



Reconciliation

Reunion of Love

People sometimes ask: *Isn't it enough to say sorry to God in my heart?* The Catholic approach to Reconciliation is deeply community-oriented: we are, after all, part of the Body of Christ. So for us, sin is never a private affair. When we sin we hurt not just another, but also ourselves; and when one member of the Body of Christ is hurt, the whole body suffers. Imagine a husband and wife who harshly criticise each other. They can regret their words and say sorry to God. But for the forgiveness of God to really **take effect** in their marriage, they also need to reconcile with one another. Similarly, in Reconciliation we offer a public sign to our faith community that we are sorry for the ways we have undermined the unity of the Church and that we desire to renew our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Saying 'sorry' is different to asking for 'forgiveness'.

When we say sorry to someone, it is an 'I-centred statement' expressing sympathy but not necessarily inferring that we take any responsibility. As such it requires nothing from the person to whom we say it. It is always good to say 'sorry' but it is nowhere near as hard to do, or as effective, as asking for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness is an act of vulnerability; not only does it put us in a position of accepting responsibility for hurting the other, but it is also a request to be invited back into unity with the person we have hurt. Full reconciliation can only occur in a relationship when we say sorry AND ask for forgiveness. This is the basis of the sacrament of reconciliation, but applies equally to any intimate relationship such as with a spouse, a child, a sibling or a school/parish community member.

For Couples: next time you quarrel or hurt each other, make a point of asking for forgiveness from your spouse.

Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child's First Reconciliation

- 1. Talk about it.** In the lead up to their First Reconciliation use your family meal time to talk about God's mercy and love. Talk about people you know who are very forgiving and compassionate. Share a time when you needed forgiveness. Talk about extraordinary examples of forgiveness, like Nelson Mandela forgiving his prison guards or Pope John Paul II forgiving his would-be assassin.
- 2. Adorn your prayer space.** Place a symbol or picture at your family prayer space, such as a picture of a scene from the prodigal son. Open your bible to this parable (Lk 15:11-32).
- 3. Remember when....** Share Reconciliation memories: what was it like for Grandpa? What does Mum or Dad remember about their first Reconciliation? Give your child a sense of our Catholic story including the positive changes in the way we celebrate Reconciliation today.
- 4. Prepare yourself.** Forgive someone against whom you hold resentment. Reflect on how your resentment is leading you hurt others. Make a decision to let go and forgive.
- 5. Seize teachable moments.** Take up teachable moments to impart to your child a lesson about forgiveness and reconciliation. e.g. Talk about ways to resolve a playground dispute, hold dinner table discussion about Aboriginal reconciliation.
- 6. Set an example.** Go to reconciliation yourself, at your child's reconciliation if possible, or immediately before or after. If you are a non-Catholic parent, and it is offered in your parish, go forward for a blessing from the priest.
- 7. Party well.** Remember how the story of the prodigal son ends? Conclude the big day with a special treat and/or celebration.

One of the advantages of receiving Reconciliation at an early age is that children develop the habit of asking for and receiving forgiveness. This will become increasingly important as they grow up and during their adolescence begin to explore the adult world and perhaps make some serious mistakes - we all need to know that there is no sin too big for God's mercy and forgiveness.