The Story of Confession: Matter, Form, and Minister

Learning Goal

› The matter, form, minister, recipient, effects, and symbols of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

› CCC 1448-1451
› CCC 1455-1456
› CCC 1459-1460

Vocabulary

› Contrition
› Penance

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

Those who conceal their sins do not prosper, but those who confess and forsake them obtain mercy.

PROVERBS 28:13

So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you of two minds. Begin to lament, to mourn, to weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection.

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

JAMES 4:7-10
Lesson Plan

**Materials**
- Butcher paper or poster board
- Penance and Reconciliation Pre-Assessment
- The Story of Confession
- The Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation Graphic Organizer
- Penance and Reconciliation Post-Assessment

**DAY ONE**

**Warm-Up**

A. Divide the class into four groups (A-D) and give each group a piece of butcher paper. Assign each group the task of coming up with five “rules” for either (A) a classroom, (B) a state, (C) a friendship, or (D) a family.

B. Walk around the room as groups work on their lists. Make sure rules are practical, just, and realistic.

C. Have groups post their rules around the room. Suggested responses may include:

**Rules in a school**

1. Be on time for class.
2. Treat the teacher and classmates with respect.
3. Respect the school’s and other people’s property, such as books, desks, supplies.
4. Don’t bully; stand up to bullies.
5. Raise your hand to talk.
6. Be prepared for class and do the homework.
7. Try your best.
8. Participate.

**Rules in a state**

1. Take care of your home and family.
2. Obey speed limits and traffic laws.
3. Wear your seatbelt.
4. Do not steal.
5. Do not kill.
6. Do not vandalize.
7. Pay taxes.

**Rules for a friendship**

1. Be nice to your friend
2. Do things together
3. Remember your friend’s birthday
4. Stand up for your friend
5. Do nice things for your friend
6. Help your friend make good decisions
7. Share with your friend

**Rules for within a family**

1. Obey your parents
2. Be nice to your brothers and sisters
3. Help with chores
4. Spend time with your family, especially on holidays and birthdays
5. Go to your sibling’s games or events
6. Don’t take other people’s things
7. Take turns and share things
Activity
Reconvene the class and go over the rule sets, beginning with group A.

Formative Assessment
As a large group, discuss the following questions.

- How are the “rules” for friendships and families different from those for other associations?
- What are some ways we repair relationships when we break these “rules”?
- Finally, what are the “rules” for Christian life?
- How can we know what they are? Note: If needed, call students’ attention to the Ten Commandments, the Great Commandments, the Beatitudes, and Apostolic teachings.
- What happens when we break them? Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to allow us to experience forgiveness and be brought back into His grace.

DAY TWO

Warm-Up
A. Ask students to turn to Penance and Reconciliation Pre-Assessment (page 216) to each student. Have students mark each statement as true or false.

B. Have students read The Story of Confession (page 217) and answer the focus and reflection questions.

DAY THREE

Warm-Up
Arrange students in pairs or trios. Ask students to turn to The Celebration of Penance and Reconciliation Graphic Organizer (page 220). Have them complete the sections titled “Matter” through “Recipient” in pairs or trios. Circulate around the room to assist as needed.
Formative Assessment

A. Review and discuss answers to The Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation Graphic Organizer.

B. Have students turn to Penance and Reconciliation Post-Assessment (page 222) and mark each statement as true or false.
Penance and Reconciliation Pre-Assessment

Directions: Write “T” if the statement is true and “F” if the statement is false.

1. In a life-threatening emergency, any baptized Catholic can hear a confession and forgive sins.
2. Confessing mortal sins is not required because all that really matters is that deep down we are good people.
3. The essential words of Penance and Reconciliation are the words spoken by Christ: “Receive the Holy Spirit…”
4. Reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation forgives the mortal sin confessed.
5. Receiving this Sacrament reconciles us with God and the Church.

Answer Key
1. False
2. False
3. False
4. True
5. True
The Story of Confession

Directions: Read the selection and then answer the focus and reflection questions.

You know this story: God made the world. God made man. God placed man in the Garden of Eden and gave him rules for his benefit. Then the Serpent played to man’s pride. The Serpent twisted and distorted God’s plan in man’s mind. Adam and Eve listened to the Serpent and chose to disobey God. God banished man from the garden and His presence.

This would be a very sad story if it ended there. Thankfully there is more to the story! God deeply desires a relationship with each one of us. The problem is that we often still listen to the Serpent rather than to God. To help us be reconciled to the Father, Jesus gave us ways to access His mercy whenever we need it.

