

Take a moment during these days of preparation to consider your own attitude to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It may be some time since you experienced the sacrament. How would you respond if you were invited to celebrate the sacrament with your child? What would it mean to your child if their parents were also experiencing God's love and forgiveness?

PRAYERS TO PRACTICE AND PRAY



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

THE CONFITEOR

I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore, 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

Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the First Time



Your child's celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time usually happens during the season of Lent. Preparation in school is through the Grow in Love programme. The context in which the child prepares to celebrate this sacrament for the first time is always rooted in a sure knowledge that they are always loved by God and that God always

forgives us. There are many ways in which the children are helped to do this, not least by experiencing the unconditional love of their parents and guardians. Your child knows that you will always love and forgive them and so they are helped to see God as one who loves and forgives us in a way that we can only begin to imagine.

In **FIRST CLASS** children are helped to understand that sometimes they lose their way, they don't show love, and that when they do this it has an impact on themselves and on others. They learn the importance of saying sorry and begin to become aware of the steps involved in the process of reconciliation. They memorise and pray **The Act of Sorrow**. They listen to the story of Shauna, a little girl who made a bad choice when she lied to her mother, her teacher and her friends in school and how she came to say sorry. The word '**sin**' is introduced to the children to describe doing something that we know is wrong. The experience of losing their way, of being lost is linked with the scripture story of the Lost Sheep. The children are helped to see God as the one who will always look for us, will always be waiting for us and will always want us to come back.

In **SECOND CLASS** the children continue to deepen their understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Together with the **Act of Sorrow** they learn to pray the **Confiteor**. They consider what happens when we behave in ways that are not loving towards others and towards God. They continue to explore what 'sin' is and come to realise that even when we sin God still loves us. God will always forgive us and we should forgive others when they say sorry to us. They hear the story of Zacchaeus which helps them to see how we are always loved and forgiven by God. The children are taught that there are **five steps** in celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When they come to celebrate the sacrament for the first time it will follow the format of these five steps. The following outline will help you to talk to your child about what will happen at the celebration

1: I REALISE I HAVE DONE WRONG AND FEEL SORRY.

This first step of the Reconciliation Celebration will include praying the Confiteor, listening to a scripture reading, singing a psalm and listening to a Gospel story, usually the story of Zacchaeus. This will be followed by a short Examination of Conscience when the children and adults present reflect on areas of their lives where they need forgiveness and want to say sorry to God

2: I SAY SORRY TO GOD

Parents are then invited to present their child to the priest and then step back to allow their child to celebrate the sacrament. The child begins by making the Sign of the Cross. They tell the priest why they are there by saying '*Bless me Father, for I have sinned.....*'. They tell the priest what they are sorry for. This is what we call '*confession*.' This is not a list of 'sins' but an opportunity to acknowledge one or two times when the child has not shown love or not lived as Jesus would like them to.

3: I ACCEPT MY PENANCE AND PRAY THE ACT OF SORROW

The priest gives the child something to do show that they are sorry, '*penance*,' and asks them to say the **Act of Sorrow**.

4: I AM FORGIVEN

The priest says the prayer of **Absolution**. In this prayer the child is assured of God's love and forgiveness. The priest may say some words of encouragement and support to the child and they then return to their parent/s.

5: I TRY AGAIN

The child, having celebrated God's love and forgiveness, knows that they must now try to make better choices.

The gospel story that helps the children understand God's love and forgiveness is that of Zacchaeus. In school they will talk about how Jesus met, had dinner with, and forgave Zacchaeus who was a cheat. They will consider how Zacchaeus came to realise the bad choices that he had made, how he knew he had sinned and how he decided that he would change and make better choices by following Jesus' way. You can find the story of Zacchaeus in Luke, chapter 19, verses 1-10.

As you help your child prepare to celebrate this sacrament for the first time you can talk to them about how we all need to say sorry for the bad choices that we make. Take time at the end of the day before they go to bed to acknowledge a bad choice made by each member of the family. Say sorry to one another. Pray the Act of Sorrow together and give each other a hug with a promise to try our best to make better choices in the future.