

PARENT INFORMATION

This Family First Reconciliation Retreat is designed to help you to prepare, with your child, for their First Penance and Reconciliation.

OVERVIEW OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

For some, the thought of “going to Confession” may come with anxiety or confusion. For others, a remembrance of a negative experience. This is not what God intended in giving us this healing sacrament. As one of the two Sacraments of Healing - along with the Anointing of the Sick - the purpose of this sacrament is to set straight our relationship - in heart, mind and soul - with our loving and merciful God.

The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Pope Francis

God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Pope Francis

Pope Francis has spent much of his pontificate reminding us of God’s mercy. This mercy is the foundation of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in which we experience the inexhaustible richness of God’s love and forgiveness. Understood in its fullest sense, the Sacrament of Penance is a moment of personal encounter with Christ; hence, the sacrament becomes something greater than an event of confession - it is an opportunity for renewal of our relationship with Christ and his Church. Through the sacrament, we experience a restoration of relationship and a return home. Like the prodigal son, God is waiting for our return not only to Himself, but to the family.

Over the years, people have used a variety of names for the sacrament - confession, penance, reconciliation - all of which are movements of the sacrament. The official title is the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. In using this name, the relational nature of saying “I am sorry” and “I forgive you,” are the focus. The Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights several descriptions that give insight into this healing sacrament:

- Sacrament of conversion because it is the first step in returning to the Father from whom we have strayed by sin
- Sacrament of penance because it “consecrates” the personal steps of conversion, penance and satisfaction
- Sacrament of confession because disclosing our sins to the priest is an essential element of this sacrament - we also acknowledge the holiness of God and his mercy
- Sacrament of forgiveness - because God’s pardon and peace are granted through the sacramental absolution expressed by the priest
- Sacrament of reconciliation - because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles

These titles also highlight movements in the celebration of the sacrament:

- Conversion of heart (making an examination of conscience) ·
- Feeling remorse for the sins that come up in the examination of conscience
- Asking for forgiveness by acknowledging sins aloud by confessing to a priest
- Receiving absolution from Jesus - through the words of the priest
- Reconciling ourselves to God by offering the penance given by the priest

This retreat resource will help you explore, as a family, the richness of this healing sacrament as a means to draw ever closer to Christ.



RESOURCE OVERVIEW PARENT INFORMATION

This Family First Reconciliation Retreat is designed to help you to prepare, with your child, for their First Penance and Reconciliation.

Each session begins with a parent overview laying the foundation for the lesson you will complete with your child. The "Together with your child" section outlines the specific activities you will do together.

There are five sessions, each of which require 30 - 45 minutes to complete:

- God's faithful love
- Existence of sin and its effect
- God's power to forgive sin and reconcile us with Himself and His Church
- The Holy Spirit at work in the Sacrament
- Preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

Prepare for success:

- Set a schedule for when you will complete these lessons with your child. Pick a time when you and your child feel fresh and alert
- Read the lesson overview
- Do any additional reading preparation to answer questions (see suggestions below)
- Set aside your phone during the session
- Preview the video, noting talking points you would like to make

Each session will require a:

- quiet space
- device to view the session video
- printed copy of the session worksheet
- pencil and/or markers to complete the worksheet

Have fun!

Additional Parent Resources:

- Sacrament of Reconciliation Explained: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfZkq7BABJM>
- What Does Penance Have to Do with Confession?: <https://focusoncampus.org/content/what-does-penance-have-to-do-with-confession>.
- Why Should I Confess My Sins to a Priest?: <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/sacramental-forgiveness/parish-resource-bozant>.
- How Do I go to Confession?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb8pzvnnL2Q>



Act of Contrition



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.
Amen.





Lesson 1 God's Faithful Love

God's Mercy Reflects His Faithful Love and Care for Us

We cannot understand the grace of the sacrament of Penance unless we have a better understanding of God's mercy. God created us because He loves us and He wants us to love Him. God also created us with free will - and He respects our freedom in our choice to love Him, or not. God wants to be in relationship with us.

God created us to live in loving relationship with Him. As with every relationship, there are times we may hurt or disappoint the other. So too with God. We may neglect our relationship with Him. We may choose to ignore His Commandments and Beatitudes - which are guideposts to a healthy spiritual life. We may turn away from Him. God is merciful and always ready to forgive us, but he will not force us to love Him or to be reconciled with Him. Like a good shepherd, He is always caring for us and ready to save us when we get lost or stray from His loving care.

