

DIOCESE OF GALLUP

RECONCILIATION

A. THEOLOGICAL AND CANONICAL MEANING

Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation the faithful receive pardon from God's mercy for the sins they have committed and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church community (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. II; C. 959). In order that this Sacrament of enabling may truly achieve its purpose among the faithful, it must take root in their entire life and move them to more fervent service of God and neighbor (*Bite of Penance*.. n.7).



The whole Church, as a priestly people, acts in different ways in the work of reconciliation which has been entrusted to it by the Lord Not only does the Church call sinners to repentance by preaching the Word of God; but it also intercedes for them and helps penitents to acknowledge and confess their sins and to

obtain the mercy of God, who alone can forgive sins. Further, the Church becomes itself an instrument of the conversion and absolution of the penitent through the ministry entrusted by Christ to the apostles and their successors (*Bite of Penance*. n. 8).

B. RITE OF PENANCE

An intensified effort must be made to explain to our faithful the nature of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and why it has been so important in the life of the Church. It is also important to point out that individual, integral confession/absolution has always been and remains the ordinary way to be reconciled from sin.

Each parish must provide and publish specific convenient and regular times for persons to participate in the individual Rite of Penance. It is not good pastoral practice that people be forced to telephone or in any way make themselves known if seeking the individual rite. An individual 's right to confess either face to face or anonymously should

be respected.

The Rite of Penance consists of three separate Rites, each with its own purpose and direction:

1. The Rite for the Reconciliation of Individual Penitents;
2. The Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution;
3. The Rite for General Absolution.

NORMS FOR THE RITE OF PENANCE

The Sacrament of Reconciliation includes four basic elements: contrition, confession, an act of penance (satisfaction), and absolution (RP , n.6). In each rite all of these elements are integral but their expression varies with each rite.

Rite I: The Rite for the Reconciliation of Individual Penitents In Rite I, the following procedures take place: I. Introductory Rites

The Priest welcomes the penitent in a warm and friendly manner. After the Sign of the Cross, the priest invites the penitent to have confidence in God's mercy. The penitent, if unknown to the priest, then indicates his/her situation in life.

2. Liturgy of the Word

The Word of God is read by the priest or penitent. A text may be chosen by the penitent beforehand and used as a basis for the confession of sins.

3. Liturgy of the Sacrament a. Confession of sins

The penitent then confesses his/her sins and the priest offers suitable counsel and instruction. If a matter or importance remains unclear or if the penitent seems to be seeking advice, the priest may seek the proper clarification and offer encouragement.

b. Act of Penance of Satisfaction

The priest suggests an act of penance which should, as far as possible, correspond to the disposition of the penitent in order that the penance may help the person continue on the path of conversion. It may take the form of prayer, self -denial, and especially service to one's neighbor.

c. Prayer of the Penitent { Act of Contrition)

The penitent expresses his/her contrition and resolution to begin a new life. It is desirable that this prayer be based on the actual words of Scripture, though not necessarily actual Scriptural passages.

d. Absolution

While the priest raises or imposes hands, he proclaims the saving power of God over the penitent and gives absolution.

4. Concluding Rites

The Rite concludes with a proclamation of praise of God taken from Scripture, and then dismissal of the penitent. A sign of peace could be exchanged at this time (cf RP , n. 16- 20)

Rite II: The Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution

The use of Rite II, namely, communal service with individual reconciliation and absolution, is recommended during the Advent and Lenten seasons. These communal celebrations of the Sacrament should be encouraged on a district level. Several priests should be available to participate in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word; to hear individual confessions, and to reconcile the penitents (RP , n.22). In this instance, the individual' s right to confess either face to face or anonymously should be respected. It is out of place to encourage just a formalistic confession of sinfulness or to tell the people to pick only one sin to be presented to the confessor. In Rite n the following procedures take place:

I. Introductory Rites

After the congregation assembles, a suitable hymn may be sung. The priest greets and welcomes the people and after a brief introduction, leads the opening prayer ,

2. The Celebration of the Word The Word of God is proclaimed in the usual manner, calling people to conversion and reconciliation. If there is only one proclamation, it is preferable that it be taken from the gospels. The homily and examination of conscience should be clearly based on the texts of Scripture and emphasize the sins of people in relationship to the mercy of God rather than solely concentrating on the person's failure and guilt. Suitable periods of silence should be provided during this time.

