ACT OF CONTRITION

O my God,

I am sorry for my sins.

In choosing to sin

and failing to do good,

I have sinned against you

and your Church.

I firmly intend with the help of your Son

to make up for my sins

and to love as I should. Amen.
I. **Loving/Unloving**
   A. Sin – saying “no” to God, doing something wrong on purpose; making an unloving choice.
   B. Mistake – doing something wrong accidentally

II. **Conscience** – awareness of right and wrong

III. **Act of Contrition** (Sorrow) – prayer to tell God “I am sorry”
   Contrition – being sorry for doing something wrong

IV. **Sacrament** – a special sign of God acting in our lives and our personal response to faith.
   In the sacrament of Reconciliation, we tell God we are sorry and God offers us forgiveness.
   A. **Penance** – Sacrament of Reconciliation
   B. penance – Prayer or act done to make up for sins
   C. Confess – to tell sins to the priest
   D. Reconciliation – getting back together after being separated – becoming friends again with God, one another, and ourselves.

V. **Blessed Trinity** – Father, Son and Holy Spirit
   Jesus – God’s son; our friend and brother
   Holy Spirit – God’s own Spirit who helps us to be brothers and sisters in God’s family – the Church.

VI. **Baptism** – Sacrament by which we become members of God’s family

VII. **Church** – God’s family
   church – house of God

VIII. **Christian** – one who knows, loves and follows Jesus; one who wants to be loving and caring like Jesus.
   Catholic – Christians whose name in God’s family is the Catholic Church.
SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

CELEBRATING THE COMMUNAL RITE OF RECONCILIATION

Sometimes we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation together. We join with our family and friends.

We sing a song when the priest enters to gather our thoughts toward God.

The priest welcomes us in the name of Jesus. All of us together make the Sign of the Cross.

We pray together with the priest. We listen to the Word of God. The priest helps us understand God’s Word.

We think about our sins. We tell God we are sorry. We ask God to forgive us.

Together we make an Act of Contrition (Sorrow). Each one then goes to talk to the priest.

As soon as I am with the Priest, I say …

_In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen._

_Bless me Father, for I have sinned._

Tell my sins to the priest (What I did wrong and why.)

Listen to the priest.

The Priest says words of forgiveness (absolution). He asks us to do a good deed or say a prayer to show we are truly sorry. This is called penance. He may put his hands on our head to show God loves and forgives us. After the priest blesses me, I return to my seat.

Together with the priest and the community we praise and thank God for his love and forgiveness.

Then the priest says ….. “Go in peace.”

We say, “Thanks be to God.”
PARENTS AND FIRST RECONCILIATION

By Sr. Loretta Primus, SFCC

The sacrament of reconciliation reminds us that our world is broken and that sometimes our lives and the lives of others are broken by the choices that we make, that we are in need of healing and direction in our lives in order to live as Jesus taught us. As we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, we are in touch with our sinfulness and wrongdoing. We are comforted by the blessing and words of absolution that send us forth with assurance to reconcile our wrong and to “Go in peace!” Reconciliation reinforces that our God is indeed merciful and loving.

The sacrament of reconciliation asks that we pay attention to the activities of Jesus’ life, to the way in which he forgave and invited others to forgive. In the universality of God’s saving love, all people were invited into Jesus’ company, for a loving God shows no partiality. We see Jesus’ saving actions extending to the sick — the presumed “sinners” of his day. In his radical love, Jesus chose to associate himself with the outcasts. He gave them a reason for new life and new hope.

The sacrament of reconciliation invites us to conversion of mind and heart. In Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 5:23-24, we are challenged first to be Christ’s presence for others, to do Christ’s actions for others, and then to come and celebrate.

A PARENT’S ATTITUDE

As a parent preparing your child, and trying to ensure his or her understanding and appreciation for the sacrament, you need to understand and appreciate reconciliation in your personal life. You have already begun preparing your child for his or her first celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation by the many ways that you show love and forgiveness within your family. A catechist shared with me the way that her mother had prepared her seven brothers and sisters.

Whenever one of the children had wronged another person or another person had wronged one of them, Trish’s mother would ask that child to show some act of kindness to the person who had wronged him or her, as a gesture of reconciliation. Trish told me that was her greatest preparation for the sacrament and led to her understanding of its meaning in later years.

Preparing your child for the sacrament of reconciliation actually begins with an examination of your own attitude towards it. Reflect on your personal experience of the sacrament, positive or negative. (If it was negative, perhaps this time of preparation with your child can be an opportunity for you to discover what a positive experience it can be.) Children come to the experience of the sacrament with an open mind and heart. So try not to impose on your child any excess baggage that you may carry from an unpleasant experience of the past.

REACHING OUT

Put on the mind and heart of a child during this time of preparation. A child is excited about love and forgiveness, about knowing that everything is going to be all right in the end. Children delight in knowing that they can always come home and feel welcome.