When we sin, we stray from God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church does not say that sin sets God against us. Nor does it say that sin turns God's heart away from us. No, the Catechism says that, "sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it [His love]" (1850). When we sin, we disappoint God, but that does not mean He stops loving us. God is always ready to forgive us when we are sorry. He wants to reconcile us to Himself. He wants us to be in a loving relationship with Him.

Together with your child

- Begin by praying the Act of Contrition Prayer included with these materials.
- Watch the video, "God Will Always Love You" - <https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/first-reconciliation/blessed-program-view-first-reconciliation-session-4-6.html>.
- Ask your child what they learned from the story.
 - Talking point: What would it feel like to be the lost sheep the shepherd came to find? Would you be happy to be found? How did the shepherd feel when he found the lost sheep? He was happy to. When we are close to God, He is happy and we are too.
- Complete the Good Shepherd activity sheet.
 - Talking point: God is always guiding and guarding us. He knows that we will can get lost sometimes. But he will always search for us and forgive us when we say we are sorry.
- Pray together, thanking God for taking care of your family. Say the name of each family member in this prayer.



There are many ways we can get lost, and stray away from God - our loving shepherd. On each of the bushes below, write one way that we may stray from God and get lost. These could be things we did, like tell a lie. These could also be things we did not do, like skip our daily prayers.





Lesson 2

The Existence of Sin and its Effect

Sin Damages our Relationship with God and Others

Contemporary culture tells us that there is no absolute truth. Many people profess that right and wrong are relative - determined by the individual or the particular situation. However, we as Catholics believe that Jesus is, "the way and the truth, and the life." This means that His truth expressed in Scripture and made manifest in the life and teachings of Jesus, are the framework for making moral decisions. When we consciously choose to ignore these truths, we sin. To acknowledge the existence of sin in the world is a first step toward an understanding the contrition necessary to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. When we acknowledge that sin exists we can begin to accept our own capacity to sin and admit that sin effects our relationship with God and others.

Baptism cleanses us of original sin away and we become children of God. However, Baptism does not free us from human weakness and the inclination to sin. When we carry the heavy weight of our sins, our relationships with God, our family members, friends and others are affected. We know that when someone in the family is having a bad day and brings that mood to their interactions with others, others are affected. The same is true for our sins, though they may not be foremost in our minds, our consciences are aware of them - we feel restless and unhappy - these emotions cast shadows on how we love, forgive and ask forgiveness of others. That is why we need the Sacrament of Penance so that we can say we are sorry and be reconciled with God throughout our lifetime.

Together with your child

- Begin by praying the Act of Contrition Prayer.
- Watch the video, "God Loves Healthy Relationships" - <https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/first-reconciliation/blessed-program-view-first-reconciliation-session-4-1.html>
 - Talking point: When was a time you needed to say you were sorry? Was it hard to do? When did someone ask you to forgive them? Was it hard to forgive them? Why?
- Complete the Forgiveness Flower activity sheet - this should be done over the course of several days.
 - Talking point for when activity is complete: Look how beautiful our forgiveness is. Each time we ask for forgiveness, or forgive another we do something beautiful for God and others. We make the world a happier and more loving place.
- Pray the "Our Father" together as a family.

