

What is the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation?

The Sacrament of Penance is one of the Church's Sacraments of Healing. It is an experience of God's gift of boundless mercy that frees us from our sins and challenges us to have the same kind of compassion and forgiveness for those who sin against us.

It is also a channel of particular graces which assist us in avoiding sin in the future, overcoming habits of sin, and growing in the life of virtue. Each of us can experience God's healing grace and love through this Sacrament!

Children at an early age (near the age of seven) should learn about and receive this precious gift. They are capable of understanding what is right, honest, kind and charitable; and what is not.

The Sacrament of Penance is a positive instrument in developing a genuinely Christian moral sense in your child. The experience can help your child to understand that when a child of God fails, or sins, it is not the end. God is waiting to help, to forgive, and to provide the strength you need to try again.

"Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances."

(National Directory for Catechesis
Chapter 5, section 36, heading B2)



The Sacrament of Reconciliation and its parts:

Confession: the act of telling your sins to the priest, in a manner appropriate to your age and ability.

Act of Penance: an important part of healing is the "penance" the priest gives you – prayers and actions you will do with God's grace, in satisfaction for your sins. You perform your penance sometime after leaving the confessional.

Act of Contrition: the words you use to express sincere sorrow for your sins (which hurt your relationship with God and with others), and the intention to not repeat them.

Absolution: On the basis of your contrition and a specific formula of words spoken by the priest, your sins are forgiven by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Preparation for the Sacrament

Your child should be prepared in such a way that the celebration of the Sacrament is a joyful experience!

Every child who has reached the age of reason (near the age of seven) must be given adequate formation in the faith that helps the child to develop:

- an awareness of the relationship of love that they have with both God and neighbor.
- a knowledge that this relationship can be harmed through sin and they must assume personal responsibility.
- the experience of personal sorrow for failures and expression of that sorrow.
- the realization that you must try to change your sinful behavior.
- an understanding that the Sacrament of Penance is a special celebration of God's forgiveness, and reconciliation with their neighbor.
- a free desire to receive this Sacrament.
- a process, in a manner appropriate to their age and ability, to talk to the priest about sins they have committed.

The celebration of First Penance is to occur before the celebration of First Eucharist.
(CIC 914, CCC 1457)

An Examination of Conscience

God gives each person the gift of a conscience to help us figure out what is right and what is wrong; and what God wants us to do and not to do.

Our conscience is formed throughout our life using the teachings of the Church and with help from our teachers of the faith.

We examine our conscience in order to see if we are living as children of God and followers of Jesus.

Help your child think about their friendship with God and with other people.

Then explain:

- We sin when we freely choose to do what we know is not what God wants us to do.
- We also sin when we choose to not do something we know God wants us to do.
- Every sin hurts our friendship with God and with others.

We can ask ourselves how well we are living or not living as Jesus taught us. One of His teachings is called the *Beatitudes* (*Matthew 5:3-12*). This teaches us the many ways that God blesses us when we live as Jesus calls us to live.

The best teaching moments for your children are the times they see you go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation!

What is a Sacrament?

A sacrament is an outward sign which was instituted by Jesus Christ in order to give grace.

Jesus, however, called the children to himself and said, "Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Luke 18:16)

Did you Know?

The Catechism teaches us that the priest can never, under any circumstances, even under the threat of death, tell anyone about the sins he hears in the confessional. (CCC, #1467)

For more information go to:
oec.dor.org/sacraments/



A Guide for Parents

First Penance
Preparation in the
Roman Catholic Diocese of
Rochester, New York



To celebrate the Sacrament of Penance, contact your local parish priest. For a parish near you, go to: www.dor.org