

RECONCILIATION

Handbook for Parents





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OF THE
BISHOP

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Dear Parents,

This parent handbook is provided to you to help you prepare your child for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Catholic Church has always taught that the task of educating children in the faith is the primary responsibility of parents. The rite of Baptism declares this when the priest says to the parents, *"You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"* Parents respond "Yes". This parent handbook is designed to help you carry out the "Yes" you professed at your child's Baptism.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation helps you and your child grow in holiness. As parents, it is very important for you to foster a love for this sacrament. In Reconciliation, we encounter the mercy and love of Christ, the Good Shepherd. By your example of frequently going to Confession, your child will learn that this sacrament both heals us and helps us live out our Catholic faith in our daily lives. Reconciliation teaches us that with God's grace we may overcome sin and grow in the virtues. Please help your child understand the beautiful reality of this merciful gift. We can be forgiven because Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection has conquered sin and death and passed on to His apostles His authority to forgive sins in the sacrament.

Remember that it is God's plan for a child to learn from his or her parents. God chose you to be the parent of your child and He gives you a specific grace to be a good parent. Perhaps you are worried that you do not know enough about our Catholic Faith to teach your child. Jesus tells us in the Gospel, "Be not afraid." Have confidence that the Holy Spirit will give you the grace to learn what you need to know. You can learn together with your child! Start now by using this handbook and praying with your child each day. Remember that learning our faith is a lifelong process: we always can deepen in understanding and in the conversion of our hearts and minds.

I recommend that you use authentic resources for learning about our rich and wonderful faith: the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Be careful with using internet sites, as not all information is accurate or true to what the Catholic Church teaches. If in doubt, ask your pastor or catechist what they would recommend.

May Our Lord, who forgives us our sins, grant you and your child a love for this Sacrament of His Mercy.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Samuel Aquila, S.T.L., D.D.
Bishop of Fargo

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Church Documents on Reconciliation

the church documents are available online at

<http://www.fargodiocese.org/EducationFormation/Evangelization/Reconciliation/1streconciliation.htm>

Preparation for receiving the Sacraments

The Role of Parents

As you begin preparing your child for the sacraments

The Church teaches that parents are the first educators and catechists of their children. This means that parents have both a right and duty to instruct their children in the truths of our faith. God the Father entrusts you with the task of raising your children to know, love and serve Him so they can be happy in this world and the next.

To be true to the demands of the vocation to parenthood, parents should do all they can to learn about the Faith so that they can hand it on to their children.

This workbook is designed to assist you in this task of being an evangelizer and catechist to your children.

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the privilege and responsibility of evangelizing their children.

CCC 2225

The Essential Role of Parents and Siblings

The initiation of children into the sacramental life of the Church is primarily the responsibility and concern of parents (CIC 890, RC 3). Parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. In Baptism, parents accept the responsibility of training their children in the practice of the Faith and to make it *“their constant care.”* As stated in the Rite of Baptism (n. 120), parents are to see that *“the divine life which God gives them [their children] is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in their hearts.”*

Brothers and sisters of the child share in this responsibility of handing on the Faith. Siblings, especially those who have been fully initiated, assist the parents by their good example. This family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches all other catechesis (CT 68).

The entire family is to deliver the Gospel to each other daily in word and deed, filled with love and respect: *“For this reason the family home is rightly called the domestic church, a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity”* (CCC 1666). The family is nothing less than a sign and image of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, for our unbelieving world (CCC 2205).

The Role of the Parish

Before, during and after the children’s preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation every parish should work to create:

- a community that is welcoming, where the Gospel is studied and lived with joy
- a community leading a sacramental life and growing in a life of prayer and discipleship
- a community willing to sustain one another in moments of hesitancy and anxiety

Parent Responsibilities for Sacramental Preparation

The Diocese of Fargo calls upon parents to help suitably prepare their children for reception of the sacraments. The home is where the faith is developed and lived out. Each parent models to their child what the life of faith looks like. To properly assist your child in this time of sacramental preparation, the following is required:

- Attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days with your children.
- Provide proof of baptism to the parish (see form on next page).
- Attend Parent Sessions. Minimum of 2 sessions (4 hours) per each sacrament. (your parish may require more in order to better equip you).
- Attend the Retreat. 3 to 5 hour retreat for each sacrament.
- Attend the Interview. Prior to the celebration of each of the sacraments, the parish priest or designated catechist will interview your child to assess his or her readiness and intention for receiving the sacrament. Ideally, both parents are to be present during the interview so that you can help your child in their final preparations and show your support.
- Do home lessons and tasks with your child to foster love and understanding for the Faith.
- Make sure your child attends the religious education sessions offered by your parish and does any assigned homework.
- At home, work on memorizing prayers. Explain the meaning of the prayers to your child.
- Have family prayer time together daily – make this a priority.
- Live a life of charity, loving God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves (CCC 1822). Look for ‘teachable’ moments throughout the day to talk about the faith.
- Have a Bible and a Catechism of the Catholic Church, as well as religious articles such as a crucifix, holy water and sacred images in the home.
- Regular Reconciliation – Parents model this by their personal participation in the Sacrament. We recommend that once your child has made their First Reconciliation, that your family go back and receive this grace and forgiveness at least once a month.
- Regular Eucharist – Parents model this by their personal participation in the Sacrament. We are obliged to attend Mass each Sunday and Holy Day of obligation. At Mass, we have the opportunity to receive Jesus in the Eucharist (if we meet the required conditions; ccc 1385-1388).

What is a Sacrament?

Out of love, Jesus died on the cross to save us. Out of love, He instituted the Church to save us. Through the Church, He gave us seven concrete ways to help us share in His life; these are the Sacraments of the Catholic Church. (Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Eucharist, Holy Orders, Marriage, and Anointing of the Sick).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) defines sacraments in the following way:

1131. The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.

What is Grace?

All Sacraments give grace. Grace is both God's life and God's help. See grace as life in Christ. Thus, receiving grace means growing in your relationship with Jesus Christ and His Family, the Church.

Outward sign shows invisible reality

When each sacrament is properly celebrated, the visible part we see and hear makes present an invisible reality that is truly taking place.¹ For example, in Confirmation we see the anointing of chrism and the laying on of hands by the Bishop, and we hear the words "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit": an actual physical event is taking place. We cannot see, however, the spiritual event that is taking place: a deepening and strengthening of baptismal grace and the permanent marking of the soul as for public witness.

Grace is both God's life and God's help. The seven sacraments are the only certain means we have to receive God's life. God's help is available at all times in our daily living.

Two things are unfolding whenever any sacrament is celebrated: the visible, physical event of the liturgy; and the invisible, spiritual event of a soul entering into a new and deeper phase of life with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Instituted by Christ

The Sacraments are part of God's plan of salvation and have been entrusted to the Church to safeguard and hand on. Jesus Christ established the Sacraments. If we say that the sacraments were instituted by Christ, does this mean He set in place during His life on earth each of the seven sacraments in their present form as we have them today? (*not exactly*) If not, are the sacraments just inventions of the institutional Church? (*no*) The Church teaches us to steer clear of these two extreme views. The TRUTH: The sacraments truly come from Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. They developed into their present form over time in the life of the Church beginning with the apostolic traditions. The Church has carefully discerned over the centuries how to properly 'dispense' the sacraments under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. See CCC 1116-1117 By establishing the Church, Jesus Christ gave His authority to Peter, the first pope, in order to carry on His mission of salvation.

