

First Reconciliation

Session 1 – Contrition

Goals and Objectives for Session One

The goal of Session one is to enable people to be aware of God's everlasting love for us and to be able to express true sorrow for failures against this loving relationship.

The objectives of Session one are:

- To help people understand the meaning of contrition according to their age and ability
- To help them name the ways God loves them
- To help them express sorrow for failing against God's love in their own words
- To teach them one form of an Act of Contrition as provided by the Church
- To give them a true experience of God's love for them.

Contrition

Over the centuries, the form of this sacrament has varied considerably. Consequently it is known by many names. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) lists the following:

- sacrament of conversion;
- sacrament of penance;
- sacrament of confession;
- sacrament of forgiveness;
- sacrament of reconciliation (1423–1424).

In our own times, the Second Vatican Council called for a revision of the rites and formularies of the sacrament “so that they more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament” (*Constitution on the Liturgy*, #72).

In response to this decree, the ritual for the sacrament was revised in 1973. The revised sacrament is found in the Rite of Penance (RP). Here the ritual celebration of the sacrament is referred to as the Rite of Reconciliation. The use of the term reconciliation is very important. It reflects the restoration of our traditional teaching about the sacrament: that the purpose of the sacrament is to reconcile the person with God and the Church. Through the sacramental celebration a person is led to truly encounter the “reconciling Christ.”

Catechists involved in the sacramental preparation for reconciliation need to be intimately aware of the revised Rite of Penance and the ritual forms of the celebration. They need to know how the Church celebrates this sacrament if they are leading others to it. They also need to be reconciling people themselves when they are leading others to encounter the reconciling Christ.

The Rite of Penance has three forms for celebrating the sacrament:

- Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents
- Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession & Absolution (Normal form for celebration)
- Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution (not permitted for use in the United States).

What does the Church Teach?

Here the content for sacramental preparation for First Reconciliation is taken from the Rite of Penance where the Church's theology/teaching on reconciliation unfolds. The Rite of Penance, #6 states that the person is converted to God in the sacrament through: 1) Contrition, 2) Confession, 3) Penance, and 4) Absolution.

These fourfold major actions become the basis for our four sessions for the sacramental preparation for First Reconciliation.

The mystery of reconciliation permeates every action listed above. As such "reconciliation" becomes a prism for understanding each of the four major actions in this sacrament.

Contrition

Session one focuses on "Contrition and Reconciliation." The rite describes contrition as "the most important act of the penitent" (RP, 6.a). Contrition is intimately connected to conversion. To be truly sorry for our sins, we must first experience and know the everlasting LOVE that God has for us. True sorrow can't happen until we know this love. The rite tells us that we can ONLY approach the kingdom of Christ "by metanoia." The rite explains that "this is a profound change in the whole person by which we begin to consider, judge, and arrange our life according to the holiness and love of God...[C]onversion should affect a person from within toward a progressively deeper enlightenment and an ever-closer likeness to Christ."

Thus the first step really begins before we celebrate the sacrament. From the rite we see that what leads people to come to the sacrament is first of all a profound awareness of God's love for us. This is the fundamental image of God for Catholics: the God of Love. Only with this awareness comes "true" sorrow for the ways we have failed to respond to this love.

The purpose of Session one on "Contrition and Reconciliation" is threefold:

- To lead to an awareness of the profound love of God for us
- To enable understanding on the meaning of contrition in light of this love

- To help articulation of this in the form of a ritual prayer called the Act of Contrition.

The Act of Contrition is a prayer that sums up in a ritual manner what has already occurred: the awareness of God's love and our sorrow for failure against this love. The Church provides us with nine models of an Act of Contrition. We can also use our own words.

(Source: Linda Gaupin, Embracing the Vision: Sacramental Catechesis for First Reconciliation and First Communion)