The experience of forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation lies in our ability to confess our sins, to reach out in a gesture of reconciliation to the one whom we have wronged, and to let go of any anger or hurt feelings. “Letting go” is one of the most difficult areas to deal with. At times we have a tendency to replay old tapes and images in our mind, to nurse grudges.

Remember Trish’s story at the beginning? As a child, she was encouraged to do something good for the person who had wronged her. As an adult, she realized that this was her greatest preparation for the sacrament.

Encourage your child to do the same. Penance plays a significant part in the sacrament of reconciliation. Penance is about prayer to change our actions or attitudes. It is also about the actions that we take to change our lives. Are we willing to restore the good name of another, for example, when we have spoken without proper information or information that is not truthful or damaging to another?

It’s easy to teach a child to say the words “I’m sorry,” or to believe that we have the right to hear these words from another person. The challenge is to set the example as parents and to be able to say these words ourselves, as a parent, as a husband, as a wife.

Read the stories of God’s forgiveness from the Scriptures and discuss them with your child: Zacchaeus the tax collector (Lk. 19:1-10), the forgiving father (Lk. 7:36-50), God seeks out the sinner (Lk. 15:1-10), the unforgiving servant (Mt. 18:21-35), Jesus gives his friends peace (Jn. 20:19-23).

As you prepare your child for the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation, find time to read and discuss these Gospel stories together. They could even serve as bedtime stories. In some of the stories, it is Jesus who moves to seek out the lost. In others, people’s lives are changed because of Jesus, and they make the move toward reconciliation. The challenge here is to identify how we may be like the person in the story, (e.g. the unforgiving servant: When did you feel so happy that you were given extra time to complete an assignment even after it was due yet nasty to another person who had borrowed and forgot to return something you had lent him?) Perhaps then you could name some action that you will try to do to live as Jesus’ disciples.
Take the time to listen to your child as he or she wishes to speak to you. Your readiness to listen, to comfort, to advise is the first sign to your child of God as a parent, willing to listen. Teach your child to say “I’m sorry” or to (first) offer forgiveness to another who may not be able to take that first step. Some people for one reason or another find it more difficult than others to speak these words, even though they may feel it in their hearts. Perhaps they think it won’t be accepted. The challenge is to make the movement to do this. Here is a good place to make that gesture of reconciliation mentioned above.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Pray with and for one another as a family. The challenge for you is to make of your home “the ordinary place of prayer.” As you are preparing the child and yourself for this sacrament, it would be good to include a family prayer that all may grow in the love, understanding and forgiveness of Jesus, and that the child may come to know and grow in this gift of peace that Jesus offers us.

Make this experience of first reconciliation a family experience and celebration. The challenge here is to have many members of the family participate in this celebration with the child, and to have the Catholic members of the family avail themselves of the opportunity to participate in the sacrament.

Share the joy of God’s gift of life, love, and mercy with one another. Perhaps the challenge here is to be able to speak about how each family member in turn experiences God’s gift of life, love and mercy. The family meal may be a good time to do this. A friend once told me that her mother would never look out the window and say, “Isn’t it a beautiful day?” Instead, she would say, “Isn’t it a beautiful day that God has given us today?” This is an example of someone rejoicing in life, and sharing it with the family. In similar ways, we can share God’s love and mercy by simply asking a question: “Peter, where did you see God’s love today?”

In the sharing, the family grows in appreciation and understanding of one another, and in their relationship with God.

Help your child to understand that the priest stands as God’s representative of the community and offers forgiveness in the name of Jesus. Help him or her understand that our sin not only affects ourselves, but others as well. This is why we celebrate the sacrament with the community: to pray for and with one another for the strength that we need to make the right choices in life. The priest is a representative of the community who offers us forgiveness in the name of Jesus. All of us need the assurance that we can go forward with our lives and be at peace.

From now until First Penance, take the time each evening to prepare for this gift of peace and to truly make it a celebration. The sacrament of reconciliation affords us this opportunity. The priest, in the name of Jesus, absolves us from our sins and sends us forth to change our lives, and to go in peace. The challenge is for us to appropriate the meaning of the sacrament to our lives, and to be a person of peace for others. Finally, once the day of first celebration of reconciliation is past, your family should continue to discuss and to celebrate forgiveness among yourselves.

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A Parent’s Prayer

Heavenly Father, make me a better parent.
Teach me to understand my children,
to listen patiently to what they have to say,
and to answer all their questions kindly.
Keep me from interrupting or contradicting them.
Make me as courteous to them as I would have them be to me.
May I never laugh at their mistakes,
or resort to ridicule when they displease me.
Bless me with the confidence to grant them all their reasonable requests and the courage to deny them privileges I know will do them harm.
May I not rob them of the opportunity to think, to choose, to make decisions for themselves.
Make me fair and just and kind.
And fit me, O Lord, to be loved and respected and imitated by my children.

Cary C. Myers