¹ An excellent resource for understanding more about the sacraments is [Understanding the Sacraments](#) by Peter M.J. Stravinskis. Many of the explanations in this handbook have been drawn from chapter one.

Prayers for Second Grade

This is provided to assist parents in helping their child learn these prayers.

Sign of the Cross - Mt. 28:19

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

CCC 233, 2157

Grace Before Meals - Jn 6:11

(Acts 27:25 - The Lord prayed at meals)

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CCC 2698

Prayer to the Guardian Angel

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here; ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

Morning Prayer

God, our Father, I offer you today all that I think and do and say. I offer it with what was done on earth by Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen.

CCC 2698

Prayer to St. Michael, the Archangel

Saint Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle; be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and the other evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

Simple Prayers

- Jesus, I love you.
- Thank you, God.
- God, how great You are.

CCC 2637

Our Father - Mt 6:9-13

Our Father,
Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.

CCC 2759, 2761, 2777-2865

Hail Mary - Lk. 1:28, 42

Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee; blessed are thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

CCC 2676-2677

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

CCC 2628

Responses to Prayers at Mass

Refer to Parish Worship Guide (Missalette)

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You. I detest all my sins because of Your just punishments, but most of all because they offend You, my God, Who are all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, so sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen

An Adult Understanding of Reconciliation & How to Talk to My Child

How Can I Help My Child In The Sacrament of Reconciliation?

The most important thing you can do to help your child in the Sacrament Reconciliation is to know, love, and receive the sacrament yourself. Set the example. Reconciliation is a wonderful gift God has given to us! If you have not received the sacrament reconciliation in a long time, the simplest way to remedy the situation is to go to the sacrament and confess. If you don't remember exactly what to do, approach a priest and explain the situation. The priest will walk you through it. Once it's over you'll be glad that you did it.

The second most important thing you can do to help your child with this sacrament is to take time to talk to him or her and teach them what it is. Explain in your own words what the Sacrament of Reconciliation is. Then ask them how they understand the sacrament. Help your child memorize the Act of Contrition. There is a variety to choose from. The parish may suggest one specifically in order to be uniform, but you can also choose a different one if you wish. Practice the Act of Contrition together daily. Try doing the role play of Reconciliation to get them comfortable with how to go.

The most important thing you can do to help your child in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to know, love and receive the sacrament yourself.

To help you teach your child, there are many books that offer good explanations. Perhaps the best place to start is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Read the sections which cover the Sacrament of Reconciliation (CCC 1420-1498). Ask your parish for additional resources to help you work with your child.

Again, the most important thing to keep in mind is that you cannot give to your child what you do not have. If you have (or are in the process of acquiring) a knowledge and love of this sacrament, you will be able to communicate that love and knowledge to your child. If you feel as though you are just beginning, that's OK; you and your child can learn together. It is never too late to experience the merciful love of our God.

Reconciliation is a precept of the Church. There are five precepts of the Church. These are the minimum requirements or obligations set for practicing Catholics in order to grow in love of God and neighbor. The second precept of the Church states that: "You shall confess your sins at least once a year." (CCC 2041-2043). Once a year is not very often – it is the minimum. How often do we wash our cars or clean our houses? How much more valuable is our eternal soul? We encourage monthly reconciliation in order to live a life of holiness. The saints often speak of how good reconciliation is for the soul and we are all called to be saints. The more you come to understand and love the sacraments, the more often you will want to receive them.

The following pages are to help you gain an adult understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and then how to talk to your children about it.

Essential Teachings on the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Baptized persons may lose the life of God within them through sin and so God arranged for the possibility of renewing baptismal graces and restoring the life of God within (CCC 1420, 1421). One of these ways to restore us to a life of grace is through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Problem: we all sin. Solution: Reconciliation.

What is the Sacrament of Reconciliation? (CCC 1420-1498)

Jesus gave us the sacrament of reconciliation as a gift of His mercy and love to overcome our sins and be reconciled with God and His Church, the body of Christ. The sacrament of reconciliation is probably the most misunderstood sacrament in popular culture. Many TV and movie dramas portray the sacrament inaccurately to make a joke out of it. This twist of the truth can leave a bad impression.

A fresh, unbiased look at the Sacrament of Reconciliation, however, yields a much different view from the one we see in the movies. Very simply, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a real encounter with Jesus Christ in which we enter in broken and wounded and come out whole and healed. This sacrament is a wonderful gift from God. And it's ours for the taking.

Reconciliation is something we really need - forgiveness for the sins we commit and a renewed help in overcoming our inclination to sin. The truth is very plain; we all sin. We give into temptation. We all do things, either privately or publicly, that we should not do. This fact does not mean that humans are evil to the core. No, the truth is we were created by a loving God who made us in His image and likeness. We are good at the core. But through original sin, we are susceptible to sin and turn away from God and who He created us to be.

Reconciliation is a wonderful gift, because it's something we really need: forgiveness for the sins we commit and a renewed help in overcoming our inclination to sin.

Objective Reality of Sin

One might ask, "What if we do something sinful, but do not know that it is sinful? Does this harm us?" It is important to understand that sin is an objective reality. Sin wounds the soul--plain and simple. One might liken the effect of sin to the act of drinking poison. A sip of poison is harmful even if a person thinks he is drinking water. Sin damages or wounds the soul and can kill it if not treated with the medicine of Reconciliation. Sin has a way of begetting sin. Small sins (venial) have a way of developing into big sins (mortal).

Knowledge & Accountability for Sin

One might also ask, "What if we do something sinful, but do not know that it is sinful? Are we held responsible? This culpability (guilt) depends on how much knowledge and how much freedom you have. Besides an objective reality, there is a subjective reality to sin: namely, how free a person is in doing something; and how aware a person is of the sinful nature of an act. God sees our heart. He knows everything. He is the perfect judge. He holds us accountable for how we use our free will to resist or give into temptation. We have a basic responsibility to know and teach our children what sin is. We are to form our consciences to recognize sin. Pray the prayer to the Holy Spirit to know your sins and the Holy Spirit will help lead you to know the truth and the Holy Spirit will help you to freely embrace the truth.

Jesus is the Atonement for Sin

No matter how hard we try, there is no perfect way to "make right" for the sins we do by our own power. Jesus is the answer to our sin problem. There is no sacrifice we can make by ourselves that completely heals the wound of sin in our soul.

Without a perfect way of atonement (making right) for sins, humanity is desperate and without hope. Jesus is this perfect way.

After Baptism, to heal our own personal sins, we again tap into the grace (the life) of Jesus' sacrifice through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

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The free act of Jesus' death on the Cross is the one, perfect sacrifice that redeems mankind once and for all. That one perfect sacrifice is made present to us in the sacrifice of the Mass. To heal our own personal sins, we tap into the grace of that sacrifice again in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Required Elements: Contrition, Confession, Absolution, Penance and Firm Purpose of Amendment.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation consists of the following three acts on the part of the penitent (sinner).

- Contrition or repentance (being sorry) for the sins that have been committed
- Confession of those same sins out loud to the priest
- Firm purpose of Amendment or the intention to make reparation and avoid these sins in the future

The priest does the following two acts.

- Absolution or God's forgiveness given to the penitent to remove sin from the soul
- Penance (prayers or acts of service) given to the penitent to help make satisfaction or reparation for the sins committed

In order to prepare for the sacrament, the penitent should undertake an examination of conscience. A traditional way of doing this examination is to reflect on the Ten Commandments (CCC 2052).

