

Sacraments

God made flesh



Sacraments: Our Life in the Church

Relationships grow through communication. Communication is more than just words. We also communicate with gestures like smiles, handshakes, hugs, gifts, cards, flowers. In our relationship with God, we too can connect with him through words and also through gestures.

But how does God communicate with us? In the same way really; in words and gestures. There are the scriptures which are God's words to us and there are the sacraments which are gestures of God's love. The Church has named and formally recognised seven sacraments as powerful examples of God reaching out to connect with God's people. Pope John Paul II said that a sacrament made visible the invisible mystery of God. The Sacraments of the Church are visible signs that God's presence is real and is among us. They are signs that God loves us.

Each of the seven sacraments of the Church emphasises a different dimension of our relationship with our loving God.

The Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation) highlight our relationship with each person of the Trinity:

- In **Baptism** we become a child of **God the Father** as we are reborn spiritually. We use the symbol of water to signify this rebirth (recalling the waters of our natural birth). Many of the prayers of baptism express belonging, being part of the family of God, and being an heir in God's kingdom, just like a real son or daughter.
- At our first **Communion** we unite with **Jesus**. When we eat his body and drink his blood, his body and blood mingles with ours and we become 'one flesh'. That's why it's called 'communion': we become one body and one spirit with Jesus.
- In **Confirmation**, we recommit to our baptismal vows (made on our behalf by our parents and Godparents) and consciously welcome the gifts of the **Holy Spirit**. We are empowered as adult members of the Church to live the Christian life with conviction.

The Sacraments of Healing (Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick) highlight the merciful nature of God, while **the Vocational Sacraments** (Matrimony, Holy Orders) illuminate our call to intimacy with God and to share God's love with others.



Baptism

A child of God

When a person is baptised into the Church he enters into a relationship. He or she no longer lives as an individual entity but as a member of the Body of Christ. The baptismal ceremony marks the beginning of this new life of union and ongoing commitment. A baptised adult says 'Yes, I want to be one with you; I want to live a life faithful to the Gospel'. When an infant is baptised, the parents and godparents make this commitment on the child's behalf.

At the same time, we, the Christian community, pledge ourselves to be in relationship with that person.

Some children in our school for a variety of reasons are not baptised. If your child expresses interest in being baptised, or you would like to have them baptised, please feel welcome to contact your local parish to discuss this further. This, of course, applies to any member in your family who wants to become part of the sacramental life of the Church. Everyone is welcome in our Church and their presence would be a great gift to our Church family.

Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child's Baptism.

- 1. Pray for them.** Place a photograph or memento of your child in your Prayer Space and pray for them each day. Ask family and friends, and especially their godparents, to pray also.
- 2. Prepare a Baptismal candle.** Many parishes and Catholic bookshops sell candles already decorated with baptismal symbols. Some families like to decorate their own candle. (Try fabric paint, use pins to hold ribbons, lace or decorative paper in place).
- 3. Prayer that lasts.** Write a prayer (or copy one) that expresses your heartfelt longing for your child to know how deeply loved and treasured they are by God. Write it out in a beautiful card or print it and frame it for your child's room.
- 4. Baptism symbols.** Place the the symbols (or pictures or words of them) used in baptism in your prayer space. Talk about what each symbol represents:
 - Water** recalling the waters of birth - we are born again and become God's children. Water also symbolises cleansing - we are washed clean of sin.
 - Oil** is used to anoint - it symbolises healing, strengthening. It also symbolises being set aside for a holy purpose.
 - Chrim** is a mixture of olive oil and balsam. It is used to anoint kings and queens. In baptism we become a princess or prince in God's kingdom.
 - White garment** recalls the resurrection and symbolises the beginning of a new life in Christ.
 - Candle** reminds us that Christ is the light of the world and has now entered the child's life. It is lit from the Paschal candle and the flame symbolises the flame of faith, which will burn through the life of the child.
- 5. My Beloved Child.** Read the story of Jesus' baptism in the gospels. Talk to your child about how God the Father will embrace him/her as his beloved child. Tell them about their natural birth and share your delight when they were born. Explain that this is how God the Father will respond at their baptism.
- 6. God's Family.** The baptism of anyone in the family or among your friends is an opportunity to revisit the meaning of our own baptism. Talk about what it means to be a child of God, to be part of the Christian family.

Information for adults about the Catholic Faith: www.catholicenquiry.com





Reconciliation

Reunion of Love

People sometimes ask: *Isn't it enough to say sorry to God in my heart?* The Catholic approach to Reconciliation is deeply community-oriented: we are, after all, part of the Body of Christ. So for us, sin is never a private affair. When we sin we hurt not just another, but also ourselves; and when one member of the Body of Christ is hurt, the whole body suffers. Imagine a husband and wife who harshly criticise each other. They can regret their words and say sorry to God. But for the forgiveness of God to really **take effect** in their marriage, they also need to reconcile with one another. Similarly, in Reconciliation we offer a public sign to our faith community that we are sorry for the ways we have undermined the unity of the Church and that we desire to renew our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Saying 'sorry' is different to asking for 'forgiveness'.

