

Children *can* get more from the sacraments

Five ways to teach reconciliation

Most parishes provide reconciliation services for students and their families during Lent. But how can you mentor your students toward a deeper appreciation of the sacrament so they aren't just "going through the motions"? How can it become a prayer experience that reaches their soul? Here are five steps to get you there.

1 Talk about the sacrament

Your students might not know that reconciliation, confession, and penance are all the same sacrament. So talk about the different parts of the sacrament. Ask them what it's like to hurt a friend, say you're sorry, and hope things can be okay again. Ask them to connect the sacrament's ritual with the steps of forgiveness between friends. Role play the sacrament so they are comfortable with what will happen. Be sure they know what to expect.

2 Read a relevant Scripture passage together

If you don't know which Scripture will be read at the reconciliation service, you can use one of these to spark the conversation about God's eternal love and forgiveness.

- The Lost Sheep (Lk 15:1-70)
- The Lost Coin (Lk 15:8-10)
- The Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32)

3 Provide an age-appropriate examination of conscience

Most reconciliation services include an examination of conscience with the homily or as an individual reflection after the homily. If you can use what will be used at the service, then review

it with your students.

Otherwise, provide a process for them to think about sin. You don't want them to be overcome with guilt, but you do want them to develop a healthy appreciation of their own developing conscience and moral understanding of right and wrong. Younger children can look at what they might do that could hurt themselves, others, or God. Older children can look at their patterns of sinfulness. What kinds of things do

The sacrament of reconciliation

A **reconciliation service** has these basic elements:

1. Opening song and prayer
2. Scripture
3. Short homily
4. Examination of conscience
5. Invitation to approach for the sacrament of reconciliation
 - a] You say a few words about your sin or sinfulness, expressing your sorrow
 - b] The priest gives you a few words of encouragement
 - c] The priest gives you a penance, some action or prayer to make things right
 - d] The priest lays hands on you, forgiving you, absolving you from your sin, and blessing you
6. Closing prayer and song

they keep doing to their parents or friends that hurt their relationships?

4 Give the space and time for "confession rehearsal"

It's important for your students to realize that a priest never tells anyone the sins they hear from individual people. They are required to keep everything secret. That's sometimes called the "seal of the confessional." And no one should ever require them to tell their sins to anyone. But your students might still benefit from a private "rehearsal." Students can write down a sentence or two of what they might want to say or even draw a picture. They can keep their papers if they want to, or you can even invite them to come forward to feed their papers to an electric shredder to demonstrate the symbolic destruction of our sinfulness.

5 Facilitate students to imagine a penance

Even though the priest gives a penance, it's helpful for people to think ahead of time about what action they might take to make things right. It builds self-esteem and hope to imagine yourself making amends and committing to the follow-through. Sometimes the priest will even ask that question, so it's good to be prepared. **RTJ**



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