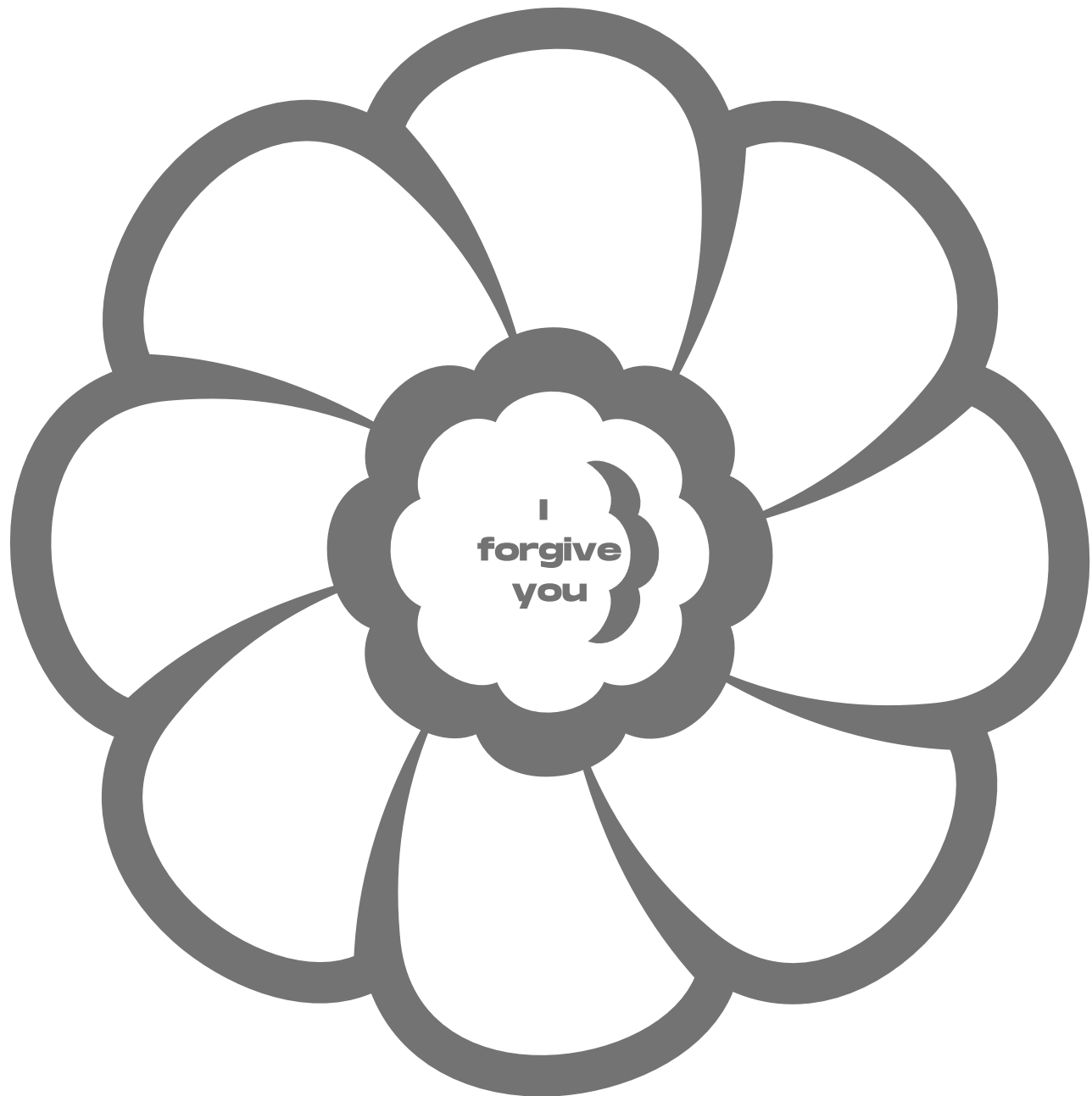
Additional Resource:

- "Alexander of the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day," by Judith Viorst illustrates how our own experiences shape the way we treat each other - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6HhKlpp7ok>.



In the Sacrament of Penance, we ask God to forgive us. We ask forgiveness for the ways we have turned away from His love, or have not treated others in loving ways - as Jesus taught us to do.

Each day, think of time you have asked for forgiveness, or forgiven someone else. Color one petal of the flower for each act of forgiveness. See how each time you practice forgiveness you make the world the beautiful place God wants it to be.





Lesson 3

God's power to forgive sin and reconcile us with Himself and His Church

God's Powerful Gift

In our human relationships, we have both the ability to seek forgiveness and to forgive others. However, in our relationship with God, we cannot "earn" His forgiveness or overcome sin by our own efforts. The gift of God's forgiveness given to us in confession is unmerited and underserved - it is freely given. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis stressed the point that mercy is God's gift: "The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift. God, by his sheer grace, draws us to himself and makes us one with Him." Every good thing we have is a gift from God. God's mercy is the greatest gift of all because it restores us to right relationship with Him in this life, and makes possible eternal happiness with Him in the next.

