

Blessed Trinity Parish Faith Formation
March 2022 Family Faith Activity – *the Sacrament of Reconciliation*



Background for parents

Our Family Faith Activities are designed to guide parents to help their family better understand and have an experience to learn and live our Catholic faith. Understanding our Catholic faith can help draw us closer to God and practice our faith more fully. We are then likely to be more open to receive God's grace through the sacraments. **The sacraments are encounters; moments of union with God.** We receive God's grace sacramentally. Grace is His presence in us. It is His strength and love in us.

This month, we will learn more about the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**. It is one of **two Sacraments of Healing**. (The other is Anointing of the Sick, which will be highlighted in April.)

Close your eyes for a minute and think about the word "confession." Then open your eyes. What feelings come up for you? Do you think about your experience of the sacrament? Do you feel nervous, ashamed or guilty? Maybe it gives you a feeling of peace and contentment. Maybe you don't feel much of anything because you don't think about it very often if at all. Through this Family Faith Activity, we will explore why the Sacrament of Reconciliation can be very healing for us and why we should turn to and not avoid the sacrament.

Confession is another name for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The root of the word "reconciliation" is "reconcile" which means to bring back together. That is what this sacrament of healing does – it *reconciles* us with God *and each other*. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is often avoided by many because of their perception of it – because of their fear or anxiety. Many people focus on the process. We go into a dimly lit small room, lower our voice and tell the priest our sins. The thought of that may be daunting sometimes. It is an uncomfortable thing for most people to admit they did something wrong and ask forgiveness. That is normal. We should think about the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an opportunity for us to heal and grow; to change. We don't go to confession in order to focus on what bad people we are; we go to confession because *ignoring our sins doesn't make them go away*. We go to the doctor when we are physically sick to get better - to be healed. We should go to confession to be sacramentally healed of our sins and to get stronger to resist sinning again through God's grace.



In the Gospel of John 20:21-23, Jesus says to his Apostles, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven, and whose sins you retain are retained." How would the Apostles know whose sins to forgive and whose to retain (not to forgive because the person is not sorry for example)? The person would tell them; confess to them.

Jesus gave the Apostles the authority to absolve (forgive) sinners in His name. For the next generation, the Apostles passed on that mission to others, and on and on in an unbroken line to the priests of today.

Why would Jesus do this? God's love is unconditional. "His mercy endures forever" ~ Psalm 118:29. God knows that our sins hurt us and our relationship with Him *and* each other. He gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to heal our hurts and ultimately be close to Him and live with him forever.

(Adapted from *Forgive and Forget* by Susie Lloyd)

Did you know?? The priest to whom you confess your sins is bound by the "Seal of Confession?" This means he cannot and will not tell anyone what you tell him in your confession.

Talk about it...

Using the "Background for Parents" above, talk to your children about the healing we can receive through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You may read it together with your older children and they will be able to understand. You may have to simplify it for your little ones to understand. Talk about examples of forgiveness in your own family and how you felt in that situation. Use specific examples if possible. Then move on to talk about where and how we receive the sacrament below.

Where do we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation?



Most Churches have a separate space for celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is called a "confessional." In most confessionals, you can sit face to face and talk with the priest or you may kneel or sit behind a screen and the priest does not see you. While it may take some extra courage to sit face to face, this is a more open way for the priest and the "penitent" (the one confessing) to talk to each other.



We can receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation any time. Parishes have scheduled times to go to the sacrament when one or more priests are in the confessional/s. Or you may call a parish office and schedule a time for the priest to hear your confession. Before you go, spend some time to prepare your mind and heart to make a good confession.

How do we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Examining our conscience is the first step in preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our conscience is God's gift that helps us know right from wrong.

When we examine our conscience, we ask ourselves whether or not we have loved God, others and ourselves. We think about things we have done and whether they were right or wrong. God's gave us the Ten Commandments to follow to keep us on the right path. We can think about how we might not have followed these commandments. **Examining our conscience helps us to know and be sorry for our sins.**

Contrition is being *sorry* for our sins *and firmly intending* not to sin again. To genuinely ask for forgiveness we need to be sorry for what we did. And we need to try our very hardest not to keep doing the same things wrong.

Confession is telling our sins to the priest. To begin our confession, we say, “Bless me Father, for I have sinned.” And we say how long it has been since our last confession. The priest may talk about ways we can love God and others better.

The priest then gives a **penance to us**. This is a prayer or action that shows we are sorry for our sins. Accepting penance shows that we are willing to change the way we live.

