

The Sacrament of Reconciliation



*Forming Christ-centred pilgrims of hope with kind hearts,
questioning minds, a thirst for knowledge and a hunger for justice*

A pastoral note

Catechists should keep all discussion and reflection gentle and age appropriate. Children should never be asked to share personal sins aloud or disclose private matters publicly.

God's mercy

Session overview:

- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who sees us when we are lost.
- When we sin, we can feel far from God, but He always wants to bring us back.
- In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus welcomes us back with love and forgiveness.

Direct knowledge statement for pupils:

- **In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we bring our wrong choices to Jesus and He forgives us and helps us begin again**

Unlock the theme

Show a sheep (e.g. a small toy or a picture).

Ask:

- What might happen if a sheep wandered off on its own?
- How would it feel to be lost?
- Would a good shepherd just leave it there?

Proclaim scripture

Luke 15:1-7 The Lost Sheep

After the parable, pause.

Say: 'Jesus tells this story because He wants us to know what God is like'

Discussion prompts

Use some of these questions gently rather than as a rapid-fire quiz:

1. What does a shepherd do?
2. Why do you think the shepherd goes to find the one lost sheep?
3. What does that tell us about how important each person is to God?
4. What might it mean to be 'lost' from God?
5. Which choices can tempt us away from God's goodness?
6. Why do you think the shepherd is joyful when he finds the sheep?
7. What does this parable teach us about what God is like?
8. How might this parable help someone who feels nervous about saying sorry to God?

Quick activity

Give each child a sheep outline.

Invite them to write or draw their name and one word they want to remember today (e.g. loved, forgiven, safe, found, welcome)

Then place the sheep around an image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, a Cross, or prayer focus area.

As pupils do this, say quietly, 'In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus the Good Shepherd gently brings us back when we have wandered from Him.'

Prayer

Jesus, Good Shepherd.
thank you for loving me.
When I wander, come and find me.
When I am sorry, bring me back to You.
Help me to trust your love.
Amen.

Repeat the direct knowledge statement together.

Teacher Notes

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is an excellent starting point for First Reconciliation because it places the focus firmly on God's initiative, love, and joy, rather than on fear, shame, or rule breaking.

At this age, children need to know first that Reconciliation is about being loved and welcomed back, not about being frightened of punishment.

In this parable, Jesus reveals God as the Good Shepherd who notices the one sheep who is missing and goes out to find it. This matters because sin is not only 'doing something wrong'; it is also becoming distanced from God, from others, and from the person God calls us to be. The image of the lost sheep helps children grasp this relationally and pastorally.

When teaching this, avoid making children feel they must identify themselves with serious wrongdoing. Keep examples simple and age-appropriate: unkindness, selfishness, not telling the truth, refusing to help, falling out with people, leaving others out etc. The aim is not to burden consciences, but to help children recognise that when we stray, Jesus comes to bring us back.

We use the terms Reconciliation and confession interchangeably. Whilst formally, we say 'The Sacrament of Reconciliation', it is common to refer to celebrating this sacrament as 'going to confession'. It is a Sacrament of healing of body and mind.

This session also lays a strong foundation for later teaching on confession itself. The sacrament can then be introduced not as a test or a performance, but as a meeting with the Good Shepherd, who welcomes, heals, forgives, and restores. Children need to remember that no one is too small, too lost, or too far away for Jesus to come and find. In Reconciliation, we bring our wrong choices to Jesus and He forgives us and helps us begin again.

How this is seen in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Children can be helped to see that this truth is not just in the story, it is also lived in the sacrament:

- > We go to Reconciliation because Jesus has already called us back to Him.
We do not begin the journey; God's love does.
- > We tell the truth about our sins because Jesus the Good Shepherd wants to take our sins away.
- > Confession is not about being trapped; it is about being found and freed.
- > The priest welcomes and listens because Christ the Good Shepherd receives us with care.
- > Absolution shows that Jesus truly forgives our sins and brings us back into friendship with God.
- > Penance (a prayer or action that a person is given by the priest during the Sacrament of Reconciliation) helps us begin walking closely with the Shepherd again.

Our choices

Session overview:

- God gives us freedom so that we can choose what is good.
- Sin is choosing against God's love.
- Jesus invites us to change and begin again.

