

To understand what it means to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance we must first believe that we are loved unconditionally by God. The *Alive-O* Religious Education programme, used in our schools, helps your child to understand and experience God's love through story, prayer and activities. The unconditional love that they experience at home is essential in helping them to believe that God always loves them. Your child knows that you will always love and forgive them no matter what. If this is true of their parents then they can only begin to imagine how much God loves them and how willing he is to forgive them.



One of the stories that best illustrates God's love for each one of us is **The Lost Sheep**. The images of the sheep and shepherds are often used in the Bible. Sheep need to be cared for, protected and looked after by the shepherd. In the Old Testament God chose shepherds to be leaders on more than one occasion, e.g. Abraham, Moses, David.

In the parable of **The Lost Sheep** we are encouraged to see God as a shepherd who always cares for and looks after all the sheep of the flock. God even goes to find the one sheep out of a hundred who gets lost. This is the Gospel story that will probably be read at your child's First Penance celebration. The parable will be read and discussed in school. They will talk about the experience of the sheep and the shepherd. They will explore what it is like to be lost, not just in a physical sense, but separated from those they love when, for example they throw a tantrum or behave inappropriately. Through further conversation and

discussion they are helped to see that they need to say sorry for the times when their behaviour has been destructive or has caused pain or hurt.

You can help your child to better understand this by spending a few minutes during family prayertime looking back at the day or the week and asking if there is anything we need to say sorry for. Include yourself in this reflection. It is important that children know that the adults in their lives can acknowledge the need to say sorry. You can finish your prayertime together by praying the Act of Sorrow.

In all that the children do to prepare for First Penance they are learning how to take the necessary steps for reconciliation with themselves, with each other and with their God. So, they come to the celebrate their First Penance secure in the knowledge that they are always loved by God and that it is good to take responsibility and ask forgiveness for those times when their behaviour has not reflected their goodness. They are learning that it is important to say sorry and accept the forgiveness that is given them in love.



This may not be how you have experienced the Sacrament of Penance (Confession). It may be quite some time since you have celebrated this sacrament. However you might like to take this opportunity to re-examine your own attitude to this sacrament and to ask yourself is it only necessary for children? You will be invited to celebrate the sacrament yourself during the First Penance celebration.

Perhaps you might accept that invitation!



PRAYERS TO PRACTISE AND PRAY TOGETHER

ACT OF SORROW

O my God, I thank you for loving me.
I am sorry for all my sins,
for not loving others and not loving you.
Help me to live like Jesus
and not sin again . Amen

PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

O my God, help me to remember the times
when I didn't live as Jesus asked me to.
Help me to be sorry and to try again. Amen

THE CONFITEOR

I confess to almighty God.
And to you, my brothers and sisters,
That I have sinned through my own fault,
In my thoughts and in my words,
In what I have done
And in what I have failed to do;
And I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin,
All the angels and saints,
And you my brothers and sisters
To pray for me to the Lord our God. Amen

PRAYER AFTER FORGIVENESS

O my God thank you for forgiving me.
Help me to love others.
Help me to live as Jesus asked me to. Amen

PREPARING FOR FIRST PENANCE WITH YOUR CHILD