The Sacramental Seal (CCC 1461-1467)

The priest is solemnly bound to keep anything said in the confessional private (sealed). What is shared in the confessional remains sealed by the sacrament. This sacramental seal of confidentiality or absolute secrecy is one of the most solemn laws in the Church. It is never to be broken for any reason. There are no exceptions. The penitent can be free to confess all their sins without reserve or worry that the priest will use it or bring it up outside of the confessional.

The sacramental seal of confession means that the priest must keep anything said in the confessional private.

There are no exceptions.

CCC 1467

The Priest acts in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Head

The role of the priest, acting in the person of Jesus Christ, is to give absolution (forgiveness). After hearing the penitent confess his sins, the priest may also offer some spiritual advice. Conversely, the penitent may ask some questions. This dialog, or spiritual direction, is one of the many fruits of this sacrament. At the appropriate time, the priest gives the penitent something to do (a penance) in partial satisfaction for the sins that have been confessed. The penance can be prayer, an offering, works of mercy, or any other sacrifice or service that is in keeping with the gravity and nature of the sins confessed. By doing the penance, the penitent unites himself or herself to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We can never make up for our sins on our own, but we can share in the one, perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ and show our sorrow for what we have done.

After penance is assigned, the priest invites the penitent to pray an Act of Contrition.

Throughout the whole Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is important to remember that the priest acts *in persona Christi capitis*, in the person of Jesus Christ the Head. The priest may be rather ordinary and plain, but he offers something that is rich and precious beyond measure. Jesus Christ acts through the person of the priest in order to heal the wound of sin. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation you are being forgiven by Jesus and encountering Jesus in His infinite mercy.

It is important to remember that the priest acts in the person of Jesus Christ.

CCC 1548, 1348, 875

Restoring Power

The whole power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with Him in an intimate friendship. Although one might not always see or feel the effects of a sacrament, you often *do* notice an immediate difference after receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You can go in with the weight of the world on your shoulders, but you come out with your burden lightened. Try it and see how great it is! Studies have linked better physical health to reconciliation. It should be no surprise that the more we stay spiritually healthy, the less we suffer physically from worry-related illnesses.

The whole power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship.

CCC 1468

Spiritual Effects

There are many wonderful spiritual fruits that come from the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The catechism lists the following as spiritual effects from this sacrament: (CCC 1496)

- reconciliation with God and a recovered state of grace
- reconciliation with the Church
- remission of eternal punishment for mortal sins
- remission, at least in part, of temporal punishment resulting from sin
- peace and serenity of conscience; and spiritual consolation
- increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle

Essential Teaching on Sin

God created us with the ability to choose to love Him. We sometimes choose our own ways to God and His ways. By using our ability to choose against God, we sin. We turn away from God. (cf. CCC 398).

The truth is that evil exists and we live in a fallen world (original sin) that is in need of God's mercy. We have been given free will to choose to love God and follow Him. When we freely choose not to love and follow God, we sin. This sin wounds our relationship with both God and mankind (CCC 1487).

Temptation's Three Sources (world, flesh, devil)

Temptation is an attraction either from outside oneself or from within, to act contrary to right reason and the commandments of God. Jesus experienced temptation and was victorious in overcoming it. He is our help in the battle against temptation. The world, the flesh and the devil are the three sources of temptation.

Temptation from the world is attractiveness of bad example and the psychological pressure or manipulation to conform. We live in the world but are not to be 'of' the world. Scripture says, "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you." (Jn. 15: 18-19) And scripture also says, "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rm. 12:2)

Temptation from the flesh, also called concupiscence, is the interior inclination to evil, whether carnal or spiritual, as a result of the fall of Adam & Eve. It is a wound of original sin and attracts us to the seven capital sins (pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth or acedia). The common phrase we've all heard sums up this reality of concupiscence: *The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*. The Letter to the Galatians lists some of the works of the flesh: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. (Gal. 5:19-21) Daily we must resist the urge to give into temptations of concupiscence. (CCC 405, 1707).

Temptation from the devil, also called Satan, is based on lies. The devil is the father of lies (CCC 391-395, 2852). He tries to tempt mankind into believing his lies are for our best interest. The devil's method is to encourage every form of avarice or selfishness, in order to lead one to pride, and through pride to all other sins. We should remember the scripture that says, "So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." (James 4:7-8) We always have strength to resist sin if we seek God's help. (CCC 2848)

Temptation's Four Steps

1. draw near to what is forbidden
2. listen to desire
3. yield to the attraction
4. fall into sin

Remedy to sin

Only God forgives sins. Jesus gave His authority to Priests to act on His behalf to forgive sins. There is great hope because we can be forgiven! God's mercy and reconciliation is perfect. (CCC 1441, 1431)

**We always
have strength
to resist sin
if we seek
God's help.**

CCC 2848

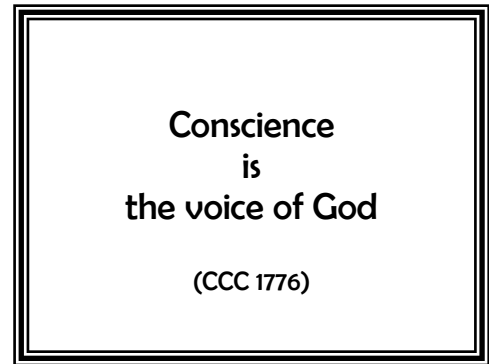
Essential Teaching on Conscience

Every person is created with a conscience within his innermost being where the voice of God calls him to love, to do what is good and to avoid evil (CCC 1776, 1795).

Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. (CCC 1796) It is the voice of God speaking to the heart. Every person is created with a conscience and free will. The Church helps form our conscience and teaches us to discern right from wrong, good from evil. As we grow up, our consciences can be malformed or also uninformed in understanding the love to which God is calling us to. A good conscience requires lifelong formation. We are responsible for sharpening our knowledge of right from wrong and deliberately choosing to do the good and avoid evil (sin). Our conscience is part of the gift of being responsible for one's actions – free will - as humans we are not forced to sin nor are we forced to do good, thus we are held accountable for our actions (CCC 1781).

The following are life-long helps to forming one's conscience:

- faith
- prayer to the Holy Spirit
- life of charity
- interior reflection or self-examination of conscience in light of the Lord's Cross (CCC 1779)
- witness / advice of others
- teaching of the Church (CCC 1783-1785, 1798, 1802)



The fruits of a well-formed conscience are **freedom** and **peace of heart** (CCC 1784).

In every situation the following objective standards of moral conduct must be remembered:

- One may never do evil so that good may result from it.
- The Golden Rule: Do to others whatever you would have them do to you (Mt 7:12)
- Avoid those things that may make your brother stumble (cf. 1 Cor 8:12, Rm 14:21)

The following are stumbling blocks to a healthy conscience: (CCC 1790-1794)

- ignorance of Christ and His Gospel
- bad example given by others
- enslavement to one's passions
- assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience
- rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching
- lack of conversion and of charity

We have the obligation to obey our conscience. We should not act with a doubtful conscience but rather earnestly seek what we need in order to form our conscience correctly. Listen to the voice of God within your heart. And remember that the priests are available to answer your questions and doubts.

Importance of Regular Reconciliation

Through Reconciliation, Jesus acts as the “physician of our souls” (CCC 1421). The sooner those wounded by sin come to Jesus the easier the healing process will be. In a sense, regular confession is like preventative medical care.