Direct knowledge statement for pupils:

- **When we sin, we choose ways that damage love, trust, peace or friendship with God and others.**

Unlock the theme

Display an image of a forked road, or two different paths.

Ask:

- What kinds of choices do you make every day?
- Are some choices easier than others?
- Can one small choice make a big difference?

Proclaim scripture

Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus

After proclaiming the passage, pause.

Say: 'Jesus does not give up on Zacchaeus. He calls him back to a better way of living.'

Discussion prompts

Use some of these questions gently rather than as a rapid-fire quiz:

1. Why do you think people do not like Zacchaeus?
2. What kind of choices has he been making?
3. Why do you think Jesus still chooses to visit him?
4. What changes in Zacchaeus after meeting Jesus?
5. What does this teach us about God's love?
6. What kind of choices can make us less loving?
7. How does Jesus help us choose differently?

Quick activity

Give each child two paper footprints:

- On one, write or draw a choice that pulls people away from love
- On the other, write or draw a choice that brings people closer to Jesus

Place only the 'closer to Jesus' footprints around a Cross, or prayer focus area.

As pupils do this, say quietly, 'When we sin, we choose ways that damage love, trust, peace or friendship with God and others'

Prayer

Jesus, friend of sinners
help me to choose what is kind, truthful, and loving.
When I make wrong choices,
help me to come back to You.
Amen.

Repeat the direct knowledge statement together.

Teacher Notes

This session should help children understand sin in a way that is relational and hopeful, not moralistic or frightening. At this age, it is important not to reduce sin to simply 'breaking rules', because that can make Reconciliation feel legalistic. Instead, children should begin to understand sin as choosing in ways that damage love, trust, peace, or friendship with God and others.

Zacchaeus is a very helpful figure because he is not perfect, but he is reachable. Jesus does not reject him; He calls him. This is the key catechetical point. God's mercy does not ignore wrong; it makes change possible.

When teaching, keep examples simple and familiar:

- > lying
- > selfishness
- > excluding others
- > refusing to help
- > speaking unkindly

Avoid abstract or overly serious moral examples. The goal is to help children recognise that their choices matter, but also that Jesus always offers a way back.

This session also prepares children well for confession itself. They need to know that naming sin is not about being shamed, but about allowing Jesus to heal what has gone wrong. The tone should remain gentle and encouraging throughout.

How this is seen in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- > In confession, we name our wrong choices honestly
- > We say sorry because we want to turn back to God
- > The priest listens because Jesus receives us with mercy
- > Absolution shows that Jesus forgives and restores us
- > Penance helps us begin choosing the good again

Telling the truth

Session overview:

- Our conscience helps us know what is right and wrong.
- Before Reconciliation, Catholics undergo an examination of conscience.
- God loves honesty and humility.

Direct knowledge statement for pupils:

- **Before the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we stop, think, and tell the truth to God**

Unlock the theme

Display an image of a person looking at themselves in a mirror.

Ask:

- Is it easy or hard to admit when we are wrong?
- Why do people sometimes pretend everything is fine when it's not?

Proclaim scripture

Luke 18:9-14 The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

After proclaiming the passage, pause.

Say: 'Jesus teaches that when we have done wrong, we can be honest about it, God loves honesty and humility.'

Discussion prompts

Use some of these questions gently rather than as a rapid-fire quiz:

1. Why do you think each person in the scripture passage behaves in the way that they do?
2. Which of them says the right thing and why?
3. What might we think about before going to Reconciliation?
4. Why is it brave to tell the truth?

Guide children towards honesty, humility, and trust in God's mercy.

Quick activity

Facilitate a quiet examen (examination of conscience) by leading children through simple thought prompts, which they answer in the silence of their hearts:

- > Have I been kind recently?
- > Have I been telling the truth?
- > Have I shared my things with others?
- > Have I left anyone out?
- > Have I done anything that I know I shouldn't have?
- > Have I listened carefully to what others have said to me?
- > Have I thanked God for what He has given me?

Then give children a quiet moment with a paper heart to reflect: 'Jesus, help me with...'. Keep this private and gentle. As pupils do this, say quietly, before confession, we stop, think, and tell the truth to God

Prayer

Sacred Heart of Jesus,
help me to be honest before You.
Help me to be sorry,
and help me to trust your mercy and love.
Amen.