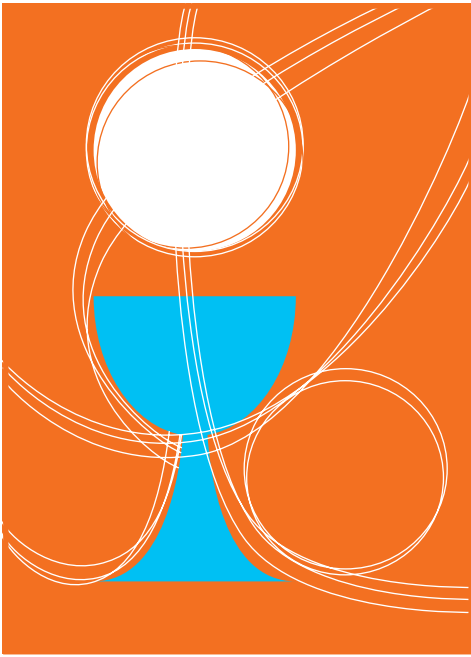
When we say sorry to someone, it is an 'I-centred statement' expressing sympathy but not necessarily inferring that we take any responsibility. As such it requires nothing from the person to whom we say it. It is always good to say 'sorry' but it is nowhere near as hard to do, or as effective, as asking for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness is an act of vulnerability; not only does it put us in a position of accepting responsibility for hurting the other, but it is also a request to be invited back into unity with the person we have hurt. Full reconciliation can only occur in a relationship when we say sorry AND ask for forgiveness. This is the basis of the sacrament of reconciliation, but applies equally to any intimate relationship such as with a spouse, a child, a sibling or a school/parish community member.

For Couples: next time you quarrel or hurt each other, make a point of asking for forgiveness from your spouse.

Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child's First Reconciliation

- 1. Talk about it.** In the lead up to their First Reconciliation use your family meal time to talk about God's mercy and love. Talk about people you know who are very forgiving and compassionate. Share a time when you needed forgiveness. Talk about extraordinary examples of forgiveness, like Nelson Mandela forgiving his prison guards or Pope John Paul II forgiving his would-be assassin.
- 2. Adorn your prayer space.** Place a symbol or picture at your family prayer space, such as a picture of a scene from the prodigal son. Open your bible to this parable (Lk 15:11-32).
- 3. Remember when....** Share Reconciliation memories: what was it like for Grandpa? What does Mum or Dad remember about their first Reconciliation? Give your child a sense of our Catholic story including the positive changes in the way we celebrate Reconciliation today.
- 4. Prepare yourself.** Forgive someone against whom you hold resentment. Reflect on how your resentment is leading you hurt others. Make a decision to let go and forgive.
- 5. Seize teachable moments.** Take up teachable moments to impart to your child a lesson about forgiveness and reconciliation. e.g. Talk about ways to resolve a playground dispute, hold dinner table discussion about Aboriginal reconciliation.
- 6. Set an example.** Go to reconciliation yourself, at your child's reconciliation if possible, or immediately before or after. If you are a non-Catholic parent, and it is offered in your parish, go forward for a blessing from the priest.
- 7. Party well.** Remember how the story of the prodigal son ends? Conclude the big day with a special treat and/or celebration.

One of the advantages of receiving Reconciliation at an early age is that children develop the habit of asking for and receiving forgiveness. This will become increasingly important as they grow up and during their adolescence begin to explore the adult world and perhaps make some serious mistakes - we all need to know that there is no sin too big for God's mercy and forgiveness.



Communion

Sacred Meal

For Catholics, the sacrament of the Eucharist is a sacred meal where we break bread and share the one cup. It is the paramount sign of our unity with and in Christ. It has been described as the 'source and summit' of the Church's life. When we receive the Eucharist we believe that we receive Jesus in an extraordinarily intimate way: we take him into our very beings in the form of food (body) and drink (blood). It's a profoundly intimate gesture, similar to the way husband and wife become 'one flesh' when they make love. In fact Pope John Paul II, and many of the mystics and saints before him, wrote extensively about how Jesus' love is like marital love. Jesus described himself in the scriptures as 'the bridegroom'. Eucharist is all about the intimate, passionate love of Jesus – he yearns to be one in body and soul with us, to be in 'communion'. If you'd like to learn more about Jesus' spousal love, see the website, under 'the Theology of the Body' (www.cathfamily.org).

Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child's First Communion

- 1. Make meal-times special.** Just as the Eucharist is at the heart of the life of the Church, family meals are the heart of your home, the 'Domestic Church'. In the lead up to First Communion Day, use your family meals as an opportunity to share memories of your own first Communion or ask your child about what they are learning in their preparation classes.
- 2. Pray for your child** during their preparation time, especially at Grace before meals. Place their photo in your family prayer space or on the fridge to remind you. Invite their godparents to pray also.
- 3. Gifts that give life.** Expensive toys or treats are not really in the spirit of this event. Rather give gifts that encourage your child's faith like Rosary beads, a Sunday missal, story book of the saints, a bible, a crucifix etc.
- 4. Prayer Space.** Put symbols of the Eucharist in your family prayer space, like wheat and grapes or a picture of the last supper.
- 5. Get to Mass.** It sounds obvious, but if you want your child to understand the importance of this sacrament, you have to make Sunday Mass a priority in your own life. Children learn more from our actions than from our words. Your example will be far more influential in your children's faith development than what he/she learns at school!
- 6. Body and Blood.** Many parishes don't offer first communion under both species. If this is the case, as soon as possible after their first communion, take your child to a mass where they can experience receiving both the body and the blood of Jesus.
- 7. Build communion at home.** Like marriage, the Eucharist is a sacrament of unity. Working towards deeper intimacy and stronger unity in our adult relationships as your child prepares for the sacrament is a powerful gift of love.
Couples: rekindle the romance of your love as a prayer intention for your child.
Widowed parents: Envelope your child in the memories of your love, share your faith in the resurrection.
Divorced parents: work at forgiving your ex-husband/wife, speak positively about him/her and refrain from criticising or undermining him/her.



Confirmation

Empowered by the Spirit

As the name implies, the Sacrament of Confirmation confirms or strengthens the new life received at Baptism. Symbolically, the bishop or priest makes the sign of the cross on the forehead using an oil called *chrism*. As he does so he says to them [by their Confirmation name]: “*be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.*”

Although the Holy Spirit is received at Baptism, Confirmation focuses on this gift by recalling the promise of Jesus to send the Spirit to be with his disciples. In the case of youth, Confirmation is often regarded as a sign of maturity in Christ. Having been baptised as a baby and raised in the Christian life, the youth is now called upon to make a more mature commitment to the Gospel. In particular, Confirmation underlines our commissioning to be bold, apostle-like witnesses to the gospel.

Chrism (olive oil mixed with balsam) is an ancient biblical custom. It was used to anoint people and objects set aside for service to God and a life of holiness. The word ‘chrism’ is directly related to the Greek word ‘Christos’ which means ‘the Anointed One’. In Baptism and Confirmation we too become ‘anointed ones’, set aside for a holy purpose.

Ways to prepare for and celebrate your child’s Confirmation

- 1. Prayer Space.** Arrange seven candles or tea-lights, each representing a gift of the Holy Spirit. For the week before the Confirmation, light one each day and talk about the gift of the Holy Spirit that it represents. On the night of the ceremony, light all seven candles and rejoice in the gifts of the Spirit.
- 2. Gifts among us.** Take one gift of the Holy Spirit and ask each other: who do we know who displays this gift? Identify the many gifts among the wider community.
- 3. Stories to inspire.** Read a bible story about someone who was called and sent by the Spirit. e.g. the prophet Jeremiah, Mary (mother of Jesus), Jonah. Read about the saints and heroes of our Christian ancestry or hire a movie that depicts the life of an inspiring Christian.
- 4. Saints alive.** Ask your child to tell the story of the saint they have chosen for their Confirmation name. Obtain a statue, picture or medal associated with your child’s saint and place in the family prayer space.
- 5. Decorate with the Gifts.** The Spirit came to the apostles at Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire over their heads. For your Confirmation celebration (e.g. dinner at home after the event), get seven helium balloons and write/decorate each with one of the seven gifts. Let them rise to the roof inside the room where you are holding the celebration.
- 6. Fire of the Holy Spirit!** Build a bonfire in the backyard and sing some Holy Spirit songs. Invite everyone present to lay hands on your child, asking the Holy Spirit to come upon him/her. (Alternative to the bonfire: light some methylated spirits in a fire proof bowl (about 1 tablespoon) or use a generous collection of candles).
- 7. Mission Moments.** Encourage your child to boldly tackle a mini-mission for the church as a their gift in response to their Confirmation. e.g. raise money for a charity, offer their services to the parish, reach out to a child on the fringes of the class, make a prayer commitment. The Holy Spirit works powerfully through the young, so don’t underestimate your child!
- 8. Grown Up Catholics.** Talk to your child about how they are now fully fledged members of the Church. Affirm them for the leadership that they offer. Take their complaints about church or the parish seriously, but encourage them to not just complain, but to help fix it.