Fortunately, when First Reconciliation is celebrated during the Second Grade, there is an opportunity to assist your child in developing a habit of regular confession (monthly or even every two to three weeks). The saints speak about going often to reconciliation and we are called to be saints.

The Code of Canon Law or CIC, can. 989, states, “All the faithful who have reached the age of discretion are bound faithfully to confess their grave sins at least once a year.” In CIC, can. 988 §1, further clarifies, “The faithful are bound to confess, in kind and in number, all grave sins committed after baptism, of which after careful examination of conscience they are aware, which have not yet been directly pardoned by the keys of the Church, and which have not been confessed in an individual confession.” In other words this obligation to confess grave sins at least once a year includes all grave sins that have not been previously confessed by the person. Yearly confession is the second precept of the Church and thus is one of the ways the faithful are guaranteed to be doing “the very necessary minimum...in the growth in love of God and neighbor.” (CCC 2041)

The CIC, can. 988 §2, states that “The faithful are recommended to confess also venial sins.” In other words, the faithful are encouraged to receive the sacrament more than once a year, to receive the sacrament regularly. Regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation goes beyond the “very necessary minimum” attitude to embracing the attitude of “doing the most possible” to grow in holiness, that is to grow in intimacy with Jesus Christ and His Family, the Church. Regular reconciliation and daily Mass constitute the greatest means for growing in the spiritual life, both of which are readily accessible in our parishes.

Reconciliation Immediately Before Confirmation and First Eucharist

“Children are to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation immediately preceding the celebration of Confirmation and First Eucharist” (*Send Forth Your Spirit*, 52).

Why?

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is crucial for preparing to receive the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist. We must be in the state of grace to receive the other sacraments. Through Reconciliation, Jesus acts as the “physician of our souls”, first, restoring the person to an intimate friendship with God and then to one another. Within the sacrament of reconciliation, there is

- a recovery of grace by the penitent
- a remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins
- a remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin
- peace and serenity of conscience and spiritual consolation
- an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle
(cf. CCC 1415, 1421, 1468-1470, 1496)

Precepts of the Catholic Church

The *Precepts of the Catholic Church* are a description of the absolute minimum actions required of Catholics regarding the Church.

CCC 241 *The precepts of the Church are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life. The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the pastoral authorities is meant to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor:*

The Five Precepts (CCC 2041-2043)

1. *You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.*

We must "sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord" (Sunday), as well as the principal feast days, known as [Catholic holy days of obligation](#). This requires attending Mass, "and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days."

2. *You shall confess your sins at least once a year.*

We must prepare for the Eucharist by means of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). This sacrament "continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness."

3. *You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.*

This "guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord's Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy."

4. *You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.*

"The fourth precept ensures the times of asceticism and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart." *See below for more about fasting & abstinence.*

5. *You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.*

"The fifth precept means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability."

Note that these precepts of the Catholic Church are required, **unless** you have a legitimate reason for not meeting them. For example:

- If you are sick or tending to a sick child, and cannot get to Mass, it is not a grave violation to miss Mass that day.
- Children, the elderly, and pregnant or nursing women do not have to fast on normal fast days (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday).

More about fasting & abstinence

One of the precepts of the Catholic Church requires fasting & abstinence as signs of repentance.

Repentance means to turn away from sin and turn back to God.

Penance means some practice that lets us express sorrow for our sins and helps repair the damage that sin has caused. Penance gives us practice in resisting temptation, thereby strengthening the virtues within us.

Fasting is reducing the amount of food you eat below normal levels. Specifically, on fast days you may eat one full meal and two smaller meals, but those two smaller together should not exceed the amount of the normal meal. Snacking is also prohibited or forbidden on fast days.

All Catholics age 18 to 59 are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. You are excused from fasting if you have a *legitimate need* to eat a normal amount of food on fast days. This includes:

- The sick or infirm, including handicapped or mentally ill people who need the nourishment or cannot make a free choice to fast
- Pregnant or nursing women
- Some manual laborers (consult a priest for help in determining a legitimate need for this)

Abstinence means not eating meat (fish is not considered meat in this case). All Catholics 14 and older are required to observe abstinence on these days:

- Ash Wednesday, Good Friday (the Friday before Easter), and all Fridays in Lent.
- Outside the U.S., this is required on **all** Fridays of the year, in honor of the Passion of Jesus on Good Friday.
- In the U.S., it is still strongly recommended to observe Friday abstinence outside of Lent, but Catholics **may** choose to substitute another penitential practice or act of charity for these days.

Note that the **duty** to perform the tasks of your state in life takes precedence over the law of fasting in the precepts of the Catholic Church. If fasting honestly causes you to be unable to fulfill your required tasks, it is uncharitable to fast — the law of fasting would not apply in this case. (Consult with a priest for help in determining what is most charitable in specific situations.)

Go beyond the minimum!

Always remember: the precepts of the Catholic Church are *minimum* levels of participation in the life of the Church. Out of love for Christ and a desire to advance in the spiritual life to become a saint, we should strive to do more than the minimum. God wants us to love Him with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength.

GOING DEEPER:

A TWO-WEEK READING ASSIGNMENT

In order to help your child prepare for Reconciliation, you must know the facts about Reconciliation as the Church teaches and not just rely on your own memory and understanding.

The following pages are set up in a 14 day reading program, 1 page a day.

Please take 5 minutes a day to read and reflect upon the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Please do this 5 minute daily reflection prior to the second parent meeting.

Make notes. Write down any questions of words you don't understand or things you wish to have explained by an example.

Is there something you disagree with? Write it down!

Is there something that you are amazed at? Write it down!

At the second parent meeting you will have the opportunity to ask your questions and get answers.

This knowledge will allow you to hand on the correct teaching to your child.

Suggested prayer to start each day's reading and reflection time:

Prayer for Decision Making by Saint Francis of Assisi

**Most high and glorious God,
come and enlighten the darkness of my heart.**

Give me right faith,

certain hope,

and perfect love,

**that everything I do may be
in fulfillment of Your holy will.**

Through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

Day 1: Catechism of the Catholic Church

1422

"Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense 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."⁴

I. What Is This Sacrament Called?

1423

It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father⁵ 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.

1424

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."⁶

It is called the *sacrament of Reconciliation*, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God."⁷ He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother."⁸

II. Why a Sacrament of Reconciliation after Baptism?

1425

"You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."⁹ One must appreciate the magnitude of the gift God has given us in the sacraments of Christian initiation in order to grasp the degree to which sin is excluded for him who has "put on Christ."¹⁰ But the apostle John also says: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."¹¹ And the Lord himself taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses,"¹² linking our forgiveness of one another's offenses to the forgiveness of our sins that God will grant us.

1426

Conversion to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us "holy and without blemish," just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is "holy and without blemish."¹³ Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life.¹⁴ This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.¹⁵

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 2: Catechism of the Catholic Church

III. The Conversion of the Baptized

1427

Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."¹⁶ In the Church's preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism¹⁷ that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.