Repeat the direct knowledge statement together.

Teacher Notes

This session should feel prayerful, calm, and reassuring. The purpose is not to make children anxious or over-scrutinise themselves, but to help them begin the lifelong Christian practice of honest self-reflection before God.

An examination of conscience is best presented not as 'searching for bad things', but as quietly noticing where love has been missing. Children need to understand that God already knows them fully and loves them fully; the point is not to inform God, but to help the child become open to grace and healing.

The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is very useful because it contrasts pretending with truthfulness. At this age, children readily understand the difference between 'trying to look good' and 'being honest.' This is the heart of the session.

Use very ordinary examples and avoid introducing worry or scrupulosity (excessive fear of sin). The tone should remain pastoral and hopeful. Children should leave knowing that confession is not a test they might fail, but a safe place where they can be honest with Jesus.

How this is seen in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- > Before confession, we pause and reflect honestly
- > In confession, we say simply what we are sorry for
- > We do not need fancy words, just truthfulness
- > Contrition shows we are sorry in our hearts
- > When absolution is given by the priest, our sins are forgiven.

God welcomes us home

Session overview:

- Jesus teaches that God is our loving Father who welcomes us home.
- God is ready to forgive when we are sorry.
- Reconciliation is about being restored to friendship with God.

Direct knowledge statement for pupils:

- **In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God welcomes us back with love and joy**

Unlock the theme

Display an image of the father embracing the prodigal son from today's parable.

Ask:

- What makes someone feel truly welcome?
- How does it feel when someone forgives you?

Proclaim scripture

Luke 15:11-24 The Prodigal Son

After proclaiming the passage, pause.

Say: 'Jesus tells this story so we can know what God is like.'

Discussion prompts

Use some of these questions gently rather than as a rapid-fire quiz:

1. Why do you think the father runs to meet his son who has returned?
2. What other reaction could the father have had?
3. What does this tell us about God?
4. What might this story teach us about the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
5. How would the prodigal son feel when he is welcomed home?

Guide children towards mercy, being restored to friendship with God, and joy.

Quick activity

Give children a blank folded piece of paper – a blank greetings card.

Children design a 'Thank you, God' card. Inside they write or draw why they are thankful for God's mercy and love. You could use a freeze-frame drama based on the parable instead, if preferred.

As pupils do this, say quietly, 'In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God welcomes us back with love and joy.'

Prayer

Loving Father,
thank you for welcoming me.
When I am sorry,
help me to trust your love and mercy
Amen.

Repeat the direct knowledge statement together.

Teacher Notes

This is perhaps the most important Gospel session in the whole preparation programme because it helps children imagine God correctly. This parable counters that beautifully. The father in the story does not humiliate or reject his son; he runs towards him, embraces him and forgives him. This image is central.

Theologically, the parable reveals God's mercy as active, generous, and personal. Reconciliation is not just about cancelling wrongdoing; it is about restoring relationship with God, each other and yourself. That can be explained to children as 'being brought close again'.

At this age, the emotional and spiritual meaning of the scripture matters more than analysing every detail. Support pupils to understand the relief, welcome, and joy of the son returning home. That emotional truth will often shape their understanding of confession more deeply than a technical explanation.

How this is seen in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- > We go to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation because God is ready to receive us
- > The priest's welcome reflects God's loving welcome
- > Absolution shows that we are restored to friendship with God
- > Penance helps us walk forward in that restored relationship

What happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Session overview:

- Jesus gives the Church the gift of forgiveness.
- In Reconciliation, we confess our sins, express sorrow, receive absolution, and are given a penance.
- The priest acts in the person of Christ to bring God's forgiveness.

Direct knowledge statement for pupils:

- **'In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Act of Contrition is a prayer Catholics say to tell God they are sorry for their sins and want to do better.'**

Unlock the theme

Display a picture of Jesus and an image of a priest in a purple stole, ready to hear confessions.

Ask:

- What can you see? How are these two pictures linked?

Proclaim scripture

John 20:19-23 Commissioning of the Disciples

After proclaiming the passage, pause.

Say: 'The disciples are commissioned by Jesus and given the power to forgive and bring peace. The priest continues this work today through the Sacrament of Reconciliation'.

