

# Bite-Size Catholic Living VI

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## Life Style: Saying “*I’m sorry*” from the heart – The Sacrament of Reconciliation

### An Introduction

On the evening of Jesus’ Resurrection when he appeared to his frightened disciples he said two important things. Jesus greeted his friends with peace and then gave them his authority to forgive sins. Inner peace and the forgiveness of sins are bound together. So important is this that Saint Paul begged his readers to be reconciled, that is to be in union with God. That also means being in union with each other. There are times in all of our lives that we need to say, “*I’m sorry*” or ask, “*Can you forgive me?*”

Forgiveness is an act of love toward another person that heals the brokenness that comes between us in our relationships. **Asking forgiveness of God and each other and offering forgiveness when asked is an essential part of being a Christian.**

The family is the place we learn to forgive. Spouses asking forgiveness of each other; children saying “*I’m sorry*” to their parents, grandparents or guardians; parents asking forgiveness from their children.

Sin is the word we Christians use to describe this brokenness. Eve and Adam disobeyed God’s commandment not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. Cain killed his brother Abel which also caused brokenness within the family. The people of Israel worshipped other gods rather than their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who saved them from slavery and led them into freedom. King David caused the death of Uriah to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba. Zacchaeus was dishonest in business. Peter denied that he ever knew Jesus.

This brokenness [sin] is caused when we do not fully live as sons and daughters of our God. We exchange the best qualities of ourselves for something less. The root of many sins is our need for power over other people, selfishness and our desire to be in control rather than serving our loving God.

So central is forgiveness to the life of a Christian that we believe it can occur in many ways. This healing of relationships takes place when we forgive each other face to face. We Catholics believe that acts of charity and donations to the poor forgive lesser sins. Saint Ignatius of Loyola taught us to complete each day with reflecting on how we lived and to pray a prayer that expresses our regret and sorrow for when did not live up to what God intended for us. Three of the seven Sacraments forgive sin: the Holy Eucharist, the Anointing of the Sick and Reconciliation [Confession]. All these various ways allow us to experience the peace Jesus offered on the night of his Resurrection and heal our broken relationships with God and the community of the Church.

There are times though when we need to speak more deeply and honestly about our lives with another Christian. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation the Church has designated the priest, who makes Jesus fully present, to be that Christian companion.

Recall the story of Jesus speaking with Peter after his Resurrection. Peter had three times denied ever knowing Jesus. Jesus now asks Peter three times, “*Do you love me?*” Peter felt hurt that Jesus asked him three times. The healing of wounds is not always easy.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation then is sitting with the presence of Jesus in the person of the priest. It is a time to answer ourselves the question, “*Do you love me?*”

## Preparation: Examin

- The best way to prepare your children to understand forgiveness and pray the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to live forgiveness out yourself and prepare yourself for the Sacrament.

Do you ask forgiveness of your spouse, friends and children?

Do you generously offer forgiveness when asked?

- Praying the Sacrament of Reconciliation needs preparation; that preparation is called an **Examination of Conscience**. An *Examin* is private time taken to reflect on the movements in our lives; the movements away from and toward God; the movements that deepen your human relationships and those that put distance between ourselves and others.
- ***An Examin for Adult Christians***

Consider for reflection the following areas that affect our relationship with God and others.

