

## Catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation



On the evening of his Resurrection Jesus sent his apostles out to reconcile sinners to his Father and commissioned them to forgive sins in his name: “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 sin you forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.’

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation first depends on the person’s acknowledgment of God’s faithful love, of the existence of sin, of the capacity to commit sin, and of God’s power to forgive sin and reconcile the sinner with himself and with the Church. “If we say: ‘We are without sin,’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). The normative point of reference for catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is the *Rite of Penance* (Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship). Dioceses and parishes should present catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that:

1. Emphasizes God’s plan for the salvation of all, his desire for every person to be reconciled with him and live in communion with him, and his gift of the grace of conversion
2. Reveals a merciful and loving father who runs to greet the repentant sinner throws his arms around him, and welcomes him home with a banquet. (Cf. Lk 15:11-32)
3. Reveals the love of Christ, the Redeemer who, through the action of the Holy Spirit, pours himself out with a “love more powerful than death, more powerful than sin” (John Paul II, *Rich in Mercy (Dives in Misericordia)*, #8).
4. Teaches that Christ is at work giving actual graces in the sacrament, thereby effecting what the sacrament signifies, namely “reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace; reconciliation with the Church; remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins; remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin; peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation; and an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle” (CCC #1496).
5. Teaches that “individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession” (Introduction, *Rite of Penance*, #31), the faithful are “obligated to confess in kind and in number all serious sins committed after baptism and not yet directly remitted through the keys of the Church nor acknowledge in individual confession, of which {they are} conscious after diligent examination of conscience” (*Code of Canon Law [CIC]*, c 988 § 1).

6. Teaches that the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation consists of repentance, confession, reparation on the part of the penitent, and the priest's absolution
7. Teaches that "mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent" (John Paul II, *Rich in Mercy (Dives in Misericordia)*, #17).
8. Teaches that one who desire to obtain sacramental Reconciliation with God and the Church must confess to a priest all unconfessed mortal sins; call attention to the obligation to celebrate the sacrament whenever one has committed mortal sin, at least once a year (CIC, c 989).
9. Teaches that "only priests who have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church can forgive sins in the name of the Church in the name of Christ" (CCC #1495).
10. Informs the faithful that priests are bound by the seal of confession, under the most severe penalties, (cf. CIC, c.1388 § 1; CCEO, c 728°). to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that penitents have confessed to them
11. Instructs those being catechized about the forms and options for celebrating the sacrament, the words and gestures of the rite, how to examine one's conscience, and how to make a good confession
12. Reminds the faithful that the Penitential Rite in the Eucharistic Liturgy is a means of repentance for venial sin and that the confession of venial sins--- "sin that merits merely temporal punishment" (CIC, c. 988 § 2)– is strongly recommended by the Church
13. Prepares the community to celebrate in ritual the realities of repentance, conversion, and reconciliation
14. Challenges the individual and the community to recognize the presence of evil and the social order, to evaluate that evil in light of the Gospel values as articulated in the Church, to accept appropriate individual and corporate responsibility, and to seek forgiveness for participation in social evil, or the evil of society
15. Reminds even those who have "put on Christ" (cf. Gal 3:27) in the sacraments of initiation that they are all sinners and that, in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, they have an opportunity to acknowledge their sinfulness, their estrangement from God and his Church, and their need for conversion and forgiveness
16. Encourages Christians to grow in their awareness of their solidarity with other human beings, to seek forgiveness from them, and to offer forgiveness to them when necessary

~ The National Directory for Catechesis pp. 132-134

#### **18-C A Deeper Look at Reconciliation**

## Catechesis for children's First Reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation



Like preparation for Confirmation and First Communion, parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation. Readiness for reception of this sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion. . . parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so they can inform and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments.

Dioceses and parishes should present catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that helps children to:

1. Acknowledge God's unconditional love for us
2. Turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation
3. Recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their personal capacity for both
4. Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and others close to them but from God
5. Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scripture of the Rite of Reconciliation
6. Understand how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation
7. Understand that "sacramental Confession is means offered to children of the Church to obtain pardon for sin, and furthermore that it is even necessary *per se* if one has fallen into serious sin" (*General Catechetical Directory, Addendum, no. 3*)

Since conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year. <sup>438</sup>