The Rite

Teach children the rite of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by walking them simply through it:

- > Sign of the Cross
- > Say this is your first confession (opening)
- > Tell your sins simply
- > Listen to the priest
- > Receive a penance
- > Pray an Act of Contrition
- > Receive absolution (forgiveness for our sins)
- > Say your prayer of penance quietly

Quick activity

Practise a simple opening and Act of Contrition together.

After you have done this, say this 'In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Act of Contrition is a prayer Catholics say to tell God they are sorry for their sins and want to do better.'

Prayer

Holy Spirit
thank you for the gift of forgiveness.
Help me to come to You honestly and peacefully.
Amen.

Repeat the direct knowledge statement together.

Teacher Notes

This session is primarily about confidence, peace, and trust. By this point, children should already have a strong sense of God's mercy, so the rite itself can now be introduced as a concrete, grace-filled way of meeting Jesus.

Keep the explanation very simple and avoid overloading them with too much technical language. Children usually worry more about what to say and what to do than about theology. So calm, repeated, embodied practice is extremely helpful.

The key theological truth is that the sacrament is not just a conversation with a priest; it is a real encounter with Christ's mercy through the Church. However, for children this is best phrased simply: Jesus forgives us in this sacrament.

Reassure them clearly:

- > they do not need perfect words
- > they can take their time
- > the priest is there to help
- > God is glad they are coming

This session should leave children feeling more secure in what will happen during the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

How this is seen in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- > We come in honesty and trust
- > We confess our sins because Jesus wants to heal us
- > Absolution is the moment when Jesus truly forgives us
- > Penance helps us to begin again and walk in friendship with Jesus.

Suggested Act of Contrition

O my God,
because you are so good,
I am very sorry that I have sinned against you,
and with the help of your grace I will not sin again.

Practise saying this Act of Contrition with the children and consider the words and meaning of the prayer with an emphasis on trying, with God's help, not to repeat our sins in the future.

A new beginning with Jesus

Session overview:

- God's forgiveness gives us a new beginning.
- When we are forgiven, we are called to live differently.
- Reconciliation helps us grow closer to Jesus and to others.

Direct knowledge statement for pupils:

- **In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus forgives us and helps us live differently**

Unlock the theme

Show something that has been broken and then restored/cleaned/mended.

Ask:

- What is the difference between something broken and something repaired?
- How do the images of something broken and something repaired help us think about the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- Can forgiveness help people begin again?

Proclaim scripture

John 21:15-19 Jesus and Peter

After proclaiming the passage, pause.

Say: 'Jesus loves us and gives us a new beginning.'

Discussion prompts

Use some of these questions gently rather than as a rapid-fire quiz:

1. Did Jesus give up on Peter?
2. What does this tell us about forgiveness?
3. If God forgives us, how should that affect the way we treat others?
4. What might a forgiven person do differently compared to how they were before they were forgiven?

Guide children towards mercy leading to change, forgiven people should forgive others, love should be lived out. Remind children of the words of the Our Father: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Quick activity

Give children a small template of a stone pathway, leading towards Jesus. On each paving stone, write or draw some of the things they want to do after receiving God's forgiveness. *For example: tell the truth, be kinder, include others, pray more, be more patient, forgive others.*

Lay all the pathways out on the floor, or next to a prayer focus, in the shape of the Cross.

As pupils do this, say quietly, 'In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus forgives us and helps us live differently.'

Prayer

Jesus, Healer and Saviour
thank you for forgiving me.
Help me to live with kindness, truth, and love.
Help me to stay close to You.
Amen.

Repeat the direct knowledge statement together.

Teacher Notes

This final session is important because it prevents Reconciliation from being understood as a one-off event that ends when the child leaves the church. The sacrament is not only about receiving forgiveness; it is also about living as someone who has been forgiven.

Peter is a very suitable figure here because he is not rejected after failure. Instead, Jesus restores him and entrusts him with a future. That is exactly the pastoral note children need: God's forgiveness is not just about the past; it opens the way for a new life.

The aim is not to create pressure, but to plant the understanding that grace changes us gently over time. This session works best when it ends with peace, joy, and a sense of readiness for the sacrament.

How this is seen in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- > Contrition means we are truly sorry and want to change
- > Absolution gives us a new beginning
- > Penance helps us take the first steps in that new life
- > After confession, we are called to live more closely with Jesus