

Celebrate
and
Remember

Reconciliation

Catechist Guide



Reconciliation

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Reconciliation

Catechist Guide

Celebrate and Remember

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In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

Catechist Background: Freedom and Forgiveness

For some reason, it is always hard to be the first one. In a social situation (“Oh, we’re the first ones here! I hope we’re not too early?”) or in a class (“James, why don’t you tell us how you solved this equation?”), there is something burdensome and even intimidating about being first.

A man named Adam and a woman named Eve were the first man and first woman God created. They were not created as robots, for God to direct at every turn; they were given the great gift of free will. Their poor use of this great gift proved to be their downfall and ours.

Many generations have passed since Adam and Eve made the choice that so affected their lives and ours. But our gifts and temptations are similar to theirs. We too have the gift of free will, and we too can be tempted to misuse this gift. Because of Original Sin, human nature is weakened. The loss of original holiness and justice makes things that should be natural to us harder and more challenging. Relationships with others that should come naturally are marked by tension and misunderstanding. Moral decisions that should be easy and straightforward become more difficult and confused; we are more inclined to sin when we exercise our freedom—an inclination called concupiscence. All of this leads to more pain and suffering in our lives.

But there is an even more serious loss because of Original Sin. Our relationship with God is now clouded and hidden. We no longer naturally walk in the Garden with God as with a close friend. Even though God desires to be just as close to us as he was to Adam and Eve, we struggle to find him. And the most serious loss of all is that we now experience death.

But, thank God—yes, thank God—this downfall was not forever. God intervened in human history, over and over again, until finally he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the human race:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
for he has visited and brought redemption to his people.

(Luke 1:68)

This great gift of free will is still ours today. In preparing young children for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, it is important to help them understand that they have choices. Because of Baptism, they have been given grace to choose rightly. They do not “have to” do or say something mean. Nobody “makes them” choose wrong over right. Children can be helped to understand and accept both their connection to others and their own independence.

Catechism references: 396–421 (Original Sin and Redemption), 1730–1748 (Human Freedom)







Chapter

1



Prayer

Loving God, thank you for creating me and for giving me the great gift of free will. Help me to use this gift to the best of my ability, with the help of your grace. May I share an understanding of this gift with the children who are preparing for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Amen.

	 Objectives	 Teaching Steps	 Activities	 Materials
Opening Prayer	To pray the Sign of the Cross and to bless oneself with holy water as a sign of belonging to Christ and to the Catholic Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the photo. • Explain why Catholics make the Sign of the Cross.  Pray the Sign of the Cross with large gestures. • Follow the ritual directions for blessing oneself with holy water. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer table • White cloth • Bible • White candle • Glass bowl half filled with holy water • Music selections • Cross or crucifix
We Listen	To learn the Scripture story about the first sin and the need for forgiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the illustration.  Proclaim the Scripture story about the sin of the first man and woman based on Genesis 2:7–9, 15–17; 3:1–24. • Discuss the effects of Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing a picture that shows a way of making peace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencils and crayons or markers
We Learn	To realize that God loves us very much and is always ready to forgive us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read aloud “Jesus Gives Us the Sacraments.” • Discuss sin and ways the Sacraments help us. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing a picture of one’s family being peaceful <p>Additional Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorizing a psalm about God’s goodness based on Psalm 103:2–3,5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencils and crayons or markers
We Learn	To understand that Jesus gives us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to bring us back to God when we sin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and discuss the text about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. • Discuss why we receive this Sacrament. • Discuss the photos on pages 4 and 5. • Discuss the stained-glass art. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing and decorating a word for a way we might feel after receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencils and crayons or markers
We Live	To reflect on and share times when we need to forgive and be forgiven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the text about people’s feelings being hurt. • Discuss the need for reconciliation. • Discuss the photos. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing before and after reconciliation pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencils and crayons or markers
We Pray	To pray a leader/response prayer praising the Trinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the photo.  Follow the directions for praying “We Praise the Trinity.” 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music selection

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit



The Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.



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What Is Reconciliation?



A Prayer Ritual

Making the Sign of the Cross with Holy Water Explain that holy water is water that has been blessed at Easter. It reminds us of our Baptism and that we belong to God.

Demonstrate by dipping your fingers in the holy water and making the Sign of the Cross. Reverently touch the cross saying that this is a way of telling Jesus you love him.

Play the instrumental music and call each child by name to the prayer table. Ask the children to bless themselves with holy water and touch the cross.

Lead the children in singing the song you have chosen.

End the prayer session and make the transition to the lesson by saying, "May God the Father bless our time together as we learn and grow as disciples of his Son, Jesus Christ." Invite the children to join together in saying "Amen."



Opening Prayer

Objective

To participate in a ritual of blessing oneself with holy water as a sign of belonging to Jesus Christ and to the Catholic Church.

Prepare

Become familiar with the directions for the ritual.

Cover the prayer table with a white cloth.

Add a clear bowl of holy water and a cross or crucifix to the prayer table (with Bible and candle).

Select soft instrumental music and a song about Baptism from the *Reconciliation* music list on page 7, or another appropriate song.

Gather

Play the song you have chosen and invite the children to gather with their books around the prayer table.

Introduction

Turn off the music.

Referring to the photo on the left, tell the children that at their Baptism, the priest or deacon said these words: "The Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of the cross. I now trace the cross on your forehead, and invite your parents (and godparents) to do the same" (*Rite of Baptism*, 79).

Demonstrate how to make the Sign of the Cross.

Pray

Ask the children to watch as you light the candle. (Be sure to comply with local fire laws.) Then say, "Let us begin our prayer in the name of the Father . . ." and pray the Sign of the Cross together.



God Forgives Us

Draw the children's attention to the illustration on pages 2 and 3.

Say, "This picture shows Adam and Eve, the first people God created. God loved them very much."