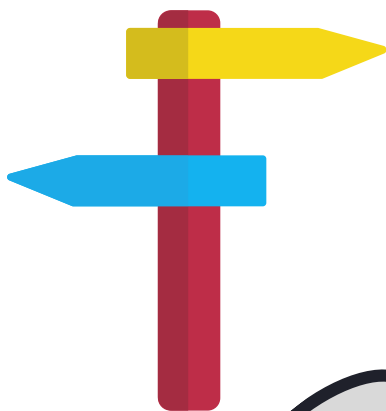
Our reconciliation with God came at a high price - the passion, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. Because only God can forgive sins, we needed a Savior. Jesus willingly chose to lay down His life for us. He paid the high price of mercy for each of us - taking on human form, taking on our sins, though he never sinned - so that we could experience the powerful mercy of God in our lives. It is through Jesus, that we are able to find our way home to our loving Father.

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation gives us an opportunity to reject our sinful and selfish actions. It helps us to love God above all things, put our priorities in order, and be people of gratitude to God. Just like the father in the parable of the Prodigal son, the Lord waits for us to return to Him. When we do, He lavishes upon us His mercy and love, making us rich in grace. God is always more generous to us than we can imagine.

Together with your child

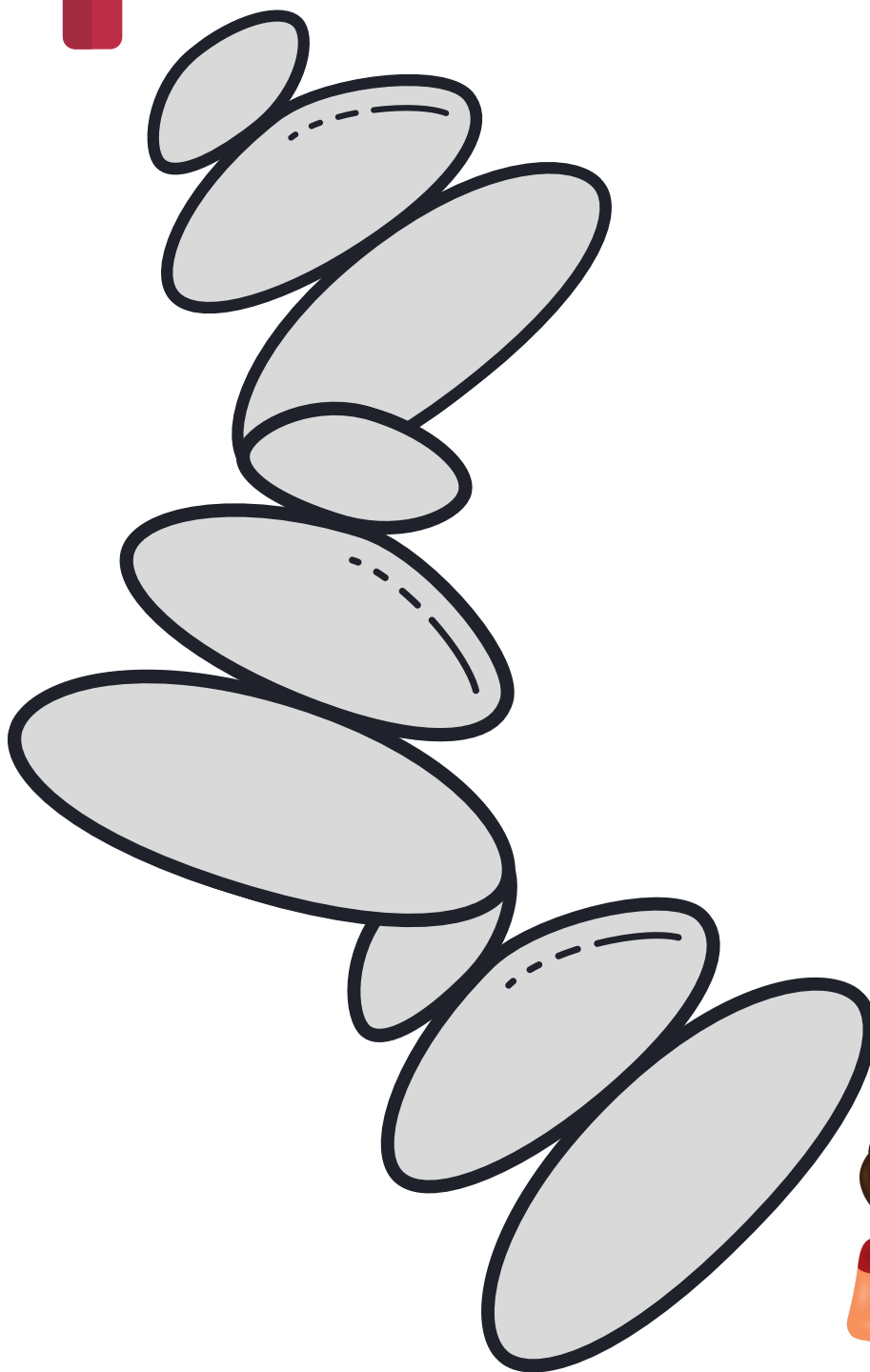
- Begin by praying the Act of Contrition Prayer.
- Watch the video, "The Prodigal Son" - <https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/first-reconciliation/blessed-program-view-first-reconciliation-session-5-5.html>.
 - Talking point: Think of a time when you asked for a toy and then did not play with it. There are times when we are not thankful for the things we have. Have you been ungrateful for what you have while asking for more? That is like the son in the story who does not see how much his father loves him and instead asks for more.
- Complete the Walking a Path of Gratitude activity sheet.
- Prayerfully read the words of Absolution that the priest prays over you in the Sacrament of Penance:
 - *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.*
- Offer a prayer of thanks to God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ who sacrificed Himself that our sins may be forgiven.





