

Please distinguish between temptation and sin. We sometimes think, "If I loved Jesus, I would never think thoughts like this," and therefore we *feel guilty* about being tempted, even though we never *consent* to the temptation.

Sin, like love, is in the will, not in feelings. I am not a good person because I have good feelings; I am not a bad person because I have bad feelings. Sometimes good people feel very bad; sometimes bad people feel very good.

Jesus absolves you from all of your sins. His absolution is not limited by my imperfect judgment or my limited virtues. It is He who says, "I absolve you from your sins." This fact applies not only to tonight's confession, but to all the times that you have confessed your sins in the past. *All* of your sins are forgiven. They are *all* washed away by the Lamb of God, Who shed His life's blood for us.

It often happens that the *feeling* of guilt remains--or comes back like a ghost to haunt us--even after we have confessed our sins and done penance. Here, too, the enemy persuades us with a false argument: "If you had any faith, even as small as a mustard seed, you would not feel like this; therefore, your feelings of guilt mean that you are not a faithful Christian."

Feeling guilty about forgiven sins is a sign of our fallen condition, in which we do not have perfect mastery over our emotions or our thoughts. Whenever you feel guilty about old sins, seize the opportunity to make an act of faith, hope, and love in the perfect mercy of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Remind ("re-mind") yourself of the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection. Soak yourself in His merciful love. Make an act of spiritual communion, however brief, and remember how much Jesus enjoys forgiving sinners--how much He enjoys giving His love to those who do not deserve His love. It is a consolation when we feel forgiven and desolation when we don't--but our feelings are often wrong.

Perfectionism breeds depression. God is perfect love, and He intends to make us perfect in love. We are all destined to be saints. We need to uphold the ideal of sanctity without letting the enemy use it against us. God loves imperfect people perfectly. God loves us as we are *right now*. We cannot increase His love for us by anything we do. We are not required to become perfect by our own unaided willpower, as if God would only love us when we no longer need His mercy. Jesus died for *sinners*. If we realize that we have fallen short of the glory of God, that means we are 100% qualified to receive God's forgiveness and healing. Jesus said, "I have come for sinners, not for saints; I have come for the sick, not for the healthy." We should not imagine our imperfections as insurmountable barriers to God's love, but growth opportunities.

Please do not suppose that I am condemning you for being perfectionistic. Perfectionism is a torment, a burden, a tendency, a temptation, or a personality trait, not a sin. We can't shame ourselves into loving God. We can't convert ourselves by beating ourselves up. When we realize that we've fallen into the trap of perfectionism, we should simply imitate St. Peter when he was beginning to sink, and cry out, "Lord, save me!" We need to focus on Jesus, not ourselves.

Confess your sins, not those of your husband, children, parents, family members, friends, or others. It is true that we are surrounded by people who sin. I am not denying that. But the healing focus in Confession is on our own wrongdoing, shortcomings, defects of character, and sins. There is a time and place to deal with those who trespass against us, but this is not that time or place. Say, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," and leave them in God's hands.

Please think about a penance that you would like to do to atone for your sins. What is your favorite way to pray? What spiritual activity have you found most consoling? What penance in the past has helped you the most to feel close to God and capable of loving others?

Make Mary's style of prayer your own. Learn from her example. See how much God loves *you* personally. You may say of yourself what she said of herself:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God, *my* savior.
For He has looked upon His handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call *me* blessed.
The Almighty has done great things *for me*,
and holy is His name.

None of us have Mary's graces. We have our own. No one else can take your place in God's heart. He made you to love Him with a unique and personal love. Everything that God did in the whole history of salvation, from the time of Adam and Eve down to the present, He did *for you*. You are the most beautiful "you" in the world. He calls you by a name known only to Himself, and He dwells within you as your Creator and Redeemer every moment of every day. He acts as if you were His only daughter, sister, and spouse, because *you are the only one of you in the whole world*.

We don't have the power to love each other with this kind of love. We are finite. When we gaze with love on one person, we do so to the exclusion of all others. We are like God, but God is *not* like us. God is outside of time. He is all-knowing and all-powerful. He can give us His full and undivided attention, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. He does not grow tired, even when we need to rest. He never becomes impatient or irritable. We cannot exhaust His love.

With cake and ice cream, the portion we take deprives someone else of a portion. God is infinite. He can lavish us with "infinitely more than we can ask or imagine," and still have infinitely more to share with all of His other children.

Acts of faith, hope, and love can take the form of affirmations.

We can use such short statements or prayers to help act against moods and inclinations that tempt us to choose unbelief, despair, and self.

I developed some affirmations for myself years ago. I've rewritten them here for women. I suggest these as a starting point; add, subtract, edit to your heart's content. The goal is to develop an unassailable standpoint stocked with truths that do not change with our feelings, moods, or circumstances. When we are surrounded with difficulties, we can take refuge in these truths.

I am a woman of God.

I am a woman of faith.

I am full of grace.

I am a masterpiece of grace.

I am God's handiwork.

I am a child of God.

I am a daughter of the Father.

I am a sister of Jesus.

I am a spouse of the Holy Spirit.

I am beautiful because I am loved.

I am beautiful as I am because I am loved as I am.

I am beautiful now because I am loved now.

God loves me totally.

God loves me now.

Virtues

Virtue is always a "mean between extremes." In pursuing the life of virtue, we can become unbalanced by excess or by deficiency of the good we wish to do. (*This is different from the commandments, which specify evils to be avoided entirely: murder, adultery, stealing, and lying.*) Virtues are gained and strengthened by practice. No one else can choose virtuous behavior for us.

Flip Side	Positive Values	Seven Deadly Sins
Depression, Despair, Suicide	<i>Self-esteem, faith, hope</i>	Pride
Dissolution	<i>Productivity, generosity</i>	Greed
Apathy, Frigidity, Impotence	<i>Intimacy, love</i>	Lust
Victim Mentality, Passive Aggression	<i>Self-defense, Assertiveness</i>	Anger (i.e., rage)
Anorexia	<i>Survival, conviviality</i>	Gluttony
Antipathy, Isolation	<i>Admiration, reverence</i>	Envy
Obsessive-compulsion	<i>Rest</i>	Sloth

Too Little:	Four Cardinal Virtues	Too Much:
Imprudence	Prudence (practical wisdom)	Over-caution
Unscrupulous behavior	Justice (equal rights, due process)	Scrupulosity
Self-indulgence	Temperance (moderation)	Puritanism/Jansenism
Cowardice	Fortitude (courage)	Presumption, arrogance, rage
Too Little:	Supernatural Virtues	Too Much:
Pelagianism, skepticism	Faith	Fideism
Despair	Hope	Presumption
Apathy, narcissism, hatred	Love	Smothering, co-dependency ...