Ask, "What do you like about the place where Adam and Eve lived?" (*Responses may vary. Guide the children in recognizing that it is a beautiful garden.*)

Invite the children to look at the picture as you read aloud the Scripture about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Follow up with a discussion.

Say, "Adam and Eve were happy living in the Garden of Eden."

Ask, "What did they do that caused them to be unhappy?" (*They disobeyed God and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.*)

Emphasize that they were unhappy because they had turned away from God's love.

Say, "Adam and Eve forgot how much God loved and cared for them. They hurt their friendship with God by disobeying his rule."

If time permits, you may wish to read aloud to the children this Scripture account from the Bible as they listen or follow along in their own Bibles.



God Forgives Us

The Bible tells a story about the first sin. This story helps to explain why people need God's forgiveness. In the Bible we read:

When God created the first man and first woman, he also created a wonderful garden for them.

Then God said to the man and the woman, "You may eat the fruit on all the trees that grow here. But do not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

The man and woman obeyed God. But then one day, there was a serpent in the garden. This serpent was sly and wicked. The serpent asked the man and woman why they did not eat from the tree of knowledge.

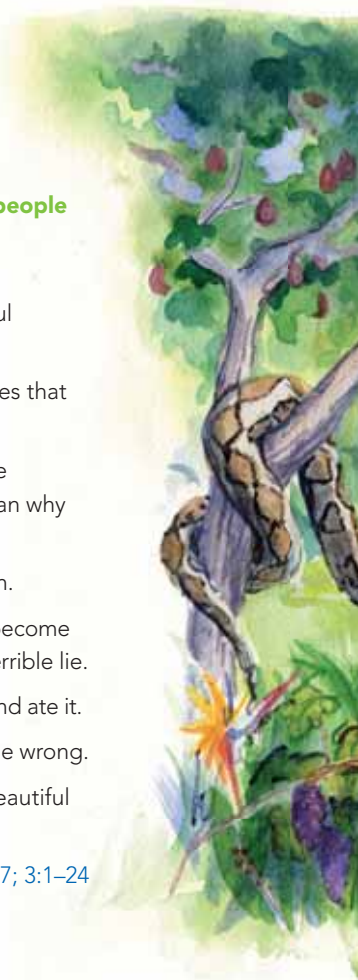
"We can eat all the fruits of all the trees except that one," answered the woman.

"Well," said the serpent, "God only said that because he does not want you to become as powerful and wise as he, knowing what is good and what is evil." This was a terrible lie.

The man and the woman believed the serpent's lie. So they took a piece of fruit and ate it. Suddenly, they were no longer happy. They felt shame. They knew they had done wrong.

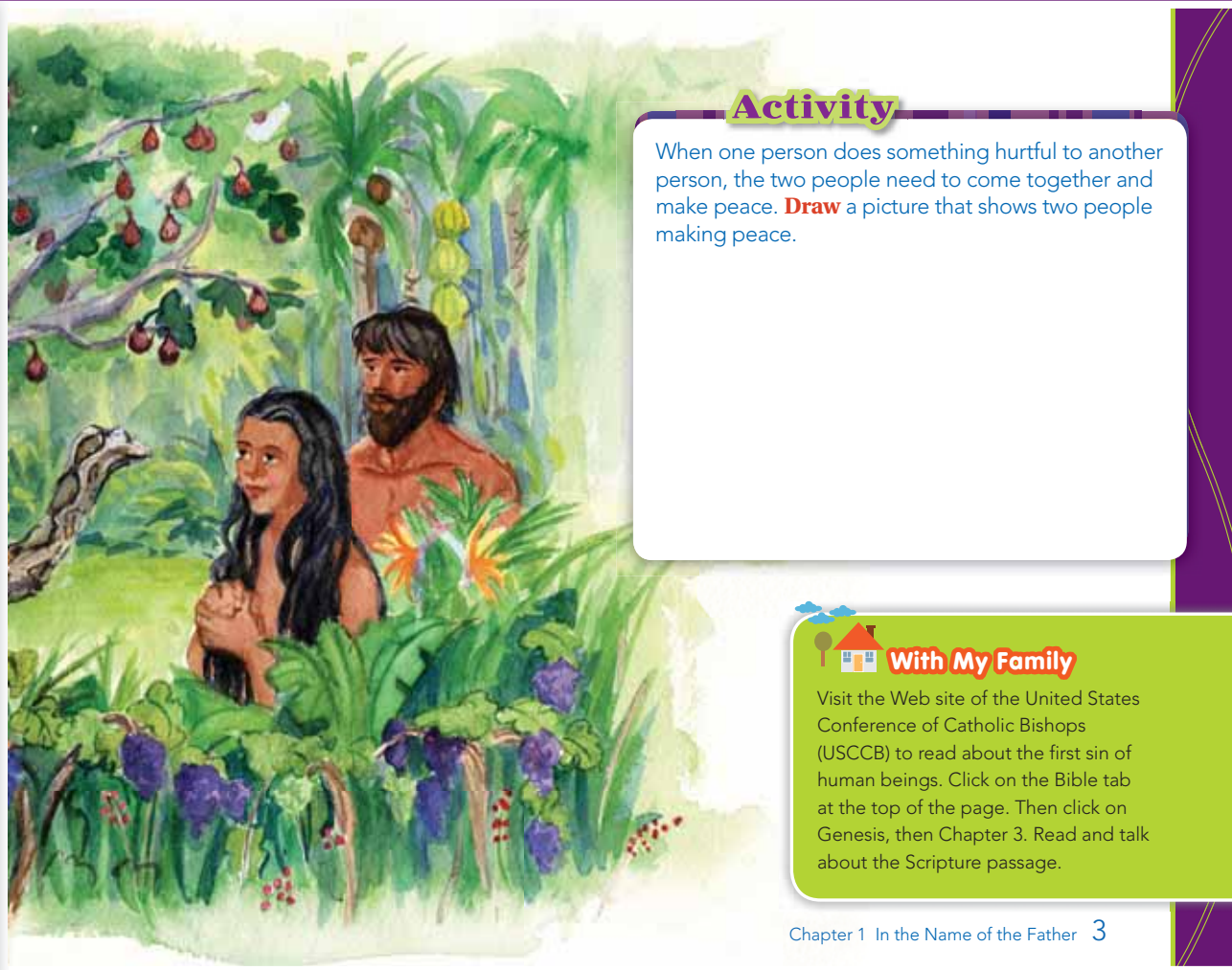
God still loved the people he had made, but they could no longer live in the beautiful garden. God had to send them away.

