

What is the Sacrament of Penance?

The Sacrament of Penance is an experience of the gift of God's boundless mercy that frees us from our sins and also challenges us to have the same kind of compassion and forgiveness for those who sin against us.

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in the *Rite of Penance* we read that the sacrament is a liturgical action. It is the Church's opportunity to celebrate the presence of God in those areas of our lives needing conversion and forgiveness.

Formation for the Sacrament

Formation for the celebration of First Penance involves the co-operative efforts of parents, pastoral leaders, catechists and children. It is a time when a person is able to encounter a loving and merciful God.

The focus of any formation must be on the developing attitude of a person. Because people grow in different ways and the awareness of sin becomes evident at different times in different people, the time of sacramental celebration should be based on personal readiness.

The candidate should be prepared in such a way that the ritual celebration is a joyful celebration, more than a memorized experience.

"Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances."

National Directory for Catechesis
Chapter 5, section 36, heading B2

Preparation for the Sacrament

Every child who has reached the age of reason (seven) must be given adequate basic catechesis for the celebration of Penance so that participation in the sacrament may be a free response of faith. No adequately prepared child may be denied the sacrament.

On the other hand, no obligation to approach the sacrament may be imposed on the child, other than that which binds all Catholics, namely the consciousness of personal, serious sin.

While catechesis for the sacrament of Penance is to precede First Eucharist, the principle of individual readiness for the celebration of the sacrament must be respected.

The decision concerning readiness of a particular child rests with the parent and child along with the assistance of the catechetical leadership.

Readiness of the individual includes:

- *an awareness of the relationship of love that they have with both God and neighbor.*
- *a knowledge that this relationship can be harmed through sin and they must assume personal responsibility*
- *the experience of personal sorrow for failures and expression of that sorrow.*
- *the realization that one must try to change their sinful behavior.*
- *an understanding that the sacrament of Penance is a special sign of God's forgiveness, and/or reconciliation with one's neighbor.*
- *a free desire to receive this sacrament*
- *an ability to talk to the priest about wrongs committed in words, and in a manner appropriate to one's age.*

The Celebration

There are a variety of ways the sacrament may be celebrated. In all cases, parents as well as children are encouraged to enter fully into the celebration.

One way of preparing for the sacrament is for the family to participate in an examination of conscience together. The ideal would be to have the whole family receive the sacrament together as well.

"Parents above all others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of Christian life by word and example."

Canon 774.2

Continuing Formation

Catechesis for the sacrament of Penance must be ongoing, and continue throughout one's life.

Participation in the sacrament at frequent and regular opportunities contributes to one's overall growth in discipleship.

The parish has a responsibility to provide the necessary support and information to parents to enable them to fulfill their role as educator of their children. Parish leadership ought to provide ample opportunities for lifelong faith formation.

The community of faith has a responsibility for modeling acts of mercy and forgiveness both within its confines, and in the world beyond.

"After receiving pardon for sin, the penitent praises the mercy of God and gives him thanks ... The penitent continues the conversion thus begun and expresses it by a life renewed according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God ...".

Rite of Penance #20



A complete copy of the *Sacramental Guidelines of the Diocese of Rochester* is available in each parish. If you would like to read them, please call your catechetical or pastoral leader.

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

FIRST

PENANCE

PREPARATION



Diocese of Rochester

**The Department of
Evangelization and Catechesis**