Sin and selfishness sometimes make us lose our way. We think we will be happier if we have more things. We fail to see all the good things we already have. Every good thing we have is a gift from God.

In each step along the path, write one thing for which you are grateful. Be sure to count your family and God's love as gifts on the path.





Lesson 4 The Holy Spirit at work in the Sacrament

The Holy Spirit Gives His Gift of Grace

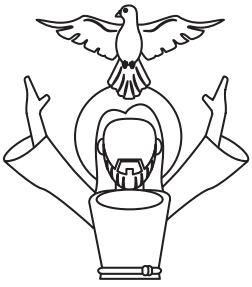
Scripture tells us of the numerous times Jesus healed the physical and spiritual illnesses of people he encountered. He healed through the power of the Holy Spirit, and gave this same healing power to forgive sins to His Apostles on the evening of His resurrection when He said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:22-23). In this way, the merciful forgiveness of God remains present in the Church handed down through the Apostles to the ministry of priests. In the Sacrament of Penance, the forgiveness of sins is mediated through the priest acting in persona Christi. Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, priests are commissioned to offer the peace of Christ to the world.

On the evening of His resurrection, Jesus found the Apostles cowering in fear. They had abandoned Jesus at the time of His passion and denied knowing Him. They had turned away from God - they had sinned. Like the disciples, we may fear that Jesus will not forgive us - that our sins are too great. It requires courage to face and name our sins; it takes still more courage to confess these sins to a priest. The Holy Spirit is at work in us in the Sacrament of Penance. The Holy Spirit inspires our consciences as we examine the ways we have turned away from God. The Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom and courage we need to approach the sacrament in confident trust of God's mercy. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit we can "entrust ourselves beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God" (St. John Paul II).