3. The Expression of Sorrow

V At the invitation of the deacon or other minister, all kneel or bow their heads and say a form of general confession. A litany or suitable song may follow. Finally, all pray the Lord's Prayer (RP , #54-56).

4. The Rite of Reconciliation

The priests then go to suitable places to hear the confessions of the penitents. After giving each penitent an act of penance, the priest gives absolution individually.

5. Period of Praise and Dismissal

When the individual confession of sins is completed; the priests return to the sanctuary. The celebrant invites all to praise and thank God for his mercy, concludes the celebration with prayer and a blessing, and dismisses the people. A concluding hymn may be sung (RP , #23-29)

Penitential Celebrations

1. Nature and Structure

Penitential celebrations are "non sacramental" proclamations of God's word in which people are called to conversion and renewal of life. The structure of these services is the same as that usually followed in celebrations of the Word of God and given in the "Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents " (RP , #36)



a. One or more biblical readings may be chosen with psalms, songs, or periods of silence inserted between them

b. Before or after the readings from Scripture, readings from the Fathers or other writers may be selected.

c. In the homily these readings should be explained and applied to the congregation.

d. After the homily, a litany or some other means of general participation should be used to unite the congregation in voice and in spirit. e. At the end, the Lord's Prayer is said.

f The priest or minister who presides concludes with a prayer and then dismisses the people. The sign of peace may be given.

2. Care should be taken that the faithful do not confuse these celebrations with the celebration of the sacrament of Penance. They are especially helpful for these purposes:

- a. to foster the spirit of penance within the Christian Community;
- b. to help the faithful prepare for confession which can be made individually at a later time;
- c. to help children gradually form their conscience; d. to help catechumens during their conversion;

- e. to provide celebrations of penance in places where no priest is available.

Rite III: The Rite for General Absolution ,

The use of Rite III, namely General Absolution, provides the opportunity for the confessor to administer absolution to large numbers of people in a single sacramental gesture reserved for use in emergency situations or in circumstances where the number of penitents is too great for a limited number of confessors to hear individual confessions.

If possible, the Bishop's permission should be sought prior to administering General Absolution. In emergency circumstances when General Absolution is used it is necessary to inform the Bishop that Rite III of Reconciliation has been administered.

In celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation using Rite III the confessor may determine which of the liturgical elements outlined for use in Rite I and Rite II would be appropriate for the celebration of this sacrament given the particular circumstances.

C. FIRST RECEPTION OF RECONCILIATION FOR CHILDREN ,

As children reach the age of reason, generally around the age of seven, the Church extends to them an invitation to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Initiated into the Christian community at baptism, the children are now called to prepare for the sacrament of God's loving mercy.

D. TIME FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST RECONCILIATION

First sacramental reconciliation normally should be celebrated prior to the reception of the First Eucharist (c. 914 and NCD 126). Full respect is to be given to individual circumstances and to the conditions of sin and serious sin (cc.916, 988, 989). The basis for the observance of the

sacrament of reconciliation for children is not only the state of sin in which they may be (i.e., serious-mortal), but the formative and pastoral aims of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These aims seek to:

-educate children from a tender age, to the true Christian spirit of penance and conversion; provide for growth in self-knowledge and self-control;

-establish for children a just sense of sin;

-express sorrow and ask for pardon of God and others;

-lead children to a loving and confident abandonment to God's mercy and love.

~Such a task belongs to parents, catechists and priests. They are to inculcate in children more than a sense of sin, but the joy of encountering God's forgiveness, as it is signified in, the form of absolution in the Rite of Penance (Congregation for the Sacraments, Prot. N. 111 1400/86; December 20, 1986).

