

Notes for Parents to Prepare Children for Reconciliation

By Sr. Marie Shields, SNDdeN

The sacrament of reconciliation should be a regular part of your life, especially during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent in preparation for the great feasts of Christmas and Easter. Here is some information to share with your family each time they prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation should not make us frightened or sad. We should think more about the goodness of God than our sinfulness. It pleases God to forgive us!

The first thing we do to get ready for this sacrament is to grow quiet, think how much God loves us, how happy God wants us to be, how much we mean to God, and how much we should love God in return. Then we ask God's Holy Spirit to help us know how we have failed to love God as we should. Here are some questions that we can ask ourselves:

- Do we always respect God's name?
- Do we make fun of holy things?
- Do we purposely miss Mass?
- Do we pay attention at Mass?
- Do we bother other people at Mass?
- Do we pray at other times: when getting up, at mealtimes, before going to bed?
- Do we ask for God's help?
- Do we thank God for the gifts we have been given?
- Are we grateful to be God's child?

Besides God, the most important part of our lives is other people. All people are also children of our Father. So they are our sisters and brothers in God's family. They are as important to God as we are. How do we treat them?

- Do we love our parents—and help them, and pray for them?
- Do we respect our teachers—and help them, and thank them?
- Do we love our sisters and brothers, and help them and share with them?
- Do we help keep the environment in God's family clean by stopping fights, by being a good sport, and not telling tales?



Everything we do makes us better or worse, so...

- Do we tell the truth or gossip?
- Do we cheat or steal or destroy?
- Are we patient, kind, forgiving?
- Do we work at home and/or school?
- Do we share our gifts: our possessions, our talents, our time, our friendship, our money?

The most important thing we do in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to be sorry for our sins. They hurt our friendship with God and other people; and sin keeps us from being what God wants us to be.

Part of being sorry for our sins is to make plans not to do the same sins over again. Maybe we need to pray more, study more, complain less. Maybe we need to be careful about what we say, what we think, what we look at. But most of all, we should be grateful that our Father forgives us, that God does not hold things against us, that God is happy that we admit our sins, that we are sorry for them, and plan to become better

Now we are ready to tell our sins to the priest, who takes the place of Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And since our sins also hurt the people of the Church, the Body of Christ, the priest also represents the Church.

We celebrate the sacrament by meeting with the priest by ourselves. The priest will greet us and begin with the Sign of the Cross. Then we will tell the priest our sins—very simply and sincerely. The priest will talk with us about our sins and about how to do better.

The priest will then give us a penance (a prayer or good deed.) This is a sign that we accept forgiveness and want to give something back.

Then we will pray an act of sorrow. We may make up our own or use one of these:

- O my God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.
- Father, I am sorry for my faults and I will try to do better.
- Father, I am sorry because you love me and I want to love you.

God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to us and forgives us because God's Son died for us. As the priest forgives us in God's name, we will listen to the 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 grant 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.

When the priest blesses us, we will make the Sign of the Cross and answer, "Amen."

The priest will rejoice with us in God's love and forgiveness, and he will say: "Go in the peace of Christ!" And we will joyfully respond: "Thanks be to God!" We will leave the confessional, pray our penance, and start all over again. Because we really do want to become the persons God made us to be!

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Suggestions to help prepare your child

- Participate in Mass weekly with your family.
- Celebrate the Sacrament of Penance for yourself.
- Read and talk about stories from the Bible that relate to forgiveness and change of heart.
- Review the Ten Commandments and the Great Commandment. This is how we are to live as children of God.
- Discuss how the choices we make everyday, the way we act and speak, should reflect what we have learned from the commandments.
- Model forgiveness and sorrow in the home. The children cannot learn something they do not experience.
- Convey the message that this sacrament gives us a chance to begin again!! We are absolved, washed clean of our sins and failings, and we rejoice and offer thanks for the mercy and love of our heavenly Father!

Whether you call it confession, penance or reconciliation, the Sacrament of God's unending mercy includes three components: the ritual, our response and the affect of the Sacrament.

This sacrament is about change: in our *hearts*, our *actions*, our *way of life*.

<u>CONFESSION</u> (ritual)	<u>PENANCE</u> (response)	<u>RECONCILIATION</u> (affect)
telling sins to a priest	changing one's life	coming back together with God and others
involves individual and priest	involves individual and God	involves individual, community and God
centering on repentance	centering on change	centering on celebration
minister (priest) serves as Jesus	minister provides tangible response, deed	minister concelebrates with individual <u>and</u> community
stressing the negative, wrongdoing	stressing shift from negative to positive	stressing the positive, the building of God's kingdom
initiative coming from God through individual	initiative coming from God through priest	initiative coming from God <u>through</u> the community
implying observance of laws	implying inner experience that leads to change	implying celebration of <u>inner and shared</u> experience



Vocabulary for Reconciliation

Absolution: from Latin meaning “to wash”; it is the prayer the priest prays while making the Sign of the Cross over the person receiving God’s forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The penitent also blesses themselves as the words are prayed.

Prayer of Sorrow / Act of Contrition: a prayer expressing sorrow for sin and an intent to do better.

Parents should teach this prayer to their children in preparation for the Sacrament:

Oh my God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

Confession: communicating /telling sins to the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Confessional /Reconciliation room: a place set aside in the church that is reserved for confessions; it has a place for the priest to sit and a chair or kneeler for the person who is confessing.

Conscience: an “inner voice” directing and guiding people to help them recognize right from wrong and to help them make moral decisions.

Contrition: sincere sorrow for sin; remorse for having offended God.

Examination of conscience: a sincere effort a person makes to remember the sins committed **and** the good things that he or she did.

Firm purpose of amendment: the intent of a person receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation to avoid occasions of sin; conversion of the heart to seek God’s will.

Free will: God-given power to make choices. God wants us to choose to love him and to speak and act like his children. He does not force us to do anything.

Mortal sin: a serious sin; a complete turning away from God’s love; a serious disruption in a person’s relationship with God. Three points: a grave matter (murder, adultery); know it is wrong; choose to do it anyway.

Penance: the prayer, good work, or action that a priest asks the person receiving the sacrament to complete in order to express an intention to become a better person.

Sin: choosing to do what we *know* is wrong. When we sin, we do not only hurt God; we hurt ourselves and the entire Body of Christ, the Church. That is why we have the sacrament and why at Mass we ask those gathered with us to forgive us when we pray the Confiteor (“I confess to Almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters...”)

Sorrow /Sorry: true and sincere feeling or expression of remorse for an action that has hurt someone.

Temptation: a pull toward something a person really wants and is sometimes willing to do wrong to have it; *temptation itself is not a sin*, but the resulting word/deed may be.

Venial sin: less serious sin; demonstrates a carelessness in a person’s relationship with God.