

National Directory for Catechesis *USCCB, 2005*

Catechesis for Children's First Reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

Like preparation for Confirmation and First Communion, parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation. Readiness for reception of this sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion.

In the Latin Church, children must receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time prior to their first reception of the Eucharist.⁴³⁵ Since the celebration of First Confession precedes First Communion,

catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation. This is to be done so that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent and so that, before receiving First Communion, the child will be familiar with the revised Rite of Reconciliation and will be at ease with the reception of the sacrament.⁴³⁶

Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances. Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child's moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continual growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love.

Dioceses and parishes should present catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that helps children to

- Acknowledge God's unconditional love for us
- Turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation
- Recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their personal capacity for both
- Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and Di others close to them, but from God
- Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation
- Understand how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation
- Understand that "sacramental Confession is a means offered children of the Church to obtain pardon for sin, and furthermore that it is even necessary *per se* if one has fallen into serious sin"⁴³⁷

Since conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ Cf *General Catechetical Directory*, Addendum, no. 5.

⁴³⁶ *National Catechetical Directory*, no. 126.

⁴³⁷ *General Catechetical Directory*, Addendum, no. 3.

⁴³⁸ Cf. *National Catechetical Directory*, no. 126.