Based on Genesis 2:7-9,15-17; 3:1-24



Scripture Background

Perfect Communion with God In the account of Adam and Eve, God is portrayed very personally, talking directly with Adam and Eve as a parent to a beloved child. The account reveals God's intention in creating human beings—that we should live in perfect, loving communion with him and with one another. But Adam and Eve's disobedience brings sin into the world. This damaged our communion with God, one another, and creation. The damage is symbolized by the consequences God describes later in the account, most especially Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:23).



Activity

When one person does something hurtful to another person, the two people need to come together and make peace. **Draw** a picture that shows two people making peace.

With My Family

Visit the Web site of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to read about the first sin of human beings. Click on the Bible tab at the top of the page. Then click on Genesis, then Chapter 3. Read and talk about the Scripture passage.

Chapter 1 In the Name of the Father 3

Activity

- Read aloud the activity directions.
- Give examples of actions that would lead us away from God, such as taking something that doesn't belong to us or calling someone names. Encourage the children to think of other ways people might hurt their relationship with God and with others. Then ask them to describe ways of making peace. *(being sorry, asking for forgiveness, doing something good that makes up for what we did wrong, sharing a symbol of peace by a handshake, giving a high-five, sharing a game, etc.)*
- Direct the children to draw a picture to complete the activity.

With My Family

Remind the children to share the With My Family message at home.



Teaching Tip

A Name Game For this first lesson, you might like to make name tags for the children. Then play a name game (with tags on). Instruct the children to line up in a row across the front of the room. Put yourself at the end of the row. Direct the first child to say his or her name. Then ask the second child to say the first child's name plus his or her own name. The third child says his or her name, plus the first two names. At the end of the row, you say your name, and then the names of all the children, beginning with the first. You might extend the game by asking volunteers to say the names of all the children. It is fine if they are reading the names from the tags!



Jesus Gives Us the Sacraments

Read aloud the first paragraph on page 4. Explain the meaning of *sin* as presented in that paragraph. Stress that sin is deliberately doing, saying, or wanting something that we know is against God's will. Sin harms our friendship with God and the special bond we share with one another as children of God.

Read aloud the second paragraph.

Ask, "What did Adam and Eve pass on that causes us to sometimes disobey God?" (*Original Sin*)

Have the children recall what the first sin was.



Jesus Gives Us the Sacraments

A sin is something we say, do, or think that does not follow God's will. Sometimes we sin by not doing something we should. When we sin, we disobey God. We turn away from him and fail to act with love for him and for other people as Jesus did. We offend God and hurt our relationship with him and with other people.

The first sin of humankind is called **Original Sin**. This sin has been passed on to all of us. We are born with it. Original Sin weakens us and makes it harder for us to do what is right.



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Liturgy Background

Baptism and the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is directly related to the Sacrament of Baptism. In the Sacrament of Baptism, all sin is washed away, including Original Sin. Yet resisting temptation and ingrained patterns of sinful behavior is a lifelong call. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we have the opportunity to confess and to be absolved of all sins committed since Baptism. Every year at Easter, we renew our baptismal promises and resolve, with God's help, to be faithful to them.

We don't know why God allows sin in the world, but we are certain that he always loves us. He loved us so much that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus died on the cross and rose again to free us from sin. When we are sorry for our sins, Jesus brings us back to God our Father. God forgives our sins. When God forgives us, we are reconciled with God and others. We are brought back together with God. One day, when we meet God face-to-face in Heaven, we'll understand his loving plan for the world and why allowing sin was part of it.

Jesus is the greatest sign of God's love. But Jesus gave seven more great and holy signs to God's people, the Church.

These signs are called **Sacraments**. The Sacraments join us to Jesus so that we can follow him more closely. They give us **grace**, the free gift of God's own life in us. Grace makes us his children and helps us to stay away from sin and to do good works.



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Activity

When we are reconciled with God and others, we are peaceful and happy. **Draw** yourself and your family being peaceful and happy together.



Chapter 1 In the Name of the Father 5

Read aloud the first paragraph on page 5.

Say, "God sent his Son Jesus to show us how to avoid sin and follow God's will. Out of love for us, Jesus lived among us, died, and then rose from the dead to save us from sin."

Ask, "What happens when God forgives us?" (*We are reunited with God and others.*)

Read aloud the remaining text.

Ask, "What did Jesus give to the Church to help our relationship with God grow stronger?" (*the Sacraments*)

Say, "When we are close to God, we are better able to avoid sin. God's grace helps us to love and forgive others as Jesus taught us."

Explain that the Sacraments are *effective* signs. They do what they say they will do. They give us grace, or God's life. Jesus gave them to the Church, and the grace we receive in the Sacraments comes from Jesus himself by the power of the Holy Spirit.



Additional Activity

A Psalm of God's Goodness Have the children memorize a psalm that tells of God's goodness.

Write the following psalm verses on the board. Have the group repeat them line by line after you.

Bless the Lord, my soul;
do not forget all the gifts of God,
who forgives all your sins
and fills your days with good things.

