

Let the Children Come: The Sacrament of Reconciliation and Children

To Such Belongs the Kingdom

Jesus loved children. As a child himself, he was raised by Joseph and Mary in their home at Nazareth (cf. Mt 2:23). Growing up among relatives and townspeople, Jesus experienced the concerns and problems common to all children, such as sickness and death among family members. Within this setting, Jesus “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him” (Lk 2:40).

Jesus’ affection for children is clearly affirmed in the Gospels. When his disciples attempted to halt people from bringing children to Jesus for his blessing, he insisted: “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Mt 19:14).

Jesus also demonstrated his solicitude for children by healing them and raising them from death. He restored life to Jairus’ daughter (cf. Mk 5:21-43; Mt 9:18-25; Lk 8:41-56) and the son of the widow of Nain (cf. Lk 7:11-17). He healed an epileptic boy and the demon-possessed daughter of a Greek woman (cf. Mt 15:21-28, 17:14-18; Mk 7:24-30; Lk 9:37-43).

His fundamental concern was always for the spiritual development of children. The greatest gift which God the Father can give to anyone, including children, is faith in his only begotten Son. Jesus declared that the Father reveals his Son to children more readily than to the learned and clever (cf. Lk 10:21; Mt 11:25).

Recalling these examples of Jesus’ attention to children sets the proper context for helping children examine the conscience and preparing them for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This sacrament allows Jesus to express his love for children today. Through it, he continues to influence their lives; he demonstrates his power to heal them, to free them from the bondage of sin, and raise them to new life. In turn, this sacrament allows children to come to know and love Jesus. For these reasons, Jesus still exhorts us: “Let the children come!

An 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, 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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Understanding the Form & Words of the Sacrament of Penance & Reconciliation

Parents: Help your child prepare for his/her first experience of this Sacrament.

Share a story about your First Reconciliation. What do you remember?

Choose a special way to celebrate your clean, saintly souls after confession. Make this part of the routine when the family participates in this Sacrament.

Talk about where the Reconciliation rooms are in your church.

Using the script below, or another printed version or script you received from your parish, practice the Rite of Reconciliation, taking turns being the priest and penitent. A “Penitent” is the person coming to confession.

I ask the Holy Spirit’s help
me to identify my sins.

After my examination of conscience, I am ready to go to confession.

I am greeted by the priest.

The priest welcomes me, and
we pray the Sign of the
Cross. He invites me to trust
in God who loves me.

Priest: Hello _____ (name).

Penitent: Hello, Father.

Priest: Let’s begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit. *Join with Father saying and praying the Sign of the
Cross.*

Penitent: Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

We read the Word of God.

The priest may read aloud a
passage from the Bible, or he
may invite me to read it.

(Optional – so sometimes this doesn’t happen)

Priest: Let’s read from the Bible together

Penitent: *Listens to the reading or reads aloud if asked.*

I tell my sins to the priest.

The priest helps or counsels
me. Then he gives me a
penance.

Priest: What would you like to share with me today?

Penitent: _____ *Shares sins with Father*

Priest: *May ask more questions about what happened or may talk to
you about ways you could make better choices next time. If this is not
your first confession, tell Father how long it has been since your last
confession.*

Priest: For your penance, please _____. *Father will ask you to do
something to help make right whatever was made wrong by your sins,
and/or he will ask you to pray prayers.*

I ask for God’s pardon. I

express sorrow for my sins.
I pray an Act of Contrition or
another prayer of sorrow.

Priest: It’s time to say the Act of Contrition.

Penitent: 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.

I receive absolution from the priest. The priest absolves me from my sins in Jesus' name.

Priest: *Putting his hands over or on your head*, I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I give thanks to God and go in peace. The priest and I thank God for his love and mercy, and then the priest says, "Go in peace." I leave and do my penance as soon as possible.

Priest: *Says a prayer of thanksgiving, ending with Go in peace.*
Penitent: Thanks be to God!

After leaving Father, find a place to say the prayers you may have received for penance, or sit quietly to think about your conversation.

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/sacrament-reconciliation-children-examination-conscience>

5 Steps of the Sacrament of Penance & Reconciliation:

1. **Examination of Conscience:** Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify your sins.

Prayer for a Good Confession (*To pray before examining your conscience.*)

Come, Holy Spirit, into my soul.

Show me my sins, both the wrong that I did and the good I failed to do.

Give me the grace to be sorry for my sins out of love for God,

so that through Confession my soul might be healed and strengthened to do good.

Amen!

2. **Be Contrite:** Have sorrow for your sins & decide (resolve) not to sin again.

3. **Confess Your Sins to a Priest (or Bishop):** Confessing your sins takes maturity and honesty.

- a. Pray an **Act of Contrition:** (*this or another Act of Contrition you like*)

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.

4. **Absolution of Your Sins:** The priest (or bishop) announces God's forgiveness.

5. **Do Your Assigned Penance:** Prayers or actions to repair the effects of your sin in the world.

(Suggested Activity: Have child trace hand 6 times, cut out. One hand is a title page, the remaining 5 hands are for each of the 5 steps. Help the child create a Sacrament of Penance & Reconciliation "book".)