

## Instruction on Children's Confessions

In preparing our children for the sacrament of Reconciliation it is important to do a thorough preparation with them prior to their sacramental confession. Please be sure to remind them of the following points so as to be certain that each celebration may have the appropriate reverence and consistency in celebrating the sacred ritual of the sacrament.

1. The children are to be reminded of the importance of the salutary and medicinal value of regular, frequent confession. Every 1 to three months is a healthy practice; minimally once a year. They should be reminded of the importance of confession for overcoming serious sins, bad habits, and the help it provides us toward growing in virtue and holiness.
2. They should be reminded to have confidence in God's love for them and that they are assured of His mercy if they are sincere in their sorrow (contrition) and in the firm purpose of amendment. They should be reminded to not worry about what the priest might think of them because he cares about them and wants to help them experience the joy of reconciliation with God and neighbor, he recognizes that it takes a big person to admit that they were wrong and are sorry, and he respects and admires them for that. They may be reminded that the priest goes to confession too and he knows what it feels like to go to confession and that he understands. The children should be reminded that the seal of confession absolutely guarantees confidentiality and that the priest would never go and tell their parents, teachers, or others what they have confessed.
3. The children should be given a printed examination of conscience well enough in advance to make a good, serene, preparation for confession. They should not hurry through it, but should carefully think about each consideration so as to make a good examination. They may write their sins down in a list if they think that will help them to remember when they get into the confessional. They should not let anyone else see the list. They should destroy the list immediately after having gone to confession.
4. In a communal or school class group celebration of the sacrament, the group should pray the act of contrition together as a group, outside the confessional. This prayer should be committed to memory. If they have not yet memorized it they may use a printed version.
5. While waiting in line to go to confession they should not be engaging in conversations. They should be continuing to examine their consciences and praying for the others who are in the confessional or are waiting to go to confession. They should be reminded to keep silent while in church so as to be reverent and preserve an atmosphere of prayer in God's house.
6. When they enter the confessional they are to be sure the door is closed behind them so as to avoid being overheard. They should avoid speaking too loudly, but not mumble.
7. They may go anonymously, behind the screen, or face to face, in the chair in front of the priest, whichever they prefer, however, the priest has the right to limit it to anonymous only. They are **always** to have the option of anonymous confession.
8. They begin by saying "Bless me father, for I have sinned." While making the sign of the cross.
9. They then confess by stating their list of sins, one after the next. The penitent is to state the sin and how many times they have committed it, insofar as they can remember. The priest does not normally need to hear the story of how it took place or what caused them to commit it. He doesn't need to hear about other peoples' sins, just those of the penitent. If the priest is unclear on anything he may ask questions to clarify. The penitent may ask the priest for clarification if they are not sure whether something is a sin or not.
10. The priest may ask them some questions so as to help them make a good and complete confession.

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11. After the penitent has listed their sins they should include a statement, something to the effect of the following: *"For these and all the sins of my life, and any that I cannot now remember, I ask penance and absolution from you, Father."*
12. In preparation, it should be pointed out that any serious sins that have been **intentionally** withheld cannot be absolved and the person has not made their confession in good faith. Any sins that have been **innocently forgotten** at the time of the confession are absolved, even if they remember them after having stepped out of the confessional. If a **serious** sin is remembered after leaving the confessional, it will have been absolved, but the penitent should mention it the next time they go to confession.
13. The priest may then **counsel** them by giving some suggestions on how to avoid the sins and how to do better in the future.
14. The priest will then assign a **penance** to them to help them make satisfaction for their sins, to help heal them of the spiritual wounds they suffered as a result of the sin, to strengthen them so as to help them avoid committing the sins again in the future and to grow in virtue and holiness.
15. If the sacrament is celebrated **outside** of a communal or school class group celebration the penitent will be asked to make their **act of contrition**. This prayer should be committed to memory. If they have not yet memorized it they may bring in a printed version.
16. The priest will then grant them **absolution**. The penitent should listen attentively as the priest pronounces the formula of absolution. The penitent should make the sign of the cross at the same time as the priest makes the sign of the cross over them while saying ...*"I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father + and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen"*
17. The priest will then conclude by saying something to the effect of the following: *"Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace."* The penitent responds *"Thanks be to God."*
18. The penitent should demonstrate their appreciation by being courteous and saying *"Thank you, Father."*
19. The penitent then exits the reconciliation chapel and goes to offer a prayer of thanksgiving and to pray their penance, if it can be done conveniently at that time.