



The Sacrament of Penance
A Catechetical Evening with the Rite

Dinner (30 minutes)

Goal: An evening for the full community (Confirmandi, sponsors, parents, catechists, and family members) to deepen their understanding of this Sacrament, and to be invited to commit to regular participation in the Sacrament of Penance.

This catechetical event should be planned early in the Confirmation programming with follow-up opportunities to celebrate Penance during Advent, Lent, and during any retreat experiences.

The lesson plan lays the foundation for what will hopefully be a lifetime practice on the part of the community for participating in the Sacrament of Penance. The final session prior to the celebration of Confirmation is an evening prayer service and practice, which includes the Sacrament of Penance (scheduled one or two weeks before the Confirmation liturgy.)

The purpose of this lesson plan is to put the Sacrament of Penance into the context of Baptism which requires a continual response for living a life centered in Christ. We each experience times when we have sinned against God and our sisters/brothers by our own choice. Each of us needs reconciliation. Confirmation, too, is one's choice to live a Christ centered life and is the completion of Baptism.

Materials: Bibles, rosaries, Music Issue, Prayer handout with the "Act of Contrition," a lesson or teaching on "The Sacrament of Penance" (a sample lesson is included)

Key Words (Vocabulary):

- **Sign of Penance:** First, the confession of sins and, second, the words of absolution or forgiveness which the priest says while making the Sign of the Cross over us.
- **Grace:** God's free and loving gift to us, his helping goodness, the vitality that comes from Him. Grace is everything God grants us, without our deserving it in the least. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote, "Grace is not a thing, but rather God's communication of Himself to humans."
- **Confession of Sins:** The telling of one's sins to a priest in order to receive absolution.
- **Absolution:** The act or prayer by which the priest, in the Person of Christ and by the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, forgives our sins.
- **Confessional:** The place where the Sacrament of Penance is normally celebrated.
- **Act of Contrition:** A prayer in which we tell God that we are sorry for our sins and promise to do our best to change our life and avoid specific sins.

Lesson

1. Opening Prayer, Scripture Reading, and Key Words (5 minutes)

- Opening Prayer: Pray Psalm 32:1-7 or Psalm 51 (all pray together aloud from a separate PDF document)
- Scripture Reading: John 20:19-23

2. "Understanding Penance" (preferably the pastor) (10 minutes)

- Message: How the words of Christ in John 20:19-23 help us better understand Penance.
 - "Peace be with you."

- Through the Sacrament of Penance we can have peace in our lives.
- Sin pains our conscience and we feel badly about what we have done.
- Knowing our sins are forgiven, and hearing the words of absolution brings great peace.
- "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
 - Jesus was sent by the Father to reconcile humans to Himself. The priest is sent by the Church as an agent "in the place of Christ," to bring forgiveness.
 - Just as God offers us mercy and forgiveness, we must offer mercy and forgiveness to those who offend us.
- "Receive the Holy Spirit."
 - It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the priest forgives our sins.
 - The Holy Spirit sanctifies and brings the life of grace to the Church.
 - Life of God will be restored, either fully or partially, with the Sacrament of Penance.
- "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them..."
 - Jesus gave his apostles the power to forgive sins.
 - The power to forgive sins is bestowed upon priest through the Sacrament of Holy Orders (ordination).
 - It is not really the priest's power, but God's power working through the priest.
 - When we go to confession, we are really confessing our sins to Jesus Christ, represented by the priest.
- "... whose sins you retain are retained."
 - A priest can refuse absolution for only very few reasons: for which the priest must provide an explanation
 - Our sins can only be forgiven if we are truly sorry for them and promise to avoid them in the future.

3. "Penance" (preferably the youth minister or core team member) (5 minutes)

- Message: Penance is the sacrament through which the sins committed after Baptism are forgiven.
 - Through the Sacrament of Penance, the grace lost by mortal sin is restored to the soul, as well as our "ordinary" venial sins are forgiven.
 - **Matter:** confession of sins to a priest in the Sacrament of Penance.
 - **Form:** words of absolution by the priest ("I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.")
 - **Effects:** forgiveness of sins; restoration of grace to the soul; sacramental grace to overcome sins and be strengthened against temptation; reconciliation with God and the Church; peace and serenity of conscience; and spiritual consolation.

4. "Steps to a Good Confession" (preferably a core team member) (10 minutes)

- Message:
 - **Examination of conscience:**
 - You must know your sins. Sins involve the breaking of your relationship with God. They further injure the Body of Christ of which you are a member. It is our choice to sin.

- If you are unsure whether something is a sin or not, confess it and ask the priest for guidance.
- **Contrition:**
 - You must be sorry for your sins. You are called to take responsibility for your sins. "I did this of my own choice: my mother, brothers/sisters, or friends did not make me do this."
 - Pray before a crucifix or before the Blessed Sacrament to help you reflect upon the gravity of your sins.
- **Amendment:**
 - You must decide to avoid occasions of sin in the future.
 - If you are sorry for your sins, you will strive to not commit them again.
- **Confess your sins to a priest in the Sacrament of Penance:**
 - You must be honest and not withhold any serious sins. You may forget sins. This is understandable. If your confession is expressed in good will, all sins are forgiven, even those we may have forgotten.
 - The priest is there to give you God's forgiveness and is happy to help you make a good confession.
 - The priest is bound by the Seal of Confession and can never reveal your sins. Your confession is absolutely confidential forever.
- **Receive absolution and penance:**
 - In absolution, you receive God's forgiveness.
 - In accepting your penance, you seek to respond in a positive and unite yourself to Christ.

5. Activity: (preferably pastor) (5 minutes)

- The objective is to reduce the anxiety of youth, who might have a fear of going to confession, prior to providing the youth the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance. Find two mature youth volunteers ahead of time to play-act the Rite of Penance. Have one volunteer play the role of the priest and the other the role of penitent. Follow the Rite.

6. "The Rite" (preferably the youth minister) (10 minutes)

- Message: Give each of the youth a copy of "An Examination of Conscience" for high school youth. Lead the youth through "An Examination of Conscience." Lead the youth through the rite of Penance. Explain that after all family members have gone to confession, they are free to leave after some time in personal reflection.

7. Prayer and the Sacrament of Penance in the Church (two or three priests) (30 – 45 minutes)

- Scripture – The Woman Caught in Adultery – John 8:1-11
- Brief reflection by a priest
- Intercessory Prayers
- Confession

8. Dismissal after all members of the family have left the Reconciliation Room and spent time in personal prayer.