1428

Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This *second conversion* is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal."¹⁸ This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.¹⁹

1429

St. Peter's conversion after he had denied his master three times bears witness to this. Jesus' look of infinite mercy drew tears of repentance from Peter and, after the Lord's resurrection, a threefold affirmation of love for him.²⁰ The second conversion also has a *communitarian* dimension, as is clear in the Lord's call to a whole Church: "Repent!"²¹

St. Ambrose says of the two conversions that, in the Church, "there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance."²²

IV. Interior Penance

1430

Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the *conversion of the heart, interior conversion*. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.²³

1431

Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace. This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* (affliction of spirit) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart).²⁴

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 3: Catechism of the Catholic Church

1432

The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart.²⁵ Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him: "Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!"²⁶ God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.²⁷

Let us fix our eyes on Christ's blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation, it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.²⁸

1433

Since Easter, the Holy Spirit has proved "the world wrong about sin,"²⁹ i.e., proved that the world has not believed in him whom the Father has sent. But this same Spirit who brings sin to light is also the Consoler who gives the human heart grace for repentance and conversion.³⁰

V. The Many Forms of Penance in Christian Life

1434

The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*,³¹ which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: efforts at reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity "which covers a multitude of sins."³²

1435

Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right,³³ by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance.³⁴

1436

Eucharist and Penance. Daily conversion and penance find their source and nourishment in the Eucharist, for in it is made present the sacrifice of Christ which has reconciled us with God. Through the Eucharist those who live from the life of Christ are fed and strengthened. "It is a remedy to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sins."³⁵

1437

Reading Sacred Scripture, praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the Our Father—every sincere act of worship or devotion revives the spirit of conversion and repentance within us and contributes to the forgiveness of our sins.

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 4: Catechism of the Catholic Church

1438

The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice.³⁶ These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).

1439

The process of conversion and repentance was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son, the center of which is the merciful father:³⁷ the fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; the extreme misery in which the son finds himself after squandering his fortune; his deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed swine, and still worse, at wanting to feed on the husks the pigs ate; his reflection on all he has lost; his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy—all these are characteristic of the process of conversion. The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life—pure, worthy, and joyful—of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church. Only the heart of Christ who knows the depths of his Father's love could reveal to us the abyss of his mercy in so simple and beautiful a way.

VI. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

1440

Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.³⁸

Only God forgives sin

1441

Only God forgives sins.³⁹ Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven."⁴⁰ Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.⁴¹

1442

Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry which he charged with the "ministry of reconciliation."⁴² The apostle is sent out "on behalf of Christ" with "God making his appeal" through him and pleading: "Be reconciled to God."⁴³

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 5: Catechism of the Catholic Church

Reconciliation with the Church

1443

During his public life Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God's forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.⁴⁴

1444

In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. This ecclesial dimension of their task is expressed most notably in Christ's solemn words to Simon 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."⁴⁵ "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head."⁴⁶

1445

The words bind and loose mean: whomever you exclude from your communion, will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into his. *Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.*

The sacrament of forgiveness

1446

Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace."⁴⁷

1447

Over the centuries the concrete form in which the Church has exercised this power received from the Lord has varied considerably. During the first centuries the reconciliation of Christians who had committed particularly grave sins after their Baptism (for example, idolatry, murder, or adultery) was tied to a very rigorous discipline, according to which penitents had to do public penance for their sins, often for years, before receiving reconciliation. To this "order of penitents" (which concerned only certain grave sins), one was only rarely admitted and in certain regions only once in a lifetime. During the seventh century Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the "private" practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest. This new practice envisioned the possibility of repetition and so opened the way to a regular frequenting of this sacrament. It allowed the forgiveness of grave sins and venial sins to be integrated into one sacramental celebration. In its main lines this is the form of penance that the Church has practiced down to our day.

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 6: Catechism of the Catholic Church

1448

Beneath the changes in discipline and celebration that this sacrament has undergone over the centuries, the same *fundamental structure* is to be discerned. It comprises two equally essential elements: on the one hand, the acts of the man who undergoes conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit: namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction; on the other, God's action through the intervention of the Church. The Church, who through the bishop and his priests forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ and determines the manner of satisfaction, also prays for the sinner and does penance with him. Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion.

1449

The formula of absolution used in the Latin Church expresses the essential elements of this sacrament: the Father of mercies is the source of all forgiveness. He effects the reconciliation of sinners through the Passover of his Son and the gift of his Spirit, through the prayer and ministry of the Church:

God, the Father of mercies,
through the death and the resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

VII. The Acts of the Penitent

1450

"Penance requires . . . the sinner to endure all things willingly, be contrite of heart, confess with the lips, and practice complete humility and fruitful satisfaction."⁴⁹

Contrition

1451

Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again."⁵⁰

1452

When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.⁵¹

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 7: Catechism of the Catholic Church

1453

The contrition called "imperfect" (or "attrition") is also a gift of God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is born of the consideration of sin's ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and the other penalties threatening the sinner (contrition of fear). Such a stirring of conscience can initiate an interior process which, under the prompting of grace, will be brought to completion by sacramental absolution. By itself however, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance.⁵²

1454

The reception of this sacrament ought to be prepared for by an examination of conscience made in the light of the Word of God. The passages best suited to this can be found in the Ten Commandments, the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic Letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic teachings.⁵³

The confession of sins

1455

The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible.

1456

Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: "All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly."⁵⁴

When Christ's faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, "for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know."⁵⁵

1457

According to the Church's command, "after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year."⁵⁶ Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession.⁵⁷ Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.⁵⁸

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 8: Catechism of the Catholic Church

1458

Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.⁵⁹ Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful:⁶⁰

Whoever confesses his sins . . . is already working with God. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God. Man and sinner are, so to speak, two realities: when you hear "man"—this is what God has made; when you hear "sinner"—this is what man himself has made. Destroy what you have made, so that God may save what he has made. . . . When you begin to abhor what you have made, it is then that your good works are beginning, since you are accusing yourself of your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works. You do the truth and come to the light.⁶¹

Satisfaction

1459

Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused.⁶² Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is also called "penance."

1460

The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, "provided we suffer with him."⁶³

The satisfaction that we make for our sins, however, is not so much ours as though it were not done through Jesus Christ. We who can do nothing ourselves, as if just by ourselves, can do all things with the cooperation of "him who strengthens" us. Thus man has nothing of which to boast, but all our boasting is in Christ . . . in whom we make satisfaction by bringing forth "fruits that befit repentance." These fruits have their efficacy from him, by him they are offered to the Father, and through him they are accepted by the Father.⁶⁴

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 9: Catechism of the Catholic Church

VIII. The Minister of This Sacrament

1461

Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation,⁶⁵ bishops who are their successors, and priests, the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

1462

Forgiveness of sins brings reconciliation with God, but also with the Church. Since ancient times the bishop, visible head of a particular Church, has thus rightfully been considered to be the one who principally has the power and ministry of reconciliation: he is the moderator of the penitential discipline.⁶⁶ Priests, his collaborators, exercise it to the extent that they have received the commission either from their bishop (or religious superior) or the Pope, according to the law of the Church.⁶⁷

1463

Certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication, the most severe ecclesiastical penalty, which impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place or priests authorized by them.⁶⁸ In danger of death any priest, even if deprived of faculties for hearing confessions, can absolve from every sin and excommunication.⁶⁹

1464

Priests must encourage the faithful to come to the sacrament of Penance and must make themselves available to celebrate this sacrament each time Christians reasonably ask for it.⁷⁰

1465

When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.

1466

The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant. The minister of this sacrament should unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ.⁷¹ He should have a proven knowledge of Christian behavior, experience of human affairs, respect and sensitivity toward the one who has fallen; he must love the truth, be faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, and lead the penitent with patience toward healing and full maturity. He must pray and do penance for his penitent, entrusting him to the Lord's mercy.