*hurting others in any way*

*passing judgment on other people*

*failures of justice*

*keeping the poor in the chains of poverty*

*feeding the hungry and the thirsty*

*visiting the sick and the imprisoned*

*clothing the naked*

*praying for the dead*

*comforting those who mourn*

*using violence to maintain your power*

*exploiting the weak*

*obeying sinful orders*

*malicious gossip*

*sexual immorality*

*withholding forgiveness*

*dishonesty in work*

*being silent when we should speak up*

*polluting the air, land and sea*

*giving way to our hostile impulses*

*greed and fraud*

*gluttony*

*profaning God's holy Name*

*hate and anger*

*not keeping holy the Day of the Lord*

*condemning in other people the faults we tolerate in ourselves*

*narrow-mindedness*

*confusing lust with love*

*using others as a means to gratify our desires and further our ambitions*

*withholding love to control those we claim to love*

*jealousy*

*shunting aside those whose differences disturbs us*

*allowing ourselves to become overworked*

*not allowing other people to change and grow*

*not being open to experiences that would make us whole*

*not taking time for ourselves*

*not caring for our physical health*

*hiding our giftedness*

*arrogance and hypocrisy*

*bigotry and cynicism*

*irreverence*

*lying*

*mistrusting others*

*using the sins of others to excuse our own sins*

*the evil that was done*

*the good that was not done*

- ***Forming Consciences***

You can assist your sons and daughters with understanding the difference between good and evil actions by taking time, for example, to watch with them some of their favourite TV programs and briefly discussing the situations within them. Help form their consciences by asking them what they think about a situation. This can be extending into adolescence by discussing news feeds and social media posts.

- ***An Examin for Young Christians***

Consider for reflection the following areas that affect our relationship with God and others.

*Do I hurt people with angry words?*

*Do I respect and obey parents, guardians and teachers?*

*Have I stolen anything from another person?*

*Do I tell the truth?*

*Do I share my belongings, time and help with other people?*

*Do I offer my friendship to others?*

*Do I talk and listen to God each day?*

## Prayer: Prayers of Sorrow

Below are brief forms of **Prayers of Sorrow** for our sins. These can easily be memorized and can be used for daily prayer especially as a way to complete day before retiring.

*Lord Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me, a sinner.*

OR

*Father, I have sinned against you and am not worthy to be called your daughter/son.  
Be merciful to me, a sinner.*

OR

*Lord Jesus, you chose to be called the friend of sinners.  
By your saving death and resurrection free me from my sins.  
May your peace take root in my heart  
and bring forth a harvest of love, holiness and truth.*

## Outline of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- **The Sign of the Cross.**
- A brief passage from **Scripture** speaking of God's mercy and compassion.
- **The confession of sins.** Telling Jesus through the priest how we have broken our relationship with God and others.
- **A Prayer of Sorrow.**
- **The Prayer of Absolution.** In this prayer Jesus forgives us our sins. The "I" in "I absolve you..." is the voice of Jesus
- **The Conclusion.**

## Belief

- Read together as a family the story of how Jesus forgave Peter. Regularly pray together Psalm 51, the words King David prayed in asking God for forgiveness.

## **Jesus and Peter, an encounter** [John, chapter 21, verses 15-17]

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, *"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"* He said to him, *"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."* He said to him, *"Feed my lambs."*

He then said to him a second time, *"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"* He said to him, *"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."* He said to him, *"Tend my sheep."*

Jesus said to Peter the third time, *"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"* Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, *"Do you love me?"* and he said to him, *"Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."* Jesus said to him, *"Feed my sheep"*.

**Reflection Questions:** Do you love Jesus more than anyone else? What do you think Jesus means for you when he says, *"feed my sheep"*?

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## **Psalm 51: A Psalm of David** [excerpt]

O God, have mercy on me! Because of your love and great compassion wipe away my faults;  
wash me clean of my guilt; purify me of my sin.

For I am aware of my faults, and have my sin constantly in mind.  
I sinned against you alone, and did what is evil in your sight.  
You are just when you pass sentence on me, blameless when you give judgement.

Teach me your wisdom!  
Purify me with hyssop until I am clean; wash me until I am purer than new-fallen snow.

Instill joy and gladness in me so that the bones you have crushed may rejoice.  
Turn your face from my sins and wipe out all my guilt.

O God, create a clean heart in me, renew within me a steadfast spirit;

Sacrifice gives you no pleasure.  
My sacrifice, O God, is a repentant spirit, a humbled, contrite heart you will not scorn.