(Based on Psalm 103:2–3,5)

Divide the group into pairs, and ask the pairs to help each other recite the psalm. Then recite the psalm together as a group.

Activity

- Direct the children's attention to the activity on this page.
- Brainstorm times when families might be peaceful and happy together: at a family reunion, at a birthday party, on a family vacation, or even helping out together at home.
- Then ask the children to draw their family in their own real-life situation.



The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Read aloud the first paragraph on page 6.

Draw the children's attention to the photos of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation on pages 4 and 5. Briefly explain each Sacrament. Have the children name the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, and list them on the board.

Then read aloud the second paragraph.

Invite a volunteer to circle the Sacrament listed on the board in which we become members of the Church.

Say, "The Sacrament of Baptism is the first Sacrament we receive. In Baptism all our sins are forgiven, including Original Sin."

Read aloud the remaining text on page 6.

Emphasize that Baptism joins us to Christ and to one another. When we sin, we hurt the oneness we share with Christ and with all the members of the Church.

Ask, "Why do we receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation?" (to receive God's forgiveness for sins we commit after Baptism, to bring us back to God and the Church)

Discuss the stained-glass art. Explain that the raised hand is the hand of the priest; it is the sign of forgiveness. The crossed keys are a sign of God's power and authority acting through the priest in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.



The Sacrament of Reconciliation



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We celebrate the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, all through our lives. The three Sacraments that begin our life in the Church are the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. We call these the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, we were baptized with holy water. Baptism united us to Jesus and gave us the Holy Spirit. We became members of God's people, the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ. All the members are united to Christ and to one another. Think of your own body and all of its parts. Think about your head, your eyes, your mouth, your hands, your feet, and your heart. The parts do many different things, but they are all important. And if they weren't part of a whole body, they would have no life. This helps us understand what it means to be a member of the Church, a member of Christ's body. Every member is united with Christ and all the other members. Each is different, but each is important. Every person has gifts that can help others follow Jesus.

In Baptism, all sins, including Original Sin, are washed away. Sins that we commit after Baptism are forgiven through the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**. If we choose to sin, we not only hurt our relationship with God. We also hurt our relationship with all of God's people, the Church. Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation to bring us back to God when we sin. When we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, grace, God's own life in us, brings us back together with God and with one another.



FYI

The Jesus Prayer The Jesus Prayer is a short prayer that originated in the Eastern Churches. The usual words are, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner." These words are based on Philippians 2:6–11, Mark 10:46–52, and Luke 18:13. Sometimes the prayer is counted on the knots of a prayer rope, a circle of knots similar to a rosary. This prayer reminds us that we are not perfect, that we are all sinners, and that we all depend on the mercy of God. This prayer is not meant to make us feel worse about ourselves but rather to ground us in the truth of humility (whose root word is *humus*, meaning "earth"). When we see ourselves as sinners, we are less apt to judge and condemn the sins of our neighbors!

Celebrating the Sacrament

The Sacrament of Reconciliation begins with the priest greeting us and welcoming us. Then we pray together, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” as we make the Sign of the Cross. The Sign of the Cross reminds us of our Baptism. It reminds us of God’s life in us. It reminds us that Jesus died and rose for us. It reminds us that we belong to God.

Making the Sign of the Cross also reminds us about who God is. He is one God in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This mystery is called the Trinity. It is at the center of our faith.

Activity

Write one word that describes a feeling that the Sacrament of Reconciliation can give you. **Decorate** the space around your word.



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Living Our Faith

The Sacraments give us God’s own life. If we come to them with faith in Jesus, God’s grace will work in our lives.



With My Family

As a family, look at pictures or other mementos of your Baptism. Together say a prayer thanking God for his new life in you.

Chapter 1 In the Name of the Father 7

Music Connections

The following are some suggestions for liturgical music suitable for young children that you may wish to use during the lesson:

“Trinity Song,” The Rennas (WLP)

“Be Merciful, O Lord, for We Have Sinned,” Marty Haugen (GIA)

“We Are Yours, O Lord,” Janet Vogt (OCP)

Go to www.smp.org for downloadable music selections.

Celebrating the Sacrament

Read aloud the two paragraphs under “Celebrating the Sacrament.” Invite the children to pray together the Sign of the Cross, the prayer that begins the Sacrament of Reconciliation and all the Sacraments of the Church. You may wish to draw three interlocking circles on the board with the names of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Activity

- Read aloud the activity directions.
- Arrange the children in pairs to work together to share what they know about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.
- Brainstorm words the children might choose: *happy, peaceful, joyful, loving*.
- When the children are finished, share each one’s words and artwork with the entire group. As a group, review the importance of the Sacrament.

Living Our Faith

Read aloud the paragraph. Guide the children in understanding how important it is to respond to God’s gift of grace in the Sacraments. Stress that Jesus asks us to come to the Sacraments with an attitude of faith, believing in him and being ready to accept his gift of grace.



With My Family

Remind the children to share the With My Family message at home.



Heart to Heart

Explain to the children that a “heart-to-heart” talk is a serious and truthful conversation. Explain that this page presents a heart-to-heart talk about hurt feelings and the need for reconciliation. Read the section aloud. Then discuss the section briefly.

Ask, “Has something like this ever happened to you? Have you had hurt feelings about something?” *(Ask volunteers to share.)*

Ask, “Have you ever hurt someone’s feelings? What happened when you did?” *(Ask volunteers to share.)*

Ask, “Were you able to receive or give forgiveness when you or someone else had hurt feelings? How did you do it?” *(Choose volunteers to share.)*

Stress the importance of talking with a parent or trusted adult when feelings are hurt. Explain that parents or other adults can help make the situation right again.

Discuss the two photos on this page.

