

Going to Confession for Children

The Sacrament of Reconciliation or “Penance” Guide for Parents

“Those who approach the Sacrament of Penance obtain pardon for God’s mercy for the offenses committed against Him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11)

What are the names given for this Sacrament?

It is called the *Sacrament of Conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.

It is called the *Sacrament of Penance*, since it consecrates the Christian sinner’s personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction. (CCC n. 1423)

It is called the *Sacrament of Confession*, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a “confession” - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of His mercy toward sinful man.

It is called the *Sacrament of Forgiveness*, since by the priest’s sacramental absolution God grants the penitent “pardon and peace.”

It is also called the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: “Be reconciled to God.” He who lives by God’s merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord’s call: “Go; first be reconciled to your brother”. Matthew 5:24 (CCC n. 1424)

Suggestions for Parents:

You began preparing your child for the Sacrament of Penance long ago. Every time your child has seen or experienced loving forgiveness in your home, he or she has understood a little more about God’s forgiving love. With the assistance of a catechist and two assistants, your child has begun a special preparation for the Sacrament of Penance. The preparation will focus on how God is a loving Father who forgives us if we just humble ourselves, repent, amend our lives, and return to Him in the sacraments.

Discuss this sacrament with your child. Remember to do more listening than talking during these discussion times. Your child may express feelings to you at home that may not have been mentioned in class. Be attentive and your child will make you aware of his/her thoughts. Please do not hesitate to contact your child’s catechist, the Religious Education Office, or one of the parish priests if you need help or advice in handling any of these questions or concerns.

Help your child learn the Act of Contrition by simply saying it together once a day before dinner, or at bedtime. Also help your child with a short examination of conscience.

Other Suggestions:

- ✚ Take your child along as an interested observer when you go to Confession. All classes will visit the confessionals prior to their First Confession to get the students accustomed to the new environment.
- ✚ Role play “going to Confession” - don’t use real sins when role playing; make up some false

sins. Take turns with your child being the priest and the penitent. Discuss the two possible options for going to Confession; face-to-face or behind a screen. Help your child decide which way he/she wants to confess his or her sins.

- ✠ Teach your child that to sin is to say “No” to God. Make sure your child understands the difference between a mistake or accident, temptation, and sin by talking about some typical situations which illustrate these occurrences.

- ✠ Above all, relax and remember that this will be the first time your child will receive the Sacrament of Penance. It is the first step in a lifetime during which your child’s appreciation of the sacrament will grow and deepen. Please bear in mind that it is YOUR responsibility to make sure that your child is provided the opportunity to go to Confession on a regular basis (a good rule of thumb is once a month).

Why do we need Confession?

Sin. We are all familiar with it. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines sin as “an offense against God, a rupture of communion with Him. At the same time, it damages communion with the Church (those around us).” CCC #1440

Jesus teaches that there are less serious and more serious sins. We call less serious sins venial sins and more serious sins mortal sins. What are the distinctions?

In order to commit a mortal sin, three conditions must be met:

1. The person must be committing a gravely evil act or thought (i.e. violation of the Ten Commandments, precepts of the Church, or sins against moral teaching of the Church).
2. The person must have knowledge that the act or thought is gravely evil. If a person has a doubtful conscience, they may not act until they have gathered sufficient information to make a rightly ordered decision.
3. The person must intend the act committed or the thought. It is important here to distinguish between temptations and willed thoughts.

If any one of these conditions is not met, a mortal sin has not been committed. The sin would generally be considered a venial sin. However, it should be noted that it is possible to commit a deliberate venial sin. These sins are of special concern since they lessen a person’s resistance to commit more serious sins. Even if the act or thought is not a grave evil, a person may still know that the act or thought is still wrong and that they intend to perform that act or thought anyway. All this describes sins of commission. However, it should be noted that we are also liable for sins of omission – good acts or obligations that we failed to do. In certain circumstances, such sins can be mortal sins.