What Is Confession, and Why Is It Necessary?
Confession is necessary because we need to be brought back to God when we sin. Despite our Baptism, and despite our best plans, we tend to sin. Throughout our lives, we will have to resist it. If we want to be reconciled with God and the Church, we must confess to a priest all the serious sins we remember after examining our conscience. Confessing our sins to a priest and receiving absolution is the only ordinary way of being reconciled to God and His Church. Confessing venial sins is not strictly necessary, but the Church strongly encourages us to do so. It helps us form our consciences and avoid future sin.

Turning away from sin and toward God is a lifelong struggle of conversion (or turning back to Him). Confession first involves feeling contrition. Contrition means sorrow for sins and the firm choice not to sin again. When we confess our sins to a priest, we are making a choice to turn back to God and ask for His forgiveness. In the person of the priest, Christ forgives our sins.

The priest then assigns us a penance – usually to say a prayer or to do something kind for another person. Jesus already took away our sins when He suffered and died on the Cross for us. When we do penance, His sacrifice gets worked into our soul. We are joining in Christ’s suffering in a small way to make amends for our sins. Performing penance helps us re-start the habits needed to be a disciple of Jesus.

It can be scary to go to Confession. Even our pope acknowledged this! But he reminds us that we have nothing to fear. “Don’t be afraid of confession,” Pope Francis said. “When someone is in line for confession he feels all these things – even shame – but then, when he finishes confessing, he leaves free, great, beautiful, forgiven, clean, happy.”
1. We need confession because we tend to sin.

2. Sorrow for our sins and the resolve not to sin again.

3. The priest does not forgive our sin on his own. It is Jesus who forgives us through the priest.

Confession does other good things for us as well. Going often helps you form a stronger conscience. It also makes it easier for you to forgive other people who have hurt you. When you are shown mercy, it helps you to show mercy to others.

Love and Forgiveness
It can be hard to forgive others sometimes, especially if they hurt you very badly. This sense that forgiveness is difficult might lead you to think that it is hard for God to forgive you. But it is not.

And finally, remember that God already knows what your sins are. He loves you anyway. Jesus told us that He did not come for perfect people, but for sinners (Luke 5:32). He also said, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance” (Luke 15:7).

God rejoices when sinners repent, and He will never give up on you. The story of Adam and Eve was not the end of the story of our salvation. With our consent and cooperation, Jesus gives us the great gift. He not only writes a happy ending to the story of our lives, but He rewrites our past, making our entire life into a “story of salvation.” The stories in which the characters live happily ever after are the best stories, aren’t they? Confession is the key to make sure our relationships with both God and one another end in reconciliation, or “happily ever after.”

1. Our sins are washed away at Baptism. So why do we need the Sacrament of Confession?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What is contrition?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Does the priest forgive our sins himself, or is he acting in the place of someone else? Explain.
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
4. Jesus has already taken away our sins through His Death on the Cross. Penance is a way to join in Christ’s suffering in a small way to make amends for our sins and become His disciple once more.

5. Pope Francis said not to be afraid to go to Confession. “When someone is in line for confession he feels all these things—even shame—but then, when he finishes confessing, he leaves free, great, beautiful, forgiven, clean, happy.”


7. Sinners who repent bring more joy to Heaven than people who have no need of repentance because they have not sinned.

Reflection question: Answers should reflect understanding that Confession involves turning away from sin and turning back to God.
**The Celebration of Penance and Reconciliation Graphic Organizer**

**Directions:** Complete the graphic organizer by matching the Catechism quotes listed on the next page to what they are describing in the left column. Either place the letter of the matching Catechism quote in the space provided or write your own summary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Penance and Reconciliation Catechism Quote</th>
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<td>Matter</td>
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<tr>
<th>Related Scripture</th>
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<td>Matthew 16:18-19; 18:15-18</td>
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<td>James 5:14-15</td>
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Penance and Reconciliation Quotes from the

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

A. “This sacrament reconciles us with the Church.” (1469)

B. “Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him.” (1422)

C. “Only priests who have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church can forgive sins in the name of Christ.” (1495)

D. “Remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins.” (1496)

E. “…through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace. I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (1449)

F. “The penitent’s acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation.” (1491)

G. “Remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin.” (1496)

H. “Bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’” (1461)

I. “Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance.” (1456)

J. “One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church.” (1493)

K. “An increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.” (1496)

L. “Peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation.” (1496)
Penance and Reconciliation
Post-Assessment

Directions: Write “T” if the statement is true and “F” if the statement is false

True or False?

1. In a life-threatening emergency, any baptized Catholic can hear a confession and forgive sins.

2. Confessing mortal sins is not required because all that really matters is that deep down we are good people.

3. The essential words of Penance and Reconciliation are the words spoken by Christ: “Receive the Holy Spirit…”

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Answer Key
1. False
2. False
3. False
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