

✂ **Points to Ponder** ✂

History of a Reconciling Church

the early Church

EARLY CHURCH

- ❖ understood Baptism as one and only sacrament of forgiveness
- ❖ excommunicated those whose serious sin was a scandal to the community and disgraced the commitment of the believers
- ❖ saw Eucharist as primary sacrament of forgiveness for most ordinary offenses

from about 150–600

INTRODUCTION OF “CANONICAL PENANCE”

- ❖ applied to serious public sins
- ❖ involved long and public penance
- ❖ celebrated only once, so seldom celebrated for fear of not being able to use it again; at this time, many people put off Baptism until much later in life

from about 600

RISE OF “PRIVATE PENANCE”

- ❖ evolved from monastic practice of daily *examen*
- ❖ focused on growing in the faith and praising God’s mercy
- ❖ reconciliation was seen as taking place in the Eucharist

in 1215

- ❖ approved and required of all at least once a year at the Fourth Lateran Council

over time ...

EVOLUTION OF FOCUS AND INTENT

- ❖ lost centrality of community
- ❖ increased focus on individual’s sin and words of absolution led to notion that sins are private and don’t have an impact on the community
- ❖ placed absolution before the completion of penance, which tended to de-emphasize the need for ongoing conversion and change of life

from 1974 to today

RENEWAL OF THE SACRAMENT

- ❖ re-emphasizes God’s mercy and the importance of community
- ❖ makes clear the demands of conversion at the heart of the Christian life
- ❖ recognizes sin in the community
- ❖ calls us to live life by Gospel values

RECONCILIATION

Celebrating God's Forgiveness

When Catholics gather to talk about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the discussion can be marked by memories of past experiences, concerns regarding one's involvement (or lack of involvement) with the sacrament, and perhaps some questions about their children's experience of the sacrament. All are important topics.

One way to explore the meaning of the sacrament is to return to three statements that describe all sacraments. We can say that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is

- a celebration of what God has done and continues to do in our lives.
- a community celebration: it is best celebrated within the context of the community of faith.
- a celebration of what God hopes for us and for our community.

Small Group Conversation

1. Introduce yourself. Name something from the talk that caught your interest. Talk about a new insight or something that you want to be sure to remember or think about further.
2. As you think about working with your son or daughter in preparation for Reconciliation ask yourself:
 - What are you looking forward to?

 - What are you finding most challenging?

 - What concerns do you have?

3. What are some ways that your family conveys the notion of forgiveness? How might you be more intentional about it—giving more focus to the experience of asking for forgiveness and expressing forgiveness?

4. What other questions or concerns do you want to raise?

Connecting Faith and Family Life

One of the best ways for parents to help their children prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is to pay close attention to the way forgiveness and reconciliation are experienced within the family. Too often, with our hurried schedules and hectic lives, we skip important parts of true reconciliation. Consider taking time this year to help your child experience and learn about the simple, but very important, parts of asking for forgiveness and celebrating reconciliation.

Consider the following scenario: A mother has had a frazzling day at work. On her way home she picks up her seven-year-old son Danny at a friend's house. As they continue home through heavy traffic, Danny is eager to connect with his mom and asks one question after another. Suddenly, in the middle of one of Danny's questions, Mom snaps and says, "Danny, that's it! Just be quiet. I've had enough!" Mother and son finish the ride in silence. How can Mom ask for Danny's forgiveness?

Acknowledge the wrong you have done. Name what you did. Be specific.

When they get home, Mom says to Danny, "I'd like to talk with you about something, please." Mom and Danny go to a quiet room and when Mom has Danny's attention she looks at her son and says, "I want to apologize to you for being so crabby today in the car. I had a frustrating day at work, but I shouldn't have been so short with you."

Look at the person and say the words, "I'm sorry."

Mom looks at Danny and says, "I'm sorry. I really am. I am going to try to be more patient next time."

Ask for forgiveness.

Mom asks Danny, "Will you forgive me?"

Respond to the person who asks for forgiveness.

Danny looks at Mom and says, "Yes, I forgive you." (Encourage your child to respond to a person asking for forgiveness with the words, "Yes, I forgive you." instead of simply saying, "Yes," or, "It's okay." Model this for your children when they apologize to you.)

Acknowledge the gift of forgiveness.

Mom says to Danny, "Thank you, Danny. Thank you so much!"

Celebrate the gift of reconciliation!

Mom and Danny give each other a hug. Mom promises to play one of Danny's favorite games with him after dinner.

As you and your child practice this way of asking for forgiveness, you will be able to show your child how these steps are also part of celebrating this sacrament.

At home with our family

We acknowledge the wrong we have done.

We say, "I am sorry."

We take an action to show we are sorry.

We receive forgiveness from one another.

We celebrate reconciliation in our family!

Celebrating the Sacrament

We confess our sins.

We pray an Act of Contrition.

Through prayer and penance we make a commitment to change.

We receive absolution and the gift of God's ever-present forgiveness.

We receive the blessing of God's peace and celebrate God's love!



Glad You Asked!



What is the most important thing I can do to help prepare my child for First Reconciliation?

Two important home experiences help children prepare for this sacrament.

- ❖ Be particularly conscious of times when family members need to be reconciled with one another. Take time this year to help your children learn to say “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you” in meaningful ways.
- ❖ While at times parents can get as angry at an accident or mistake as they do at a genuinely unloving act, it is important for your child’s moral growth that you help him or her see the difference. Make clear the cause of your frustration or anger—“I know that it was an accident, but I get really frustrated when you spill milk because you are fooling around at the table.” or “I get really angry when you say mean things to your sister—that is an unloving thing to do and we don’t allow it in this house. Please speak more respectfully.”

Your child’s celebration of reconciliation will be shaped by his or her experience of forgiveness and peace at home and by a growing awareness of the difference between sins and mistakes.

I remember that there was a formula that we had to say when we went to confession, but my child doesn’t seem to know it.

The “formula” that was learned in the past (“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned . . .”) probably didn’t start off as a formula but as a way to begin a conversation about areas in need of grace. Over time, however, it became so formalized that it almost seemed to be a necessary part of the sacrament!

Your child’s religious education book probably gives some guidance, but the basic format is this:

- ❖ The child and priest greet one another and the child can introduce himself or herself.
- ❖ They make the Sign of the Cross together. The priest will say a short prayer or read from the Bible. He will then ask the child about unloving choices he or she has made or areas in life that need to change.
- ❖ After the child and the priest talk about this, he will give the child a penance—some action he or she can take to help make the change in his or her life.
- ❖ Then he will invite the child to pray the Act of Contrition. He will follow this with the words of absolution and a closing blessing.

What are some suggestions for celebrating my child’s First Reconciliation experience?

Here are a few simple suggestions to mark your child’s celebration:

- ❖ Plan a family meal either at home or at a favorite restaurant. The meal doesn’t have to be elaborate. What is most important is that everyone in the family is together to celebrate.
- ❖ Write a card to your child expressing your love and your hope that he or she will always trust in God’s love and forgiveness.
- ❖ Give a simple gift to mark the occasion—a book, a special picture of Jesus, a cross, or a medal.
- ❖ Create a special blessing or prayer with your child and use it at bedtime.