Ask, “What do you think is happening in the photo with the two children who are talking together?” *(They are sad. They look like they are talking about something serious or something that made them unhappy.)*

Ask, “What do you think is happening in the other photo, with the two children looking happy?” *(They are happy because they have talked things over. They have said, “I’m sorry” and are together again.)*



Heart to Heart

Forgiveness

Sometimes people hurt our feelings. Did any of your classmates ever play a game and not let you play? Think about the way you felt. It is especially hard when someone we love and care about hurts our feelings. Yet, sometimes we are the ones who hurt someone else’s feelings. And then, when we think about what we did, we feel terrible.

When this happens, we need reconciliation. We need to forgive and we need to be forgiven. For this to happen, someone needs to say, “I’m sorry,” and someone else needs to say, “I forgive you.”



Two images on this spread © Rhienna Cutler/istockphoto.com

8



Cultural Connection

Symbols of the Cross The cross is an ancient symbol of the Paschal Mystery (the life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus) and especially a reminder of his Passion and death. Through the centuries, this symbol has been both embellished and simplified. For example, Saint Francis of Assisi preferred the simple “tau” cross, in the shape of a Greek T. Many Franciscans today wear this cross. Crosses have been both embedded with jewels and made of straw. In Ireland, Saint Brigid’s cross, a cross made of straw with a square center, is a sign of protection and can be found above the doorway in many homes. The British flag combines three crosses to symbolize the three original nations forming Great Britain: the red Saint George’s cross, for the patron of England; the white Saint Andrew’s cross, in the form of an X, for the patron of Scotland; and the white Saint Patrick’s cross, for the patron of Ireland.

Activity

In the "Before Reconciliation" space on top, **draw** two people who are angry with each other or hurting each other. In the "After Reconciliation" space on the bottom, **draw** the same two people after they forgive each other and are reconciled.

Before Reconciliation

R E C O N C I L I A T I O N

After Reconciliation

Saint Spotlight

Saint Teresa of Ávila
(1515–1562)

Saint Teresa of Ávila is a saint from Spain. She wrote many books about prayer. She also wrote about sin. Saint Teresa wrote that when she sinned, she would ask God to forgive her. She would then make great efforts to become better.



With My Family

Together review the names of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation and the Sacrament of Reconciliation shown on pages 6 and 7. Share a personal experience related to each one.

Chapter 1 In the Name of the Father 9

Activity

- Read aloud the directions for the activity on page 9.
- To help the children identify situations to draw, brainstorm ideas about negative situations between people that need reconciliation.
- Have the children complete the activity.

Saint Spotlight

Read aloud the paragraph about Saint Teresa of Ávila. Talk about some ways Saint Teresa of Ávila lived a holy life: She prayed and she studied about God and prayer. She also wrote about sin, and how we can change our ways from selfishness to love of God and others.



With My Family

Remind the children to share the With My Family message.



More Saints and Holy People

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430) As a young man, Saint Augustine lived only for worldly pleasures. Through the prayers of his mother and the guidance of Ambrose, bishop of Milan and later a saint, Augustine turned to God and chose to be baptized. In a book called *Confessions*, Saint Augustine wrote about the ways God helped him in his struggle with sin. He discovered the goodness of God in his own life. As priest and bishop, sharing the knowledge and love of God with others became his life's work. Saint Augustine, a Doctor of the Church, was a wise teacher of the early Church and people today still study and learn from his writings. His feast day is August 28.

We Praise the Trinity

- Invite volunteers to describe the photo. (*It could be a boy and girl holding arms up in praise for being created by God.*)
- Explain that the closing prayer is a prayer of praise to the Blessed Trinity.
- Tell the children that you will be the Leader and that they should read the parts for "All." If you wish, have the children practice their parts.
- Lead the children in praying the prayer.
- End by singing together the song you have chosen.

We Pray Together



We Praise the Trinity

Leader: God, our Father, you created us out of love. You never stop loving us even when we sin.

All: Glory be to God the Father.

Leader: You sent your Son, Jesus, to teach us how to live and to show us how to forgive.

All: Glory be to God the Son.

Leader: You send your Holy Spirit to be our helper and guide and to give us the grace we need to turn away from sin.

All: Glory be to God the Holy Spirit.

Leader: For these wonderful gifts, we pray,

All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.



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Reviewing the Lesson

Help the children to recall the key points they learned in this lesson.

Ask, "What important things about our faith did we learn in this lesson?"

After allowing several volunteers to respond, and after affirming their responses, review the following points with the children. You might like to reformulate the points as questions.

- The Sacraments give us grace, God's life in us.
- Sin hurts our relationship with God and the Church.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation brings us back to God and the Church.

Trust in God's Mercy

Catechist Background: Our Wonderful Father

We've all at one time or another wished there was a way we could get a "do-over." If we just had that moment back, we thought, we would handle things differently. In the story of the forgiving father (or the prodigal, or "wasteful," son), a young man is given a "do-over."

This young man does not seem to be a young man originally bent on a life of immorality. He just wanted to be independent. He wanted to grow up, to leave the family, to live his own life. And, of course, to do that, he needed money or skills. He seems to have lacked both.

Asking for his inheritance before his father had even died seems to be a particularly selfish and disrespectful thing to do. The fact that the father went along with this plan only illustrates his generous love.

We are meant to identify with the son. We are meant to become aware that we have been given tremendous gifts, and we often give in to our tendency to waste them. We give in to our desire for instant gratification. An opportunity to sin presents itself, and we sometimes take it. We are not quite the grown-ups we pretend to be.

But we have a wonderful Father! We have a Father who is rich in mercy and forgiveness, who runs to meet us on the road, welcomes us back, dresses us in fine clothes (like a baptismal garment, for example) and throws a celebration just for us!