1467

Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives.⁷² This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the "sacramental seal," because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains "sealed" by the sacrament.

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 10: Catechism of the Catholic Church

IX. The Effects of This Sacrament

1468

"The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship."⁷³ Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament. For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation "is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation."⁷⁴ Indeed the sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true "spiritual resurrection," restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God.⁷⁵

1469

This sacrament *reconciles us with the Church*. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. The sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it. In this sense it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a revitalizing effect on the life of the Church which suffered from the sin of one of her members.⁷⁶ Re-established or strengthened in the communion of saints, the sinner is made stronger by the exchange of spiritual goods among all the living members of the Body of Christ, whether still on pilgrimage or already in the heavenly homeland.⁷⁷

It must be recalled that . . . this reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations, which repair the other breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his innermost truth. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation.⁷⁸

1470

In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, *anticipates* in a certain way the judgment to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin.⁷⁹ In converting to Christ through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and "does not come into judgment."⁸⁰

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 11: Catechism of the Catholic Church

X. Indulgences

1471

The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance.

What is an indulgence?

"An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints."⁸¹

"An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin."⁸² The faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead.⁸³

The punishments of sin

1472

To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a *double consequence*. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.⁸⁴

1473

The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the "old man" and to put on the "new man."⁸⁵

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 12: Catechism of the Catholic Church

In the Communion of Saints

1474

The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. "The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person."⁸⁶

1475

In the communion of saints, "a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things."⁸⁷ In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin.

1476

We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the *Church's treasury*, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy."⁸⁸

1477

"This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body."⁸⁹

Obtaining indulgence from God through the Church

1478

An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.⁹⁰

1479

Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted.

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 13: Catechism of the Catholic Church

XI. The Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

1480

Like all the sacraments, Penance is a liturgical action. The elements of the celebration are ordinarily these: a greeting and blessing from the priest, reading the word of God to illuminate the conscience and elicit contrition, and an exhortation to repentance; the confession, which acknowledges sins and makes them known to the priest; the imposition and acceptance of a penance; the priest's absolution; a prayer of thanksgiving and praise and dismissal with the blessing of the priest.

1481

The Byzantine Liturgy recognizes several formulas of absolution, in the form of invocation, which admirably express the mystery of forgiveness: "May the same God, who through the Prophet Nathan forgave David when he confessed his sins, who forgave Peter when he wept bitterly, the prostitute when she washed his feet with her tears, the publican, and the prodigal son, through me, a sinner, forgive you both in this life and in the next and enable you to appear before his awe-inspiring tribunal without condemnation, he who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen."

1482

The sacrament of Penance can also take place in the framework of a *communal celebration* in which we prepare ourselves together for confession and give thanks together for the forgiveness received. Here, the personal confession of sins and individual absolution are inserted into a liturgy of the word of God with readings and a homily, an examination of conscience conducted in common, a communal request for forgiveness, the Our Father and a thanksgiving in common. This communal celebration expresses more clearly the ecclesial character of penance. However, regardless of its manner of celebration the sacrament of Penance is always, by its very nature, a liturgical action, and therefore an ecclesial and public action.⁹¹

1483

In case of grave necessity recourse may be had to a *communal celebration of reconciliation with general confession and general absolution*. Grave necessity of this sort can arise when there is imminent danger of death without sufficient time for the priest or priests to hear each penitent's confession. Grave necessity can also exist when, given the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors to hear individual confessions properly in a reasonable time, so that the penitents through no fault of their own would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time. In this case, for the absolution to be valid the faithful must have the intention of individually confessing their grave sins in the time required.⁹² The diocesan bishop is the judge of whether or not the conditions required for general absolution exist.⁹³ A large gathering of the faithful on the occasion of major feasts or pilgrimages does not constitute a case of grave necessity.⁹⁴

1484

"Individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession."⁹⁵ There are profound reasons for this. Christ is at work in each of the sacraments. He personally addresses every sinner: "My son, your sins are forgiven."⁹⁶ He is the physician tending each one of the sick who need him to cure them.⁹⁷ He raises them up and reintegrates them into fraternal communion. Personal confession is thus the form most expressive of reconciliation with God and with the Church.

Questions to ask about this section of readings:

Day 14: Catechism of the Catholic Church

IN BRIEF

1485

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week," Jesus showed himself to his apostles. "He breathed on them, and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (*Jn* 20:19, 22-23).

1486

The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is conferred by a particular sacrament called the sacrament of conversion, confession, penance, or reconciliation.

1487

The sinner wounds God's honor and love, his own human dignity as a man called to be a son of God, and the spiritual well-being of the Church, of which each Christian ought to be a living stone.

1488

To the eyes of faith no evil is graver than sin and nothing has worse consequences for sinners themselves, for the Church, and for the whole world.

1489

To return to communion with God after having lost it through sin is a process born of the grace of God who is rich in mercy and solicitous for the salvation of men. One must ask for this precious gift for oneself and for others.

1490

The movement of return to God, called conversion and repentance, entails sorrow for and abhorrence of sins committed, and the firm purpose of sinning no more in the future. Conversion touches the past and the future and is nourished by hope in God's mercy.

1491

The sacrament of Penance is a whole consisting in three actions of the penitent and the priest's absolution. The penitent's acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation.

1492

Repentance (also called contrition) must be inspired by motives that arise from faith. If repentance arises from love of charity for God, it is called "perfect" contrition; if it is founded on other motives, it is called "imperfect."

1493

One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church, must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his conscience. The confession of venial faults, without being necessary in itself, is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.

1494

The confessor proposes the performance of certain acts of "satisfaction" or "penance" to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ.

1495

Only priests who have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church can forgive sins in the name of Christ.

1496

The spiritual effects of the sacrament of Penance are:

- reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace;
- reconciliation with the Church;
- remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins;
- remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin;
- peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation;
- an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.

1497

Individual and integral confession of grave sins followed by absolution remains the only ordinary means of reconciliation with God and with the Church.

1498

Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and also for the souls in Purgatory.