Although you are only obliged to confess your mortal sins, any sin may be confessed. Of course, no one may receive Holy Communion if they have committed mortal sins that have not been absolved by a priest through the Sacrament of Penance. A person is obligated to make a good confession at least once a year (Easter Duty), although it is generally recommended that one makes a good confession at least once a month, or as necessary.

One must also consider the social effect of every sin. Even the most private sin affects the entire Church and society at large since we all live in community and engage in self-definition by our acts and thoughts.

While the above information is difficult to express to second graders, it may be helpful for parents as guidelines

when instructing children.

Counting on God's Mercy

Mercy is the chief characteristic of God the Father. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus reveals to us that God's mercy far outweighs his justice (even though His mercy and justice never contradict each other). In the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (Rich in Mercy), Pope John Paul II offers us insights into this most familiar of parables. The Holy Father writes that just as the father in the parable constantly looks out in anticipation of his repentant son, so does God the Father anticipate our contrite return to the Church's Sacraments and to the state of grace.

This theme of repentance was among the central themes of both John the Baptist's and our Lord's preaching. It is clear that our Lord thought that repentance and forgiveness was so important that he instituted the Sacrament of Penance through the Apostolic Succession. In John 20:23, Jesus says to the Apostles, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In Matthew 16:19, Jesus says to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." In both instances, our Lord gave the Apostles (the first twelve bishops) and their successors the authority to forgive sins on His behalf. Since her earliest days, the Catholic Church has obeyed this divine command and has practiced some form of this Sacrament of Reconciliation, formalizing it as early as 100-150 A.D.

Another parable that reveals God's merciful love towards us is the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:4-7. In this parable, the Shepherd (representing God the Father) notices that He is missing one (the sinner who has turned away) of His sheep (the Church or "Fold"). The Shepherd sets out to find the one sheep – the one is so very important. From this parable we notice that God loves us individually so much since He seeks out one sinner at a time. We also decipher that God's love is patient and protecting. Sheep are proverbially foolish animals that need much guidance in order to avert potential disaster. Good shepherds go to great lengths to ensure that their sheep do not fall into the hands of predators or other dangers. Finally, we know that God rejoices when the lost sheep is found and returns to the fold. In the parable, the Good Shepherd does not merely herd the sheep back to the fold, rather, He places that lost sheep on His shoulders and carries it back home. Similarly, we can experience the tremendously compassionate love God has for us through the Sacrament of Penance.

See the Rite of Reconciliation which explains in detail how to go to Confession.

While the penitent has the choice of going to Confession face to face or anonymously (behind the screen), the priest has the right to only hear confessions anonymously.

As we approach this sacrament, may we always turn to the Mother of God, Refuge of Sinners, for the courage to make a good confession with a contrite heart and a firm purpose of amendment.

Examination of Conscience (for First Penitents)

Did I miss Mass ON PURPOSE on a Sunday or Holy Day? (Do not confuse this with your parents not taking you to Mass. You only have the obligation to ask them to take you).

Was I late for Mass through MY own fault?

Did I laugh, talk, or play in church?

Was I disobedient to anyone looking after me?

Did I talk back to anyone taking care of me?

When I had a chance to do something nice, did I choose not to do it?

Did I fight with someone?

Did I use angry words?

Did I cheat on school work or tests?

Did I try to "get even" with someone?

Did I use bad words?

Did I steal something?

Did I tell any lies?

Did I call anyone bad names?

Was I mean to other people?

Did I tease someone unkindly?

The Rite of Reconciliation

Child:

- 1) In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- 2) Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.
- 3) This is my First Confession.
- 4) These are my sins: (Name your sins).
- 5) For these and all the sins of my whole life, I am truly sorry.

Priest:

- 1) Gives words of advice or suggestions.
- 2) Gives child penance (often this will be prayers to be said in the Church after Confession).
- 3) Priest asks child to say an Act of Contrition.

Child:

An Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments; but, most of all, because they have offended Thee, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love, I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.

Priest:

Gives absolution (the prayer which removes ones sins).

Child:

Thank you, Father.