In this chapter, the children are introduced to the concept of God's mercy. They may have glimpsed his mercy in the mercy of their parents or teachers. The parable teaches exactly how wide and deep God's mercy can be. Allow the children to experience this parable of mercy in an immediate way by asking them to act it out. If time permits, do it more than once. And the first time, why not volunteer yourself to be the prodigal son?

Catechism references: 543–550 (Proclamation of the Kingdom of God), 1846–1848 (Mercy and Sin)

Chapter

2



Prayer

Lord, your love for me knows no limits. When I turn away from your love, and find myself far from you, give me the strength and courage to turn back toward you, admit my mistakes, and trust in your abundant mercy. Amen.

	Objectives	Teaching Steps	Activities	Materials
Opening Prayer	To pray for God's mercy and to participate in a change-of-heart ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce the prayer based on Psalm 51.  Together pray for God's mercy. Follow the ritual directions for asking God to change our hearts. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prayer table Purple cloth Bible White candle Small artificial tree or branches in a pot of soil Small red paper hearts tied with ribbon or string Music selection
We Listen	To learn the Scripture story about the forgiving father to help us understand how much God loves us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the illustration.  Proclaim the Scripture story, "The Forgiving Father," based on Luke 15:11–24. Discuss the parable as it relates to God's loving forgiveness and our sorrow for sin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completing a word puzzle about the word <i>FORGIVE</i> <p>Additional Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting out the Parable of the Forgiving Father 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils
We Learn	<p>To learn that God sent his Son to save us from sin</p> <p>To understand what it means to have contrition for our sins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the photo. Read aloud "God Sent Jesus to Forgive Sins." Discuss God's mercy and the meaning of <i>contrition</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing a picture of oneself looking sorry for a wrongful act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils and crayons or markers
We Learn	<p>To learn that God forgives sin and promises new life in Jesus</p> <p>To understand that our sins can be forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and discuss the text about celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coloring letters of a hidden message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crayons or markers
We Live	To appreciate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a gift of God's life that makes us new again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the photo. Read and discuss the text about God's gifts in the Sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping the lost son find his way through a maze 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils
We Pray	To pray for a forgiving heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the photo.  Follow the directions for praying "We Pray for Forgiveness." 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Music selection

Trust in God's Mercy



We Pray for God's Mercy

Leader: Let us pray for God's mercy.

Side 1: Have mercy on us, O God.

Side 2: For you are great and good.

Side 1: Wash away our sins.

Side 2: Heal our hearts.

Side 1: Open our lips.

Side 2: And we will praise you.

Side 1: Create clean hearts for us, O God.

Side 2: Give us joyful and willing spirits.

Side 1: We will tell others about you

Side 2: That they may know your goodness.

All: Lord, we praise and thank you with all our hearts!

Based on Psalm 51

Who Loves and Forgives Us?



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Opening Prayer

Objective

To participate in a reconciliation ritual based on Psalm 51.

Prepare

Become familiar with the directions for the ritual.

Cover the prayer table with a purple cloth. Add a plate with small red paper hearts (one per child) to the prayer table. Place on the table a small artificial tree or a few branches arranged in a pot of soil to look like a tree, with a few red hearts hanging on it.

For the opening prayer, select soft instrumental music. For the closing prayer, select a song about sorrow for sin or forgiveness from the *Reconciliation* music list on page 17, or another appropriate song, such as one about a change of heart.

Gather

Play the song you have chosen and invite the children to gather with their books around the prayer table.

Turn off the music.

Introduction

Tell the children that today's prayer is based on a Psalm in the Old Testament. In this Psalm, King David expresses sorrow for a serious sin he committed.

Ask the children to think of a selfish act or unkind words that hurt someone and for which they are sorry. Tell them that in this prayer they can ask God to forgive them.

Divide the group into side 1 and side 2.

Pray

Ask the children to watch as you light the candle.

Say, "Let us begin our prayer in the name of the Father . . ." and pray the Sign of the Cross with the children.

Lead the children in the prayer.



A Prayer Ritual

Asking God to Change our Hearts Demonstrate how to take a heart from the plate and carefully hang it on the tree while saying, "Create a clean heart for me, O God."

Continue the instrumental music.

Invite each child to take and hang a heart, say the verse, and then to return to his or her place around the prayer table.

Sing together the song you have chosen.

End the prayer session and make a transition to the lesson by saying, "May God the Father bless our time together as we learn and grow as disciples of his Son, Jesus Christ."



The Forgiving Father

Explain that Jesus often told special stories called parables to help us grow closer to God. Sometimes the characters in the parables stand for someone else. In the Scripture story, the forgiving Father is God.

Invite the children to follow the text as you read aloud “The Forgiving Father” on page 12.

Say, “The father loved his children and took care of them. The younger son did not appreciate all that his father had given him. He thought only of himself.”

Ask, “What did the younger son do that was selfish?” (*He spent all the money his father had given him on himself.*)

“What did the son do when he realized he had sinned?” (*He went home to tell his father he was sorry.*)

Direct the children’s attention to the illustration on pages 12 and 13.

Say, “The Father loves his son so much that he doesn’t even wait for him to walk to the house. He rushes out to meet him.”

Ask, “What else does the Father do to show that he loves his son and forgives him?” (*He hugs and kisses him; he has a celebration to welcome him back.*)

Stress that we are God’s children. God our Father rejoices when we are sorry for our sins and turn back to him. Recall the concept of reconciliation presented in chapter 1, and its fundamental meaning of being reunited with God and others.

If time permits, you may wish to read aloud to the children this Scripture account from the Bible as they listen or follow along in their own Bibles.



The Forgiving Father

To teach us that God is our forgiving Father who rejoices when we are sorry for our sins, Jesus told this story.

A man had two sons. Each son would inherit money from the father one day, but the younger son did not want to wait. He asked his father for his share of the money. The father agreed.