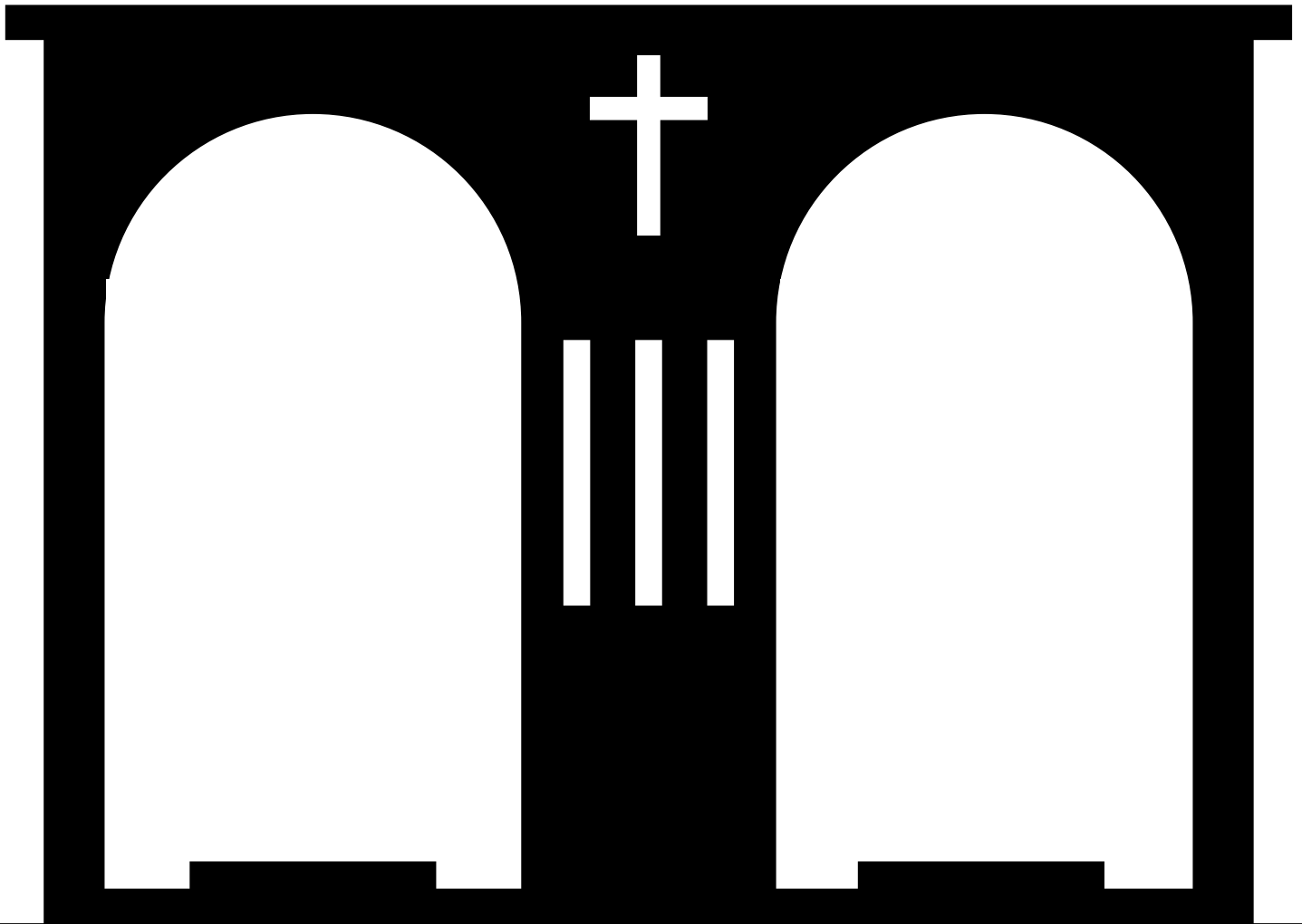
Together with your child

- Begin by praying the Act of Contrition Prayer.
- Watch the video, "Follow Your Conscience" - <https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/first-reconciliation/blessed-program-view-first-reconciliation-session-2-6.html>.
- Complete the Celebrating with the Holy Spirit activity sheet.
 - Talking point: The Holy Spirit is constantly at work in each of us - making us receptive to God, informing our consciences, inspiring us to pray, and encouraging us to help others. In the Sacrament of Penance, the Holy Spirit is at work in both the penitent and the priest. The priest, who himself is human, forgives us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Prompted by the Spirit, we should not fear to confess our sins to God through the sacrament.
- Pray the "Prayer to the Holy Spirit" together as a family.
 - *Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.*





The Holy Spirit is at work in every sacrament.
Draw a picture of you celebrating the Sacrament of Penance in the image below.
Be sure to include the Holy Spirit at work in both you and the priest.





Lesson 5

Preparing to Celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

Receive God's Mercy in the Sacrament of Penance

Each sacrament is a special encounter with God. God is present in every sacrament and gives Himself freely to us as grace. In receiving God's grace through the sacraments, we receive God's life in us and grow to become more like Him. It is important for us to prepare for the sacraments - so that we can receive God's grace and mercy in its fullness.

You have been helping your child to prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time. Nevertheless, each time we approach this sacrament we must first prayerfully reflect on the times when we have said 'no' to God's love, and turned away from His will for our lives. The Church invites us to do this through an examination of conscience. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, this prayer helps us see how we have failed to follow God's Commandments and Beatitudes. We consider both things we have done, and those that we have failed to do. This is the first step in celebrating the sacrament with a heart open to God's grace and mercy.

With sorrow for the sins committed, we come to the sacrament to ask God for His forgiveness. The steps to the celebration of the sacrament mirror the movements that take place in the heart of the penitent - confession, penance, contrition, absolution.

