**The Sacrament of Reconciliation**

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Dear Parents,

We’re looking forward to seeing you all on Friday 26th February 2013 for The Sacrament of Reconciliation Ceremony. It will begin at 11:30 a.m. sharp.

Children should wear their school uniform for the ceremony.

Celebrating a sacrament for the first time is an important step in the life of your child as a Roman Catholic. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation or penance, we receive God’s love and become close to God in a renewed way. It is a way of answering Jesus’ call to return to our Father, and to become both human and fully alive.

To understand what it is to be fully human, we need to look at Jesus Christ. Jesus was truly God: he was the son who lived amongst us as a fully human person. He was exactly the same as us in all things. He ate like us, he laughed and cried like us, he loved like us and he suffered like us.

The only difference between Jesus’ humanity and ours is that sin played no part in his life. He did not sin. And the reason he did not sin was because he was fully human exactly as God had intended every man and woman to be. Jesus shows us what it is to be a true and complete human being.

Sin enters our lives when we are being less that human. Every time we think, say or do something which is not a reflection of Jesus’ humanity, we sin. But sin does not stop there because so much of what we do or fail to do affects other people.

In the light of Christ’s life, we can then turn to our own life. It is not very helpful to try to remember everything – some people spend hours before they go to confession trying to recall every fault and failing. God is not interested in how good a memory we have or how many failings we can discover in ourselves. God is only interested in restoring us and in being reconciled with us in love and healing, so God wants only our sorrow. When the prodigal son decided to return to his father, he prepared a little speech of apology. But before he could deliver it, the father was showering him with kisses of forgiveness and joy at his return. That is how it is with our heavenly Father and us in this sacrament.

Since your child was an infant you have been teaching him or her how to make good choices and to recognise the difference between good and bad actions. Perhaps one way you did this was when your child was unkind to another child or family member and you taught or showed the right way to treat them. This important task of teaching your child to make good choices also took place when you explained how to share, how to speak respectfully to others, and how to play fairly. You yourself modelled these behaviours too, perhaps when you said you were sorry when you had been unkind. Such actions taught your child to do the same.

In school, your child has been learning about the life of Jesus and his teachings. Jesus taught difficult religious concepts through parables. A parable is a story with a deeper meaning.

For the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we will take the parable of the Lost Sheep as our theme. This parable is all about God’s faithful love. It parallels the Sacrament of Reconciliation beautifully. The story itself has a number of appropriate symbols. The Good Shepherd is God. We, his children, are the sheep. The sheep that strays from the flock symbolises the person who turns away from God, the person who sins. The finding of the sheep in the end is a symbol of the person returning to God and repenting. When the shepherd celebrates the finding of the lost sheep, this represents God rejoicing in heaven at being reconciled with us. It is important that our children begin to understand that no matter how far they may stray from living as God calls them to live, God will always love them and welcome them back.

Another parable that represents the forgiveness of God is the parable of the Prodigal son. Jesus used this parable to teach the people to trust in God’s great love and unending forgiveness. During it’s teaching we talk about how difficult it must have been for the son to return to his father and say he was sorry. The father’s joy was made real as we talk about how the father arranged a big party to welcome his son home.

Your child has probably experienced many times when she or he has had to express sorrow for an unloving or selfish act at home. When you have forgiven your child during such times, you set an example of love and forgiveness. Through your actions your child has learned to trust and say “I’m sorry.” It is through these normal forgiving moments that your child grows in his or her trust in God. It is also important for your child to experience giving forgiveness to another person. An example would be when you ask your child’s forgiveness at a time when you may have been unfair. Such actions on your part help your child come to realise that everyone, even grown-ups, must ask for forgiveness.

**You can help your child prepare for the Sacrament of Confession in the following ways:**

1. Talk about the parable of Jesus learned about in school asking questions such as

* What is the parable of The Lost Sheep about?
* Discuss the symbols contained in it as mentioned above.
* Why is it a good story to use when you are making your first confession?
* What is your favourite part of the story?

1. Say their prayers for confession nightly.
2. Read through their lines for the drama *An t-Aoire Maith nightly.*
3. Your child’s baptismal candle is required for the confession ceremony. Please send it to school at your earliest convenience.

On the day of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a ceremony will take mass. It is not a full length mass. A copy of the ceremony is included with this handout.

**On the day of confession, you will be asked to take part in a number of tasks throughout the ceremony.**

1. To answer a question posed by the priest at the beginning of the ceremony.

* Priest: *What do you ask of God’s Church for your children?*

Parents/Guardians say together**:** *The celebration of God’s forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance.*

1. Toward the end of the ceremony you will be asked to come forward and receive your baptismal candle on behalf of your child. Children are then called to the altar.

* The priest will say *‘I invite you now to bless your child on the ears and the mouths as was done on the day they were baptised.’* You will bless your child on his ears and mouth saying *‘The Lord made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he touch your ears to receive his work, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God.’*