

Celebrating Mercy in the Home

Greetings!

What are your hopes for your child? Happiness, finding a purpose, and being a good person would top the list for most people in the world. Christian parents—and many others—would add the goal of heaven. We can help children journey toward this abundant life, and one of the most vital tools we have to offer them is the sacrament of reconciliation.

The sacrament of reconciliation reminds us that there is nothing your child can do or cannot do that will make God love him or her more. It is God's nature to love and to do so extravagantly. If you are looking to give your children a gift that will serve them every day of their lives, ground them in an awareness of God's unconditional love.

To reiterate, the focus of this sacrament is not our sinfulness. It is about the depth of God's love for us. The sacrament of reconciliation is an outpouring of God's grace and a celebration of God's love and forgiveness. It is also a sign of what God is up to in our world: God is healing all division and drawing all people to himself.

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In light of this incredible reality, I invite you to separate your day-to-day behavior management struggles with your child from discussions about sinfulness. Children are not more likely to share or stop squabbling with their siblings or put their shoes on in a timely fashion because Jesus says so. We must avoid inadvertently framing behavior that is developmentally appropriate as sinful. This is dangerous, and leads to shame rather than contrition. Contrition encompasses sorrow for sin, will to make amends, and desire to grow and do better. Shame is a dead end. It does not help us to grow and do better.

Your child's most fundamental identity is as God's beloved child. No deed can separate children from God's love. The more this is reinforced, the more the sacrament of reconciliation will become an opportunity rather than a dreaded obligation. But how?



Parents can help a child understand their identity as a child of God, who offers abundant love.

Make talk about God's love a regular part of your family day. Use Scripture, the tradition of the Church, and the stories of holy men and women who have gone before us to talk about what God wants for us: living in communion with God and one another. When not in the heat of any behavioral challenge or argument, talk about what types of things hold us back from living in God's love. Think about the ways our interconnected lives are affected by one another's choices, so that our failings and limitations do not affect only us. Throughout, mention that God loves us so much that God is longing for us to try again. You can use the parables of Jesus to show the joy that God and the community experience when what was lost is found. God wants us to find new ways to live so that we can have life more abundantly.

Model receiving the sacrament. You might talk a little bit about your examination of conscience, that you realize that no one is perfect, and how you are ready to take steps toward living more fully the life Jesus calls us to as disciples. Let your child see your great joy.

When your child receives the sacrament of reconciliation, make sure that it is treated as the wonderful gift that it is. As a wise teacher once told me, "God is always ready to forgive us, but sometimes we need to celebrate it." And celebrate we do: my children and I usually stop for ice cream on the way home.