CANONICAL CONSIDERATIONS

By the age of 7 a child is presumed to have attained the use of reason (c. 97). Children who have reached the use of reason are to be prepared for and receive Eucharist, preceded by sacramental confession (c. 914). Anyone who is conscious of being in serious sin is not to receive Eucharist without prior sacramental reconciliation (c. 916). Serious sins are to be confessed in individual, sacramental confession once a year, the faithful are also encouraged to confess less serious sins (cc. 988-989).

WHY IS THERE CONFUSION ABOUT THE ORDER OF FIRST EUCHARIST, FIRST RECONCILIATION?

During the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Catholic Church in the United States and elsewhere was permitted to experiment with the age of first celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. This could not have been wrong in itself or the Holy See would not have given permission for this experimentation. In many cases first confession was delayed until after the child had received first Eucharist. A later age was preferred because developmentally the child was better able to comprehend the meaning of sin and the need for the sacrament of reconciliation.

The note added to the general catechetical directory promulgated by the

Sacred Congregation for the Clergy on 11 April 1971 confirmed the custom of administering the Sacrament of Penance before the first communion of children: "Taking everything into account, it would seem that one could not in principle abrogate a common and general practice except with the consent of the Holy See. Having consulted episcopal conferences the Holy See believes that it is proper to continue the Church's custom of placing first confession before first communion" (n. 5).

The same document took account of certain new practices which have been introduced in certain quarters, where it is permitted to receive first communion without first receiving the Sacrament of Penance. It allowed such practices to continue on a temporary basis, merely, "in consultation with the apostolic see in a spirit of communion with it" (ibid.).

After mature consideration and having taken account of the views of the bishops, the Sacred Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments and for the Clergy declares by this present document, with the approval of the Sovereign Pontiff, Paul VI, that these experiments, which have lasted for two years up to the end of the school year 1972-73, should cease and that everybody everywhere should conform to the decree *Quam Singulari*.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law and the National Catechetical Directory, 1978, have reiterated the directive of *Quam Singulari* (1910), which emphasizes the right of children to make their first confession and receive First Communion beginning at the age of reason (around age seven).

~ One catechetical issue that arises from catechizing for first reconciliation before catechizing for First Eucharist is the need to separate the two sacraments so they do not become confused in the mind of the child (NCD #126). Pastors and catechetical personnel will need to consider what will work best for the children and families in their individual parishes in this regard.

E. THE PLACE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST RECONCILIATION

A child's first reception or reconciliation is normally held in the setting of the parish church, in a prayer room or reconciliation room.

F. HOW TO CELEBRATE FIRST RECONCILIATION

Generally the preferred rite is Rite II -Rite of Reconciliation for

Several Penitents with individual Confession and Absolution. The celebration of the sacrament should be adapted to the needs and age levels of the child and be in accord with the spirit and pastoral theology reflected in the rite of reconciliation. A communal setting with family and friends helps provide a rich experience of the sacrament.

G. THE MINISTER OF FIRST RECONCILIATION

A priest who has received the faculty to hear confessions is the minister of the sacrament. Children are to be provided with an opportunity to establish a warm rapport with the priest(s) of the parish, so that they will be able to talk with the priest about their actions and possible wrongdoing in a manner appropriate to their ages.

H. CATECHETICAL PREPARATION FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION

"Catechesis of children for reconciliation seeks first to make clear the relationship of the sacrament to the child's life; second to help the child recognize moral good and evil, repent of wrongdoing, and turn for forgiveness to Christ and the Church; third to encourage the child to see that, in this sacrament, faith is being expressed by being forgiven and forgiving ;fourth, to encourage the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly" (NCD #126).

"Catechesis for the sacrament of reconciliation is to precede First Eucharist and is to be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation. This is to be done so that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent' (NCD #126).