Notes

1. 2 Cor 4:7; Col 3:3.
2. 2 Cor 5:1.
3. Cf. Mk 2:1-12.
4. LG 11 § 2.
5. Cf. Mk 1:15; Lk 15:18.
6. OP 46: formula of absolution.
7. 2 Cor 5:20.
8. Mt 5:24.
9. 1 Cor 6:11.
10. Gal 3:27.
11. 1 Jn 1:8.
12. Cf. Lk 11:4; Mt 6:12.
13. Eph 1:4; 5:27.
14. Cf. Council of Trent (1546): DS 1515.
15. Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1545; LG 40.
16. Mk 1:15.
17. Cf. Acts 2:38.
18. LG 8 § 3.
19. Ps 51:17; cf. Jn 6:44; 12:32; 1 Jn 4:10.
20. Cf. Lk 22:61; Jn 21:15-17.
21. Rev 2:5, 16.
22. St. Ambrose, ep. 41, 12: PL 16, 1116.
23. Cf. Joel 2:12-13; Isa 1:16-17; Mt 6:1-6; 16-18.
24. Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1676-1678; 1705; cf. *Roman Catechism*, II, V, 4.
25. Cf. Ezek 36:26-27.
26. Lam 5:21.
27. Cf. Jn 19:37; Zech 12:10.
28. St. Clement of Rome, Ad Cor. 7, 4: PG 1, 224.
29. Cf. Jn 16:8-9.
30. Cf. Jn 15:26; Acts 2:36-38; John Paul II, DeV 27-48.
31. Cf. Tob 12:8; Mt 6:1-18.
32. 1 Pet 4:8; cf. Jas 5:20.
33. Cf. Am 5:24; Isa 1:17.
34. Cf. Lk 9:23.
35. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1638.
36. Cf. SC 109-110; CIC, cann. 1249-1253; CCEO, cann. 880-883.
37. Cf. Lk 15:11-24.
38. Cf. LG 11.
39. Cf. Mk 2:7.
40. Mk 2:5, 10; Lk 7:48.
41. Cf. Jn 20:21-23.
42. 2 Cor 5:18.
43. 2 Cor 5:20.
44. Cf. Lk 15; 19:9.
45. Mt 16:19; cf. Mt 18:18; 28:16-20.
46. LG 22 § 2.
47. Tertullian, De Pœnit. 4, 2: PL 1, 1343; cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1542.
48. OP 46: formula of absolution.
49. Roman Catechism II, V, 21; cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1673.
50. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1676.
51. Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1677.
52. Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1678; 1705.
53. Cf. Mt 5-7; Rom 12-15; 1 Cor 12-13; Gal 5; Eph 4-6; etc.
54. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1680 (ND 1626); cf. Ex 20:17; Mt 5:28.
55. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1680 (ND 1626); cf. St. Jerome, In Eccl. 10, 11: PL 23:1096.
56. Cf. CIC, can. 989; Council of Trent (1551): DS 1683; DS 1708.
57. Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1647; 1661; CIC, can. 916; CCEO, can. 711.
58. Cf. CIC, can. 914.
59. Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1680; CIC, can. 988 § 2.
60. Cf. Lk 6:36.
61. St. Augustine, In Jo. ev. 12, 13: PL 35, 1491.
62. Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1712.
63. Rom 8:17; Rom 3:25; 1 Jn 2:1-2; cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1690.
64. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1691; cf. Phil 4:13; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17; Gal 6:14; Lk 3:8.
65. Cf. Jn 20:23; 2 Cor 5:18.
66. Cf. LG 26 § 3.
67. Cf. CIC, cann. 844; 967-969; 972; CCEO, can. 722 §§ 3-4.
68. Cf. CIC, cann. 1331; 1354-1357; CCEO, can. 1431; 1434; 1420.
69. Cf. CIC, can. 976; CCEO, can. 725.
70. Cf. CIC, can. 986; CCEO, can. 735; PO 13.
71. Cf. PO 13.

72. Cf. CIC, can. 1388 § 1; CCEO, can. 1456.
 73. *Roman Catechism*, II, V, 18.
 74. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1674.
 75. Cf. *Lk* 15:32.
 76. Cf. *1 Cor* 12:26.
 77. Cf. *LG* 48-50.
 78. John Paul II, RP 31, 5.
 79. Cf. *1 Cor* 5:11; *Gal* 5:19-21; *Rev* 22:15.
 80. *Jn* 5:24.
 81. Paul VI, apostolic constitution, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 1.
 82. *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 2; cf. Norm 3.
 83. CIC, can. 994.
 84. Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1712-1713; (1563): 1820.
85. *Eph* 4:22, 24.
 86. *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
 87. *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
 88. *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
 89. *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
 90. Cf. *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
 91. Cf. SC 26-27.
 92. Cf. CIC, can. 962 § 1.
 93. Cf. CIC, can. 961 § 2.
 94. Cf. CIC, can. 961 § 1.
 95. OP 31.
 96. *Mk* 2:5.
 97. Cf. *Mk* 2:17.

ADDITIONAL READING

Section from CCC on Virtues

_____ 1803	Article 7: The Virtues
_____ 1804	I. The Human Virtues
_____ 1805 - 1809	The Cardinal Virtues
_____ 1810 – 1811	The Virtues and Grace
_____ 1812 – 1813	II. The Theological Virtues
_____ 1814 – 1816	Faith
_____ 1817 – 1821	Hope
_____ 1822 – 1829	Charity
_____ 1830 - 1832	III. The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit
_____ 1833 - 1845	<u>IN BRIEF</u>

Section from CCC on Sin

_____ 1846 – 1848	Article 8: Sin, I. Mercy and Sin
_____ 1849 – 1851	II. The Definition of Sin
_____ 1852 -1853	III. The Different Kinds of Sins
_____ 1854 – 1864	IV. The Gravity of Sin: Mortal and Venial Sin
_____ 1865 – 1869	V. The Proliferation of Sin
_____ 1870 – 1876	<u>IN BRIEF</u>

More Good Sections in CCC

_____ 1699-1876	section on the moral life
_____ 2052-2557	section on the commandments

Activities & Resources

**The following pages are just some ways
of helping you teach your child about
the Sacrament of Reconciliation.**

CHURCH TOUR

Go walk around your Church and talk about the things you see there. The church tour is an opportunity for your child to see up close and ask questions. Set an appointment with your Priest for some of the things on this list. Review these things regularly with your child to ensure they remember them.

1. Background knowledge about the sacred space they are about to enter into.

- God gave us His Church on earth as a sign of His love for us, so we can celebrate His love as a community here on earth, we don't have to wait until heaven.
- Explain how you enter into God's church. This would include things like why we are quiet in church, what is reverence, and why we are reverent, and what is holy?

2. Start the church tour outside the front doors

- Talk about the name of the church, who is it named after
- Talk about the structure of the church, does it have stained glass windows? A steeple? bells?

3. The Holy Water Font

- This is usually near the entrance. Children often see their parents dip their fingers and make the Sign of the Cross but may not know it is to remind us of our Baptism and that we are children of God, part of His family.
- You can bring a container to the Church and take holy water to use at home when you pray. Consider using holy water to bless your child before bedtime or any important event.

4. The Tabernacle, Sanctuary Light (candle), Genuflection and Adoration

- Direct the children as they enter into the church to automatically look for the Tabernacle and to check and see if the Sanctuary Candle is lit. (the sanctuary light is lit, indicating that Jesus is present [Body, Blood, Soul, Divinity] inside the tabernacle)
- Explain the Presence of Jesus and this is **who** we genuflect towards when we enter into a pew or we happen to be in front of the Tabernacle.
- Explain Genuflecting. This comes from tradition as to when people would go down on one bended knee in the presence of the King. Who is our King? Jesus. This is why we only genuflect towards the Tabernacle and nothing else – Jesus is present there.
- If people cannot genuflect because of physical limitations, then a reverent bow is appropriate.
- Explain why the Church is a unique place to pray – because Jesus is physically present, not just spiritually, like He is in our homes or anywhere else.
- Sometimes Eucharistic Adoration is available. This is when the priest places the Eucharist in a lovely monstrance (display container) for us to worship and adore Jesus face to face.

5. The Crucifix

- Every Catholic Church has a cross with the body of Jesus on it - we call this the Crucifix
- Another powerful sign of our faith, we begin all our prayers with the Sign of the Cross. Making the Sign of the Cross reverently can take away our venial sins.
- The Crucifix reminds us of how much Jesus loves us because Jesus died for our sins.
- Sometimes the server who leads the procession carries a crucifix.

