

Welcome. I don't know you and you don't know me but I'm supposed to talk with you about how you and I as parents can help our children prepare for First Reconciliation. They are about to enter into a new fullness of life with Jesus and with Jesus' people, His church, as they are welcomed to share the body and blood of Jesus at Mass. For this, they prepare by renewing their own baptism in this sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. How can we help them to enter with joy and hope into this sacrament where they have the opportunity to come very close to Jesus, in the closeness that comes of responding to Jesus' personal love for each of them, and letting him know all the sins they can remember, be sorry about them, and hope by his grace to change. Now does that sound like something we can do? I'm here to give you a hand. First, let us remember we are in the holy presence of God. We think of Jesus who 'for the sake of the joy that lay before him' endured the cross. So, with that hope in front of us, we can try.

1. The baptism certificate of your child is your ticket to come to this talk, in a way—and shows on a piece of paper the day of your child's entrance into a new life. It is a new life of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Freed from original sin, united with Jesus in his death and resurrection to live a life for him and like him, a child of God and a member of the Catholic Church.

Most of our children when they were baptized, were unable to make the promises that you and I made for them. At our child's baptism **we** promised that we would raise our child to love God and neighbor. We promised to live the faith that we proclaimed at their baptism so that they would grow up in that faith. Our child's baptism was a time for crossing our hearts, not our fingers- and it is not even too much to die for Him. We even surrender our child to God's plan for his or her life as we trace the cross on our child's head. At our child's baptism, we claimed that the only true joy is to live now and forever in such closeness with God and one another, the joy of living not for ourselves but for Him that embraces carrying our daily cross.

We promised to raise our children in the faith- and we declared our YES to the essentials. **Let's stand and renew those promises now.**

2. At our child's baptism we promised to teach our children by our example in words and deeds to keep the greatest commandments: to love God with ALL your heart, ALL your soul, ALL your mind, ALL your strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

Let's be honest: Who of us has no problems doing that ALL the time?

And so, building on the promises we made at our child's baptism to be the best teachers of the faith, we have to look back on the years that have passed and ask ourselves if we

have kept those promises. What have we been busy about? What have we put in first place?

Perhaps now, the first step to preparing our children for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is to model asking forgiveness of them—and of each other—day after day. The first step is to practice asking forgiveness and praying together for help to begin again. And that's what we do big time in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, aka confession. Our sins not only damage the temple of the Holy Spirit that our body becomes at baptism, and not only hurt others, but it is Christ and the Church whose light we dim by our sins. We confess our sins to the priest who is representing Jesus and the Church, and we receive absolution. How much more this could mean to our children if this movement of sorrow and asking and giving forgiveness and praying for one another was part of their daily lives with us—and if they saw us 'going to confession'~

When we go to confession, we are going to meet Christ in a most particular, up close and personal way. We are invited to a renewal of our baptism. We are invited to an encounter with Christ through the Church in which if we are truly sorry for our sins and want to change, we will not only be forgiven but we will be given a new freedom to struggle with God's will in a way that will open us to his help in prayer, and in the community of the Church, and especially in the feast of Holy Communion.

Let's look at what to expect when we go to 'confession,' the nickname for the Sacrament of Peace and Reconciliation. **The booklet.**

3. Here we will fast forward, moving across centuries of the people of God from Abraham who waited in faith for the coming of the Messiah, and all the Catholic Christians who stand with us now in the communion of saints. At baptism, the community asks these saints to pray for the one being baptized, and for the parents who are taking on a huge responsibility, and they pray for themselves to give the needed help to the parents and child.

It's been said that the greatest tragedy in life is not to be a saint, that is not to grow the deepest friendship with God and to be the brightest light God created you to bring to the world. I think the greatest tragedy is not *to want* to be a saint. To desire something else is an illusion, a deception, an idolatry—and it will never give you peace....nor will it give your children the joy and peace and love that are the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace. At baptism we promised to teach by our example and also to guide by our help our children in this way of peace, to "Go God's way in following Jesus the Good Shepherd,' to glorify God with our lives. At baptism we are entrusted with the OUR FATHER, in which we pray "Hallowed be thy name." It is in His name, the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" that we are baptized and so we not only

dishonor our family name and our own name by our sin, but we do not glorify God's name.

At baptism, we are given a family to help us: our Church. Including the communion of saints. Have you told stories of the saints to your children? Do you have a sense of the way the Church lives the liturgical year, including the Sundays, holy days and seasons, and feasts of the saints? (hold up church calendar) What heroes are your children growing up with?

We are to glorify God's name together. We need help to do this. We must beg for it, we must look for it, we must take it when it is given. We are offered to take simple things to help us; like the calendars the church gives out around the New Year. We are invited to have Jesus TAKE our sins away. We are invited to the greatest of gifts: Jesus said, "Take, eat, this is my body.... Take, drink, this is the chalice of my blood." He said "TAKE." Do we? This help is given to us in the people God who live on earth today and those saints who are in heaven praying for us, our companions on the journey- all of whom we join with mysteriously at Mass, the greatest gift.

4. Do we TAKE what is given so that faith can be a reality, something our children can see and touch and hear, and know that they and we are loved by God and trying to love God with our all, and to love one another, quick to ask for and offer forgiveness and the help of our prayers for one another?

I wanted to leave you with a little gift. Some of you may already pray a daily rosary as a family, or some other morning and nighttime prayers. These are necessary to frame the day. Our prayers for one another, with the prayers of the saints, help us along the way.

Perhaps this practice, too, will help the Sacrament be a real encounter, a real celebration for your child and could help you 'get there' with them many times as you prepare for the great feast of Mass each Sunday and as you look forward to life forever in heaven at the banquet table.

First things first. There will always be a temptation to choose against God's will, and the good that God knows is best for you and your children. But that other choice is fake. Remember your baptismal promises and the ones you made for your child, and that God is trustworthy. His mercy endures forever. He did this (hold up crucifix) for you and for me because he came to save us from our sins. Certainly nothing we have done is outside of his mercy if he has gone to this much trouble to save us. Now is the time to unwrap that gift.

**Examen.**