

First Reconciliation

Session 4 - Absolution

Goals and Objectives for Session Four

The goal of Session four is to enable the families to have a profound experience of the loving embrace of Christ so that they may become aware of the importance of absolution and reconciliation in their lives as Catholic Christians according to their age and ability.

The objectives of this session include helping the families:

- Experience the loving embrace of Christ
- Understand absolution as a sacramental sign that expresses forgiveness and reconciliation with God, Church, and others
- Understand the primary symbol of the laying on of hands and what it means in their sacramental life
- See the sacrament of reconciliation as a way to deepen their relationship with God and Church
- Be able to relate the sacramental experience to Church.

What the Church Teaches

The fourth major action of the sacrament of reconciliation is absolution. The Rite of Penance (RP) says that “Through the sign of absolution God grants pardon to sinners who manifest their change of heart” (RP, 6.d). The sign of absolution is the “laying on of hands” (the symbol of touch). After the penitent expresses sorrow (contrition), acknowledges sin (confession), and accepts a penance, the priest “extends his hands over the penitent’s head and gives him absolution” (RP, 55).

The sacramental symbol of the laying on of hands reveals what happens when we celebrate the sacrament. It express the following:

- The penitent is pardoned.
- The Father receives and embraces the repenant.
- Christ places the lost sheep on his shoulders and brings them back to the sheepfold (image).
- The Holy Spirit resanctifies those who are the temple of God or dwells more fully in them.
- The person is reconciled with God, Church, and others.
- The entire Church rejoices.

How are young children led to understand these sacramental realities? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) states that we lead people to understand these mysteries by beginning with the primary sacramental sign of the sacrament. For reconciliation it is the laying on of hands. The *Catechism* states: “Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the “sacraments” to the “mysteries” (CCC, 1075).

The focus of this session is to lead the children to understand absolution through unfolding the meaning of the laying on of hands (touch). The Church teaches that opening this symbol includes four parts:

- To unfold its meaning from natural experience so that we can see how creation reveals the truth about absolution
- To unfold its meaning from Scripture so that we can see how the living Word of God reveals the truth about absolution
- To unfold its meaning from ecclesial use so that we can see what the Church teaches about the truth of absolution
- To unfold its meaning from the liturgical experience so that we can understand absolution by truly experiencing it in the sacrament.

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