

FIRST PENANCE AT ST. JEROME AND ST. JAMES CHURCH

The **Rite of Reconciliation**, first announced by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1973, was broadly implemented in the United States during 1976. The Sacrament of Penance brought with it a unifying emphasis on the ministry of reconciliation. "By the hidden and loving mystery of God's design people are joined together in the bonds of supernatural solidarity, so much so that the sin of one harms the others just as the holiness of one benefits the others. Penance always entails reconciliation with brothers and sisters who are always harmed by our sins" (*5, Rite of Penance*). The familiar parts of the sacrament — confession, sorrow, absolution, and penance — remain the parts of the Sacrament of Penance. But these separate moments in the sacramental action all work toward reconciling person to person, person to God, and people as a whole to God.

First Penance introduces children to a more conscious, active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. A child's experience of first penance is a simple, but vital, beginning. The process of preparation for this segment is carried on in three places — the home, the parish, and in a religious education system.

Although parish celebrations of reconciliation are adult celebrations, the parish community nurtures its children and calls them to grow by including them. As they mature, children will deepen their understanding of reconciliation by participating in these celebrations. Your family life is foundational to all these experiences. Your children first learn attitudes of forgiveness in your family circle. There they establish patterns on which they build for the rest of their lives.

As a Christian parent, you are laying the foundation for your child's life. You are called to place at the heart of your parenting Christ's spirit of unconditional love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. As your child experiences this in your care, he or she will begin to glimpse the true nature of the love of God and the promise of lasting peace and happiness, which is God's promise to us. As a loving and caring parent you will be anxious to help your child at this important time, and of course, you are at the very heart of your child's understanding of reconciliation.

Children preparing for First Penance must meet the following criteria:

1. Be baptized and already practicing the Catholic faith at a level appropriate to their age.
2. Have a desire to enter into the process.

Preparation will include:

- Mandatory preparation sessions for parents and child.
- Periodic liturgical ritual celebrations within the Sunday Mass.
- Timely completion of the parish Reconciliation Preparation Materials.
- If possible, experience the parish communal celebration of the Sacrament of Penance with their family.

Celebrate the Sacrament of Penance prior to beginning preparation for First Eucharist.