A few days later, the younger son took all his money and left. He went away and spent everything he had on wasteful and selfish things.

Soon he was hungry and penniless. He did not know what to do, so he took a job feeding and caring for a farmer’s pigs. He was so hungry, he almost ate the pig feed!

He thought, “My own father’s servants are better fed than I am. I will go back to my father and say I am sorry. I no longer deserve to be called his son, but maybe he will take me back as a servant.”

So he headed home. As he drew closer to home, his father saw him in the distance and ran to meet him. The father hugged and kissed his long-lost son.

The son said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.”

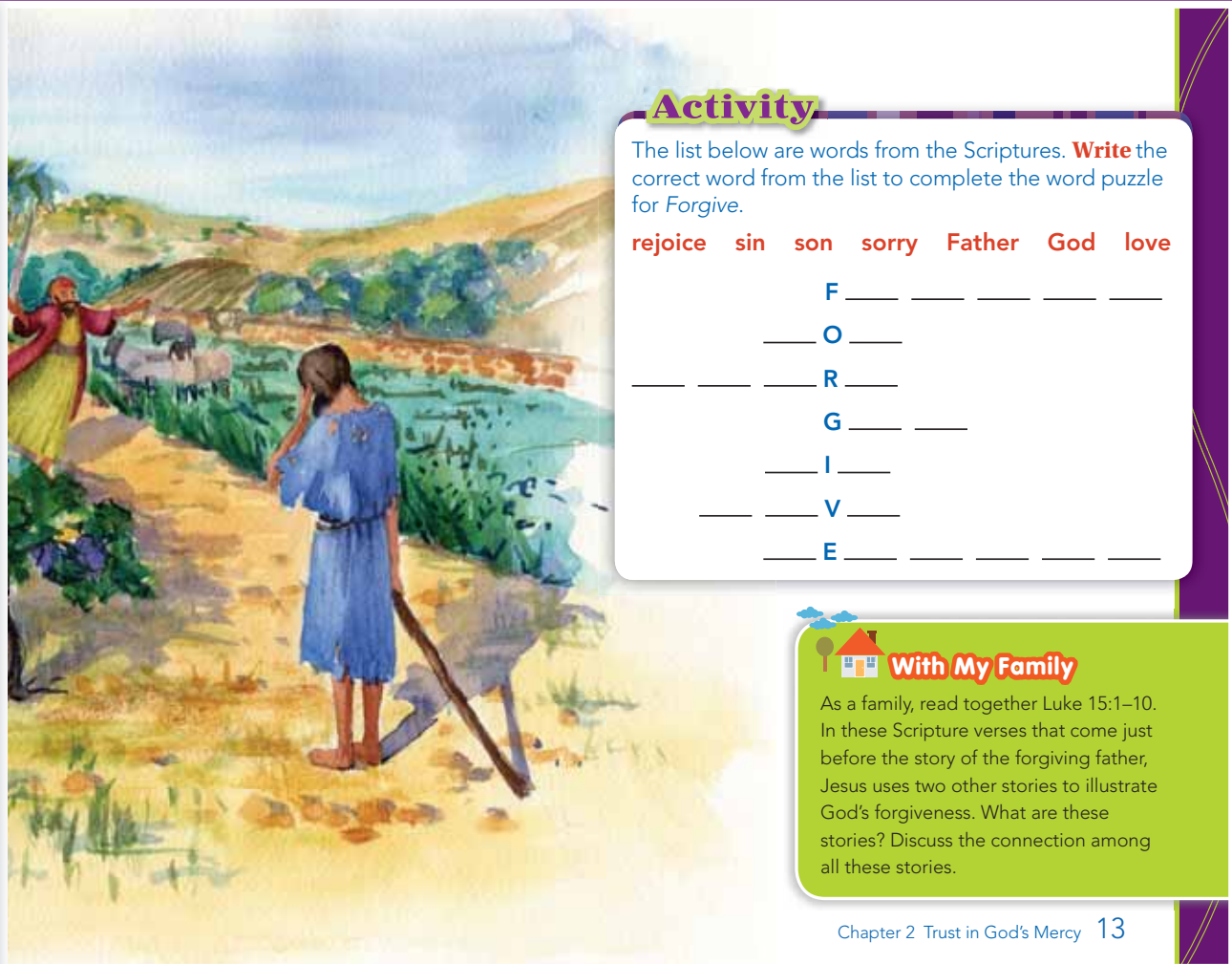
But the father was not angry. He was filled with love for his son and rejoiced at his return. The father held a great celebration to welcome his son home.

Based on Luke 15:11–24



Scripture Background

Love before Honor The Parable of the Forgiving Father is better known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. By the cultural standards of Jesus’ time, the behavior of the younger son in the parable is dishonorable and brings great shame on the father. The father should have completely disowned the son, even when he came back asking for forgiveness. Instead, the father dishonors himself by running to greet the returning son (dignified Jewish men never run in public) and giving the son gifts that restore his role in the family. The parable would have shocked Jesus’ listeners and clearly made his central point: God loves you even more than this father loves his wayward son.




Activity

The list below are words from the Scriptures. Write the correct word from the list to complete the word puzzle for *Forgive*.

rejoice sin son sorry Father God love

F _ _ _ _ _
_ O _
_ _ _ R _
G _ _ _
_ I _
_ _ V _
_ E _ _ _ _ _

 **With My Family**
As a family, read together Luke 15:1–10. In these Scripture verses that come just before the story of the forgiving father, Jesus uses two other stories to illustrate God’s forgiveness. What are these stories? Discuss the connection among all these stories.

Activity

- Invite volunteers to read the words in the box on page 13.
- Explain the directions and do the first word of the puzzle together. Have the children work in pairs to complete the puzzle. Review their responses.
- Answers in order are: *Father, son, sorry, God, sin, love, rejoice*.
- Call on volunteers to retell the story using one or more words in the puzzle.