"Before receiving First Eucharist, the child will be familiar with the Rite of . " 1 Reconciliation and will be at ease with the reception of the sacrament (NCD #126).

PREPARATION OF THE CHILD

Every child who has reached the years of discretion must be given adequate basic catechesis for the celebration of reconciliation so that participation in the sacrament must be a free response of faith. No adequately prepared child may be denied the sacrament (c. 854). On the other hand, no obligation to approach the sacrament must be imposed on the child, other than that which binds us all as Catholics, namely the consciousness of personal serious sin.

Children normally participate in either a Catholic elementary day-

school or a parish religious educational program for at least one year prior to immediate preparation for the sacrament. Regular catechesis, provided through the Catholic school or religious education, together with the formation parents are providing in the home, forms the foundation upon which the immediate catechesis for first reconciliation can be built.

Catechetical preparation is to provide children with:

- a basic understanding of their dynamic relationship with God in faith;
- a basic understanding of the meaning of sin within the context of an ongoing relationship with God, others and self;
- an initial understanding of how their conscience is formed;
- the meaning of Rite I and Rite II of the sacrament of penance;
- an appreciation of the love, peace and mercy extended through the sacrament of healing.

Periodically, catechetical programs need to provide both non-sacramental penitential prayer services and opportunities to participate in the sacrament. Care should be taken, however, to see that these prayer services are clearly seen as separate from sacramental celebrations.

PREPARATION OF THE CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Persons who are developmentally disabled, who have severe learning disabilities or who have other handicaps, are to be welcomed in the parish program and have their needs met. Particular care and an understanding of the situation of these persons is required for their preparation for this sacrament. Given appropriate catechesis, persons with developmental disabilities can benefit from this celebration. Communal celebrations, such as those that occur periodically in many parishes, provide the most meaningful manner of participation for those with special needs. For persons with developmental disabilities, it may also be most appropriate to delay the celebration of this sacrament into their teen years. Parents, parish priests and catechists will cooperatively decide when or if the sacrament of reconciliation is to be offered to children who are mentally handicapped. Whenever possible they are to participate in regular liturgies and activities and are to be included in parish celebrations.

PREPARATION OF THE PARENTS

Parents have a right and a responsibility to be intimately involved in preparing their children for first reconciliation (NCD #126).

The parental right and responsibility to direct the religious formation of their children needs to be affirmed and encouraged. For this reason, parent programs are to be offered by all parishes to assist parents in carrying out this right and responsibility. Such programs help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciation of reconciliation, as well as enable them to participate readily in catechizing their children. These programs are to include:

- an adult presentation on the theology and experience of reconciliation;
- an understanding and appreciation of grace, sin and conversion; -some understanding of faith and moral development;

- an understanding of the historical development of the sacrament in the life of the Church and the Rites that exist today;

- an explanation of how parents will assist in the preparation of their children for reconciliation.

The personal witness of parents and catechists to the forgiving love of Jesus is of primary importance in the catechesis of children. Children learn much more through example than they do from abstract explanations. Witnessing family participation in the sacrament of reconciliation and awareness of forgiveness in the Eucharist are critical parts of the preparation process. Parents are to teach their children at an early age what the meaning of forgiveness is and offer forgiveness to them throughout their lives.

In order to adequately assist parents in preparing their children sufficiently for the reception of first reconciliation, and encouraging them to assume as much responsibility as possible, at least one class should be offered. It is recommended that parishes offer three parent meetings in the course of the preparation period.

Special sensitivity needs to be shown to single parents, those in interdenominational marriages, those who have participated in previous programs recently, parents of the handicapped and all who exercise the role of legal guardian.

READINESS FOR THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION IS TO BE THE OPERATING PRINCIPLE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

""-' The principle of individual readiness must be respected. Sound

pastoral theology emphasizes that the reception of any sacrament may be neither forced nor refused to those suitably prepared to receive. Thus catechetical preparation of children is to respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of each individual.