We pray an Act of Contrition (also called an Act of Sorrow) to tell God we are sorry for our sins and we will try not to sin again.

“My God I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help to do penance, to sin no more and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen.”



We receive Absolution. This is God’s forgiveness of our sins through the actions and words of the priest. The priest extends his hand and makes the sign of the cross over us saying, “Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We should make the sign of the cross.

After we leave the confessional, we kneel down and say our penance and say a prayer thanking God for his mercy and forgiveness.

Always remember that through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we receive God’s healing mercy, forgiveness and His grace. Through this sacrament, we are strengthened by God to turn away from sin. We should turn to this sacrament often.

March Family Faith Activity – asking for forgiveness, turn away from sin and grow

In this activity, we hope you will experience the love of God and each other as you talk together about the healing power of forgiveness, turning away from sin and growing closer to God and each other.

Together, either read the parable (a story Jesus told to teach a lesson) of the Prodigal Son in your Bible in **Luke 15:11-24** or read it here [Luke 15:11-24 NIV - The Parable of the Lost Son - Jesus - Bible Gateway](#)

OR watch this video of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. *We suggest watching the video for younger children to better understand the story.* [The Parable of the Prodigal Son - Biblical Stories - YouTube](#)

Talk about it.... Share your thoughts with each other by answering these questions:

Do you see yourself in any of the characters in the story? Which one(s)? Why?
What does that tell you about yourself?

How comfortable, or uncomfortable, are you with that? Why?
What point do we think Jesus is trying to make with this story? What is the point of the story for us as a family, do we think? Why is that?

How might the point of the Prodigal Son parable move us as a family to change how we act toward each other? Could it help us to grow closer as a family? How?

Parents, use this opportunity to talk about some of the hurts you may be experiencing in your family. While you might not resolve them fully at this time, it could be the beginning of healing and growing.

Bring it home...

To symbolize turning away from sin, asking for forgiveness, and growing as a family, you will be planting seeds and nurturing them to help them grow. You don't have to go to any expense for this activity if you don't want to. You can use what you have around the house. Also, the Dollar Store carries all of these items and you can even get a pack of seeds there for 25 cents!



What you will need:

- ✓ A small flower pot, container or plastic/Styrofoam cup. You can plant one or as many as you like
- ✓ Potting soil to fill your container
- ✓ Seeds of any kind
- ✓ Water to dampen your seeds

- Put enough soil in your container to almost fill it (do not push it down)
- **One person at a time, pick up a seed and as you push the seed lightly into the dirt say out loud to your family: “ Please forgive me. I want to change and grow.”**
- Once each person has had a turn, make sure all seeds have a light cover of soil over them and sprinkle some water to moisten the soil.
- Over time, keep it moist – not too wet – and keep the container out of direct sunlight until the seeds start to sprout.
- Once they start to sprout, put the container where there is good light.
- Keep your plants watered and watch them grow!

As you see the seeds sprouting and growing, let it be a reminder to each of you that you are trying to change and grow inside, too!



Close with prayer. A parent or older child can read this prayer to the family or you can make up your own. Dear God, thank you for the blessing of our family. We are grateful for this time together talking about forgiveness and your mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Guide our hearts and minds away from sin and towards your love. Help us to remember to show your love to each other every day as we change and grow as a family. We ask this in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Family Faith Activity Response -- Send it in

Take a picture of your family planting your seeds. Print it out and send it in with your child to Faith Formation or email the photo to us. OR You can write a response about your family's experience with the activity and send that in or email it to us: egarfold@blessedtrinitypgh.net OR ceisenbarth@blessedtrinitypgh.net

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God asks us to humble ourselves and admit our sins to a fellow human being – the priest. *God* knows what our sins are. But often *WE* do not. We may be in denial. We may be ignoring our sins. Going to Confession is more than just taking steps to admit our faults. It is God meeting us there – and giving us grace to heal and grow. If something is holding you back from going to the sacrament, let go and allow yourself to receive sacramental grace.

We encourage you to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation together as a family.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, March 2nd and is a wonderful time to go to the sacrament as a family. Lent is a season of repentance. It is a time to change and grow closer to God and others.

Blessed Trinity Parish Confession Times:

Saturdays throughout the year: Holy Angels Church after 8:30 AM Mass to 9:30 AM,
St. Sylvester 9 – 10 AM, St. Basil 11:00 - Noon

Wednesday, March 30 -- The Light is On for You! A special evening across the Diocese of Pittsburgh when many churches are open for confession. Our parish times/locations:
St. Albert 11 AM – Noon; St. Basil 6 – 8 PM and St. Sylvester 6 – 9 PM

