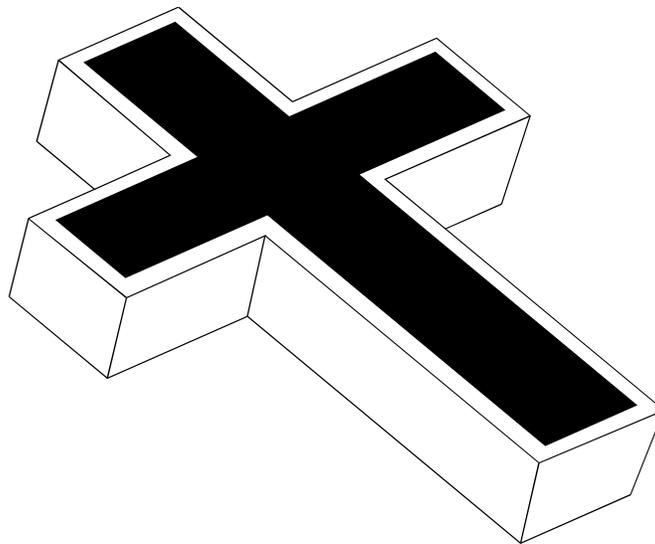


Proximate Preparation
for
Penance and Eucharist

Session Three



Jesus' Unconditional Love

Office of Faith Formation
Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn
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Preparing the Environment: A small table with a purple stole, bible and child's religion text book. The purple stole is a symbol of the power that the priest receives when he is ordained to forgive sins in the name of Jesus. The color purple symbolizes penance. The bible is God speaking to us and the children's religion book gives us the teachings of the Church. Both help us to know the way to live as good children of God.

Part I:

Prayer:

Begin by making the Sign of the Cross.

Leader: Lord Jesus, through your death you showed us unconditional love. Thank you for forgiving us each time we failed to live as true children of God. Help us to more like you in what we say and what we do. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.

Orientation: In our first session, we reflected on our becoming children of God through our baptism. You remember that we spoke about the white garment being a symbol of putting on Jesus' way of thinking, acting, and loving. And the lighted candle that our godparent held for us symbolized the light of Jesus in us. The priest or deacon prayed that this light would remain bright every day of our lives. In our last session we spent time on how to live so that this light of Jesus can always be shining.

Part II:

Catechesis:

Today we will reflect on the wonderful sacrament of reconciliation which shows Jesus' unconditional love for us always. He knew that it would not always be easy to be his followers. In his great love and concern for us and his deep desire that we always have his light in us, on the afternoon of that first Easter Sunday, Jesus gave the Church the sacrament of reconciliation in which Jesus forgives our sins and gives us special help to continue to faithfully live according to his ways.

Let us listen carefully to a Gospel parable that Jesus uses to tell us about God's unconditional love and desire to forgive us always. Luke 15: 11-32

Jesus: A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father:

Younger son: Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.

Jesus: So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he

found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses, he thought:

Younger son: How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here I am, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.

Jesus: So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son and said to him:

Younger Son: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.

Jesus: But his father ordered his servants:

Father: Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.

Jesus: Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out on the field and, on his way back, as he neared his house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him:

Servant: Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.

Jesus: He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply:

Older Son: Look, all these years I have served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property you slaughtered the fattened calf.

Jesus: He said to him:

Father: My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.

(A moment of silent reflection)

Leader: My dear children and parents, what part of this parable struck you in special way? (elicit some responses from children and parents)

In this parable who is the father? Yes, that father represents God our Father. If you think the father in this story is so excited and happy to welcome his son back home, even though he had done something bad, God is far more happy to welcome every person who has failed at times to let the

light of God's life in them shine brightly. No matter how small or how big the sin may be, God always has his arms opened wide to forgive us and welcome us back to him. This is what happens in the sacrament of reconciliation.

As we said at the beginning of today's session on the afternoon of the very same day that Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus gave the Church this sacrament to forgive all sins. And this power is given to every priest when he is ordained.

In the celebration of the sacrament of penance, it is really Jesus who forgives our sins, but he uses the priest to be his voice to say the words which forgive our sins.

At that moment, if we are sincerely sorry, all of our sins are absolutely forgiven. Isn't that a cause for a great big celebration? Yes, Jesus' unconditional love for us is beyond words!

Shortly you children will be going to confession for the very first time to experience this great joy. Jesus is eagerly waiting for you. And we invite you, parents and family members, to take this occasion to also approach the sacrament of God's unconditional love.

We will now go over to Church to be a part of the Entrance Procession. Immediately following the prayer after Communion over in the Church, the whole parish community will join us in a special blessing for the children.

Part III:

Ritual

Leader: (Immediately following the prayer after Communion) I invite the children who are preparing to celebrate the sacrament of penance for the first time to please kneel and bow their heads. I ask that the parents and the whole parish assembly gathered here remain standing and extend their hands over the children.

Celebrant: God of pardon and mercy, you reveal yourself in your readiness to forgive and manifest your glory by making us holy. Look upon these children with great love and tenderness. They want to live as your children though at times they may find it difficult. Help them always to walk in your light and remain your faithful followers.

The blessing immediately follows.