The only time that the sacrament of reconciliation is absolutely required by the Church is when the person is conscious of having committed a grave sin. This judgment cannot be made for another person or group of people; it must be left up to the individual conscience. A young child of seven is often not capable of committing a grave sin because of insufficient understanding of intentionality.

A child is to be considered ready to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation when there is:

- an awareness of the relationship of love with God and neighbor;
- a growing ability to distinguish between good and evil in their actions and in the world around them;'
- a knowledge that relationships with God and others can be broken through sin; -the need to assume personal responsibility for actions or omissions;

- an awareness of conscience which involves the need to make choices between various types of actions and responses to the behavior of others;

- the experience of personal sorrow for failures to love and the need and ability to express that sorrow;

- an acceptance of personal and communal responsibility for decisions and the ensuing consequences of decisions;

- an understanding that the sacrament of reconciliation is a special sign of God's forgiveness and of reconciliation with one's neighbor;

- an awareness that the Church provides in different ways at different times the opportunity to experience God's loving

forgiveness (NCD #125).

THE DECISION TO DELAY THE FIRST CELEBRATION OF RECONCILIATION

While the norm of the Church is that first sacramental confession should precede the reception of First Eucharist, it must also be acknowledged that exceptions are allowed.

~Parents may decide that their child is not ready to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation before the reception of the Eucharist. This should be an informed decision, made only after the parents and child have participated in the preparation program for reconciliation I and have consulted with the pastor and catechist-On-Going Invitation

1 For anyone who decides to delay first reconciliation, an explicit invitation is to be made annually to celebrate this sacrament and suitable immediate preparation is to be provided.

Parishes may need to make special provisions for children of families who move from one parish to another without receiving adequate preparation for the sacraments. This special provision is also necessary for children who have never been catechized but whose families are returning to active participation in the life of the Church after a period of separation.

I. ONGOING CATECHESIS

Because continuing lifelong conversion is part of what it means to grow in faith (NCD #126), the catechesis begun in early years is to be continued and developed throughout the child's life. In this way children continue the development of a deeper awareness of the sacrament of God's loving mercy. Children have a right to fuller catechesis each year.

Just as the life of faith is never static, so the understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation is never complete at any given age. Appropriate catechesis and celebrations are to be available and respectful of the age, ability and faith level of the person. -II

J. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Do priests need to request faculties in order to administer the sacrament of reconciliation?

By reason of their diocesan pagella of faculties, the priests of the diocese have the habitual faculty to administer the sacrament of reconciliation~ by virtue of the law itself they may exercise this faculty everywhere unless in a given diocese and in a given case that is denied by the local ordinary .In danger of death any priest may administer the sacrament even if he does not have faculties. Special faculties are no longer required for hearing the confessions of women religious.

2. Are there requirements regarding the proper place for the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation?

The proper place for the celebration of the sacrament is a church or

oratory .The Conference of Bishops is to establish norms governing the confessional~ in the United States the Conference has permitted the use of a reconciliation room which must, however, also allow for use of a kneeler and fixed grill or screen. Just cause must dictate that a confession be heard in a place other than the confessional or reconciliation room.

3. What is to be done about the confession of a person who is to be received into full communion in the Catholic Church?

When the profession of faith and reception take place at the celebration of the Eucharist, the candidates, following their own consciences, should receive the sacrament of reconciliation in advance. Any priest may be approached for the celebration of this sacrament but the penitent should inform the confessor that he or she is preparing for the reception into full communion.

4. Are there "reserved sins" which the priest cannot absolve in the sacrament of reconciliation?

Except in danger of death, a priest may not absolve an imposed or declared censure but the cases of these are extremely rare. Some automatic penalties which are not reserved to Rome may be remitted in sacramental confessions. By reason of their pagella of faculties the priest of the diocese may remit the penalty of automatic excommunication in cases of abortion without recourse to the bishop.

5. What Office can be contacted with questions regarding Reconciliation?

General questions and catechetical questions should be addressed by the Department of Education. Canonical questions should be addressed to the Chancery office.

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