 **With My Family**

Remind the children to share the With My Family message at home.



Additional Activity

Acting Out the Parable of the Forgiving Father To help the children internalize the message of the Parable of the Forgiving Father, have them act it out.

- Choose a narrator, a father, a son, friends of the son who help him spend his money, and the farmer who hires him to feed the pigs.
- After the roles are assigned, read the Scripture paraphrase and ask the actors to listen for their parts.
- Help the children begin, and coach them along the way. Help them put the story in their own words.
- You may want to have the class act this out more than once to give everyone in the group a part in the action.



God Sent Jesus to Forgive Sins

Direct attention to the photo on page 14.

Ask, "Why do you think Jesus is shown with his arms stretched out?" (*It is a sign of his love and forgiveness for all people.*)

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the first paragraph on page 14.

Ask, "Why did God send his Son, Jesus Christ?" (*to bring us back to God and save us from sin.*)

"What does the name of Jesus mean?" (*"God saves."*)

Remind the children that Original Sin weakens our ability to avoid sin. Jesus Christ frees us from sin and reunites us with God and one another.

Read aloud the next paragraph as the children follow along silently.

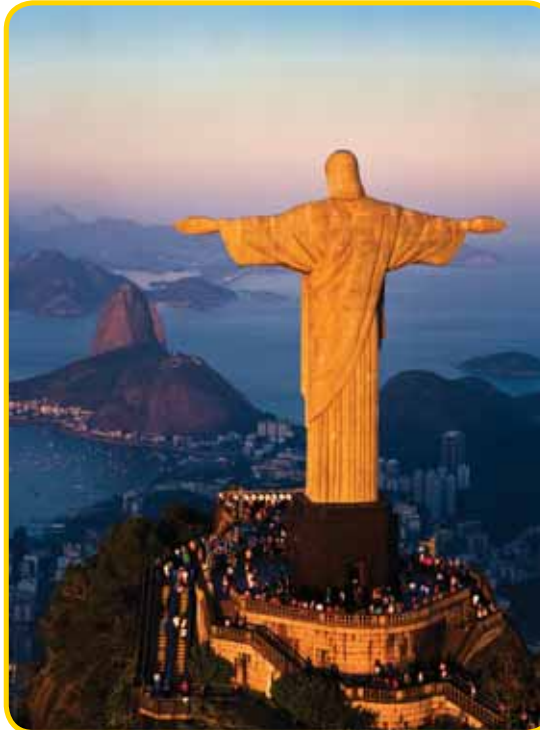
Ask, "What does the story of the forgiving father teach us?" (*God the Father loves us; God welcomes us back when we are sorry for our sins.*)

Then read aloud the last paragraph on this page.

Ask, "What does the word *contrition* mean?" (*being sorry for our sins and trying not to sin again*)



God Sent Jesus to Forgive Sins



© Danny Lehman/Corbis

God knew that human beings needed his love and forgiveness. So God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to bring us back to him and to save us from sin. The name "Jesus" means "God saves."

In the Scriptures, we find many stories about Jesus forgiving sinners. Jesus shared God's **mercy**, or love and forgiveness, with them. Jesus told the story of the forgiving father to teach us how much God the Father loves us. He wanted us to know that God always welcomes back sinners who are sorry for what they have done.

In the story of the forgiving father, the younger son knew he had done wrong. He admitted that he had sinned. When he went back to his father, he showed his sorrow and his contrition. **Contrition** means being sorry for our sins and trying not to sin again.

14



Liturgy Background

"Let It Be So" The word *Amen* is a Hebrew word meaning "let it be so" or "let it be done." As a conclusion to prayer, it represents the agreement by the person praying to what he or she has said in the prayer. At the end of the Eucharist, there is sometimes a final blessing, which includes a prayer or petitions to which the assembly responds, "Amen." For example, the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time I, taken from Numbers 6:24–26 and called the Blessing of Aaron, begins, "May the Lord bless you and keep you" (*Roman Missal*). To this blessing the assembly responds, "Amen."

There are times when we are sorry, or have contrition, because of our love for God and our love for others. There are also times when we might be sorry because we will be scolded or punished for what we did. It is better to be sorry because of love for God and others than because of fear. But being sorry always means trying not to sin again.



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Activity

When we are sorry for something we did, we have contrition. **Draw** yourself at a time when you were sorry for something you did.



Read aloud the paragraph on page 15.

Ask, "What are some different reasons we can be sorry or have contrition for what we have said or done?" (*We can be sorry because we love God and we love the person we have hurt. We can be sorry because we will be scolded or punished for what we did.*)

Point out that both ways of being sorry are contrition.

Ask, "Which type of sorrow is better?" (*being sorry because we love God and the person we hurt*)

Emphasize that in addition to being sorry for our sins, we must try not to sin again. Recall that Jesus gave us the Sacraments to help our relationship with God grow stronger. Prayer, talking with God often, also helps us to stay close to God.

Activity

- Read aloud the directions for the activity.
- Brainstorm times to be sorry for what we do: *fighting, teasing even when someone asks us to stop, calling names, refusing to share games, not doing as parents ask or direct, not listening to teachers or other adults in charge.*
- Ask the children to picture what they look like when they are sorry. Ask them to draw themselves looking sad. They may also put others (friends, parents, teachers) in the picture if they wish.



Teaching Tip

Introducing the Glossary Introduce the children to the glossary in the back of the book. Help them look for the new words presented in this lesson, *contrition* and *mercy*. Ask volunteers to read the definition for each one. Then ask the group if anyone would like to read another word from the glossary. Allow each volunteer to choose a word at random to read. To review the new words presented in the lesson, you might like to have the children read them from the glossary at the end of each lesson.