Together with your child

- Begin by praying the Act of Contrition Prayer.
- Watch the video, "Preparation Matters" - <https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/first-reconciliation/blessed-program-view-first-reconciliation-session-5-3.html>.
 - Talking point: Discuss with your child the movements of the sacrament as moments of confession, penance, contrition, and absolution. Share a personal experience of the sacrament. How did your heart feel after receiving absolution? Discuss with your child how important it is to prepare our hearts to receive God's mercy by praying an examination of conscience.
- Complete the 5 Steps to Confession activity sheet. Give your child some time to read the questions in silence. Remind them that they can bring a list of their sins to confession if it will help them remember what to confess.
- Help your child prepare for their First Reconciliation by role-playing the steps to Confession. The child should practice the role of the penitent with you serving in the role of the priest. Remind them they do not need to confess their sins to you as you practice.

Additional Resources:

- The most effective method of transmitting the faith is through personal witness. Take time to work through an examination of conscience yourself. A list of possible Examinations of Conscience can be found here: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examinations-of-conscience>.
- Learn more about Making a Good Confession by watching this video by Fr Mike Schmitz <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCmumpsrwBE&v=1=en>.
- Review the Five Steps to Confession - <https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/first-reconciliation/blessed-program-view-first-reconciliation-session-5-4.html>. This video is designed for children, but provides a very good overview of what to expect when celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. You may want to view this with your child.



God loves us so much! There is nothing we can do to ever stop God's love for us. Because God love us, He is always ready to forgive us when we have sinned against Him. To receive God's forgiveness, all we need to do is be truly sorry for what we have done, and promise to do our best to never sin again. We experience God's love and receive His forgiveness in a special way through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance.



5 Steps to Confession

Examination of Conscience

- The Holy Spirit helps us think about the sins on our hearts when we pray the examination of conscience. The questions in this prayer help us see where we have sinned by saying 'no' to God's love.
- Take some time to prepare your heart for the sacrament by praying with the examination of conscience for children:
 - <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/sacrament-reconciliation-children-examination-conscience>.

Confession

- When we enter the confessional, the priest welcomes us by making the Sign of the Cross. The priest may then offer a prayer or read a scripture verse. These words help us focus on God's loving mercy.
- We then confess our sins. Remember, what you share in confession is completely private. You can share anything on your heart. The priest will never tell your sins to anyone else.

Penance

- Sin hurts our relationship with God and others. After hearing our confession, the priest will offer a penance - this is a prayer or an act of service for us to do after the Sacrament. We cannot always undue the harm that result from our sins, but by offering our penance we make a symbolic repair to the harm our sins have caused.

Contrition

- Before receiving God's forgiveness, our hearts need to experience contrition. To experience contrition means to be sorry for our sins and resolve to not sin again. We show God how sorry we are by praying an Act of Contrition. Practice praying an Act of Contrition:
 - *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. Amen.*

Absolution

- After we offer an Act of Contrition, the priest will extend his hand and say the words to the Prayer of Absolution. This is the moment we receive God's forgiveness. Jesus, acting through the words of the priest, forgives our sins. Prayerfully reflect on the Prayer of Absolution:
 - *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.*
- We accept God's mercy by responding with an "Amen!"
- Be sure to offer the penance given to you by the priest as soon as possible.





Examination of Conscience for Children

Responsibilities to God:

- Have I prayed every day?
- Have I prayed my morning prayers and night prayers?
- Have I prayed with my parents and family?
- Have I been moody and rebellious about praying and going to church on Sunday?
- Have I asked the Holy Spirit to help me whenever I have been tempted to sin?
- Have I asked the Holy Spirit to help me do what is right?

Responsibilities to others:

- Have I been obedient and respectful to my parents?
- Have I lied or been deceitful to them or to others?
- Have I been arrogant, stubborn or rebellious?
- Have I talked back to parents, teachers or other adults?
- Have I pouted and been moody?
- Have I been selfish toward my parents, brothers, and sisters, teachers, or my friends and schoolmates?
- Have I gotten angry at them? Have I hit anyone?
- Have I held grudges or not forgiven others?
- Have I treated other children with respect or have I made fun of them and called them names?
- Have I used bad language?
- Have I stolen anything? Have I returned it?
- Have I performed my responsibilities, such as homework and household chores?
- Have I been helpful and affectionate toward my family?
- Have I been kind and generous with my friends?

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