6. The Altar

- The Altar table is a holy place set apart for a special purpose. The altar reminds us that the first Mass took place at a meal on Holy Thursday with Jesus and the Twelve apostles.
- The Altar also reminds us of the Temple in the Old Testament upon which the priests made sacrifices to God. This reminds us that the Mass is also the celebration of the sacrifice that Jesus offered for us, so we could be freed from sin and become His children in heaven forever.
- When the priest starts Mass, he kisses the altar, as a sign of His love for Jesus Christ.
- Sometimes an altar may have a tiny relic of a saint in a small stone called an altar stone.

7. The Lectern

- A large stand upon which the Lectionary is placed. The Lectionary is a book of scriptures.
- The lectern is sometimes called the 'Ambo'. It is the place where God's Word is proclaimed.

8. Votive Candles

- These candles are a symbol of our prayer for others or ourselves. The lit candle is before Jesus, who answers all our prayers. It is not the candle that prays, but it is a representation.
- When you are lighting a candle, usually you put a donation inside the box. Then you say a prayer. While you are praying, the light represents Jesus, who is the eternal light.

9. Statues

- Most Catholic Churches have statues of Jesus, Mary and the saints. The saints that are chosen usually have some connection with the community. See if children can identify and discover why certain saints might be in their parish.
- Explain that our prayers are addressed to the saint - the statue reminds us of the holy saint.
- The saints are still part of our community even though they are not here on earth with us. They are our friends in heaven. They are now living with God and all the other saints.

10. Stations of the Cross

- Most Catholic Churches have on the wall representations of the last hours of Christ. We call these stations. If we follow the story of each station we see how Christ suffered as he carried his Cross and was crucified and was buried. Most of all we see how much Jesus loves us.
- Point out each station and see if they are able to tell you what is happening to Jesus.

11. Confessional

- Be sure to point out the confessional. Mention that this is the place that we seek Jesus' forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation. The priest represents Jesus.
- If possible go inside the confessional, so children are comfortable with going inside.
- Identify the items seen in the confessional (crucifix, priests' stole, chair, kneeler and screen)
- We have the option of going face-to-face or behind the screen. Both ways are acceptable.

12. The Sacristy

- This is the special room where they store items that they use for Mass and get ready for Mass.
- See if the priest or sacristan will show you the various items – vestments (alb, stole, chasuble, cope, etc), unconsecrated hosts, unconsecrated wine, chalice, paten, ciborium, cruets, purificator, thurible (incense), aspergelium (holy water sprinkler), seaquarium (special sink), monstrance, etc.

Parent / Child Sample Discussion Questions - Reconciliation

DIRECTIONS: Parents lead a discussion with your child to talk about the sacrament of Reconciliation.

1. What is the sacrament of Reconciliation?

Reconciliation is the sacrament by which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven.

- Mortal sin kills the life of Christ in our soul.
- Venial sin makes our soul sick.
- Reconciliation is like medicine.
- It cures sick souls.
- It is much stronger than any medicine for the body.
- It even gives life to dead souls (forgiving mortal sin).
- This sacrament helps us to be good afterwards (gives grace = God's help).
- Our sins may be big. Our sins may be many. But Our Lord always forgives us if we are sorry.
- God is never angry with us. He loves us. This is why He gave us the sacrament of Reconciliation.
- God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and restore us to life.

2. What must you do to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation worthily?

To receive the sacrament of Reconciliation worthily I must:

- a. Find out my sins (examination of conscience)
- b. Be sorry for my sins (repent)
- c. Make up my mind not to sin again (firm amendment)
- d. Tell my sins to the priest (confess)
- e. Do the penance the priest gives me (restitution)

3. What is the best way to do these five things?

The best way to do these five things is to

- a. Pray to the Holy Spirit to show me my sins.
- b. Think of Jesus' sufferings and death. Think of how much He loves you.
- c. Do an examination of conscience to find out my sins.

4. How do you make your confession?

I make my confession in this way:

- a. I go into the confessional and either I kneel (behind a screen) or sit (face to face).
- b. I make the Sign of the Cross. The priest will then invite me to confess my sins.
- c. I confess my sins. (The priest will help me if I need help). At the end I say 'for these and all my sins I am truly sorry'.
- d. I listen to what the priest tells me.
- e. I say the Act of Contrition loud enough for the priest to hear me.
- f. The priest then prays the prayer of absolution.
- g. I make the Sign of the Cross and say 'Amen' at the end of the prayer of absolution.

Prayer of Absolution

God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.

You say: Amen.

- ❖ Remember you are talking to Jesus, Our Lord. The priest is standing in Jesus' place, because Jesus asked the priest to do so.
- ❖ Do not be afraid. Tell the truth.
- ❖ Tell all the sins you can remember.
- ❖ Do not leave out any sin on purpose.
- ❖ If you forget to tell a sin, God forgives you.
- ❖ If you don't tell all your sins that you remember, you commit another sin.
- ❖ Listen carefully to the priest.
- ❖ Say your Act of Contrition from your heart - really mean what you are saying.

5. What do you do after leaving the confessional?

After leaving the confessional, I do the penance the priest has given me and say another prayer to thank God for forgiving my sins.

6. Before bedtime how can I reflect on my day?

Before bed, I can do an examination of conscience to reflect on my day and see if I have done anything that made God sad. I can ask God to forgive me for these sins. If I have done a mortal sin I need to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be forgiven.

Children's Basic Examination of Conscience

Responsibilities to God

- _____ Do I try to pray, even when I found it hard to do so?
- _____ Do I always show respect to God, my family and my friends by the words I use?
- _____ Have I gone to Mass on every Sunday or asked an adult to take me to Mass?
- _____ Do I have a good attitude about attending Mass?
- _____ Have I been good in Church?
- _____ Have I asked the Holy Spirit to help me whenever I have been tempted to sin or do bad things?

Responsibilities to others and self

- _____ Have I ever been disobedient or disrespectful to my parents?
- _____ Have I talked back to parents, teachers or other adults?
- _____ Have I been selfish toward my parents, brothers and sisters, teachers or my friends?
- _____ Have I lied or been deceitful to my parents or to others?
- _____ Have I been arrogant, stubborn or rebellious?
- _____ Have I pouted and been moody?
- _____ Have I gotten angry and lost my temper?
- _____ Have I hit or shoved anyone?
- _____ Have I held grudges or not forgiven others?
- _____ Have I made fun of others and called them names?
- _____ Have I said mean things about another behind their back?
- _____ Have I stolen anything? Have I returned it?
- _____ Have I skipped my homework when I was supposed to do it?
- _____ Have I ever copied another person's answers on a test or assignment?
- _____ Have I skipped my household chores when I was asked to do them?
- _____ Have I destroyed or damaged someone's property?
- _____ Have I ever been jealous about what other people have?
- _____ Have I ever been jealous about what other people get to do?

Lastly if you're not sure if something is a sin, ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?" If Jesus wouldn't do it, you shouldn't either. Let Jesus be your guide.

Three Prayers for Reconciliation

Prayer Before Reconciliation

Come, Holy Spirit,
give me Your light
to see my sins,
and give me Your help
to be sorry for them and
show me why I sinned.
Help me never again
to sin on purpose.
Amen.

Act of Contrition

(or other suitable one)

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

Prayer After Reconciliation

My Jesus, I thank You
for washing away my sins
in Your Precious Blood.
Help me to accept my
cross each day
and not to hurt You
or anyone else.
I love You
with my whole
heart and soul.
Amen.