

First Reconciliation

Session 2 – Penance

Goals and Objectives for Session Two

The goal of Session two is to enable the children to comprehend the importance of naming the ways they sin against God, Church, and one another as a means of strengthening their relationship with God.

The objectives for this session are:

- To help children understand sin in the broad context of failure against the Great Commandments of Love
- See the Ten Commandments as specific ways we fail against the Great Commandments
- Be able to name/confess the ways they sin according to their age and ability
- Know the difference between a sin and an accident
- Be able to confess sins properly within the context of a sacramental celebration

What the Church Teaches about Sin

Naming or confessing our sins has always been an integral part of this sacrament even from ancient times. To be able to name or confess sin, however, is much more than choosing actions from a list. The Rite of Penance (RP) states that the confession of sins “comes from a true knowledge of self before God and from contrition for those sins” (RP, 6.b). Confession of sins requires an openness of heart; an awareness of God’s love; and self-knowledge of how we have failed against this love. In this sense Session two builds on the catechesis of Session one.

The immediate preparation for the sacrament of reconciliation has a twofold purpose: 1) to enable people to sacramentally encounter the reconciling Jesus; and 2) introduce them to the moral life of the Church. In order to accomplish the latter, we must be aware of what the moral life is all about.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) devotes an entire section to the moral life of Catholic Christians. It is found in Part Three, Life in Christ. (Catechists should read #1699–2015.) To live the moral life, one must first be aware of the new commandments given to us by Christ in the New Testament: the law of love and the Beatitudes. These build on and expand the moral law of the Old Testament codified in the Ten Commandments.

Session two focuses on enabling the children to understand sin and name it (confess) according to their age and ability. The context for doing this is reconciliation. Just as the goal of the sacrament is to restore right relationships with God, Church, and one another, sin is a failure against or even a “rupture” of these relationships. The Rite of Penance states: “Since every sin is an offense against God that disrupts our friendship with him, the ultimate purpose of penance is that we should love God deeply and commit ourselves completely to him” (RP, 5). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right

conscience; it is failure in genuine love of God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods” (CCC, 1849).

Session two begins to talk about sin first of all from Jesus’ commandment of love. Only then does it address sin and the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. This is important since the great commandments of love given to us by Jesus Christ sum up the meaning of the Ten Commandments.

The Rite of Penance advances our prior notion of sin by not only speaking of “personal” sin but also “social” sin. This latter category is sin we commit as a community. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that we commit social sin when “we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them. This includes participating directly and voluntarily in them; by ordering, advising, or approving them; by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so; by protecting evil doers” (CCC, 1868).

There are many types of sin that we evaluate according to their gravity. For example, sins that are of a less serious matter (venial sins) are actions that weaken charity, our love of God and neighbor. These sins do NOT sever our relationship with God and neighbor, or deprive us of grace or friendship with God. It is important, however, that we name and confess these sins in the sacrament of reconciliation. Why? Because by doing so we are given strength to grow more fully in love with God and one another. The sacrament of reconciliation has a wonderful and positive outcome: allowing us to grow deeper in love.

There are also sins that are of a grave nature (mortal sins). “Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law” (CCC, 1855). These sins turn us away from God. They attack the vital principle of charity within us. They sever our relationship with God, Church, and neighbor.

The Church continues to teach that for a sin to be “mortal,” three conditions must together be met: “Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent” (CCC, 1857).

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