

made necessary for all who have fallen into mortal sin after Baptism.

For this reason, the greatest sinners, even those that have grown old in vice, ought to take care, when they return to God, not to trouble and torment themselves on account of examination of conscience. It suffices that they quietly review the years of their sinful life, remarking as well as they can their bad habits and the probable frequency of their sins, monthly, weekly, or daily, without aiming at precision or certitude utterly impossible. After having made their examination in this way, they ought to remain tranquil, not thinking themselves obliged to examine more and more under pretext that, by doing so longer, they would find new sins of which to accuse themselves in confession. Cardinal De Lugo expressly teaches this when speaking of the discretion that the confessor ought to observe in the questions that he puts to his penitent. "It is bad reasoning," says that theologian, "to say : Such and such questions will make me discover more clearly the number or the species of sins committed. — Then, we must ask : How could it be bad reasoning on the penitent's part to say, If I examine myself another hour, I may discover the sins that now escape my notice, and then I shall very likely make a more exact accusation. If this be so, I ought to examine myself another hour." — Under such conditions, there would never be an end to these examinations.

Let us now see how sinners ought to act who have not confessed for a long time, or who have made a great number of null or sacrilegious confessions.

They ought to fix the date since their last confession, or since their last good confession, for example, say ten years. Then they should examine the species of sins into which they have fallen, whether theft, unjust contracts, blasphemy, hatred, impurity, failing to hear Mass, &c.

The species of their sins being known, they must next consider their number. If there is not question of habitual sins, but of those committed at rare intervals, we can easily calculate the precise, or, at least, the approximate, number. This happens, for instance, when the penitent has, in the space of ten years, failed to hear only five or six Masses of obligation, so that naturally he ought to