

Lesson 31 – Confession

Grades 6-8

Lesson Preparation:

Read Lesson 31 in the Baltimore Catechism.

Opening Prayer:

Scripture: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” James 5:16

Leader: Lord, give us the courage to face the truth about ourselves, the wonderful gifts we have, and the times we have fallen short. Through confession, may we continue to grow in your grace. Amen.

Together: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in His consolations, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Opening:

As our study of the sacrament of penance continues, this lesson is specifically on the confession element of the sacrament. To help focus students and stimulate background knowledge, ask them to share their experience of their first Confession. Of course they will not be telling the class any of their sins, but allow them to recall and share their experience with the sacrament, especially the first time.

Watch the Lesson 31 Video on Catholic Brain

Comprehension Questions: *Note: These questions are asked after the video, just to check student comprehension. They are not discussion questions, but be sure students understand the answers to these questions before moving on*

1) What is confession?

The telling of our sins to a priest in the sacrament of penance so that we can receive absolution (forgiveness).

2) Which sins are we obligated to confess?

We must confess all of our mortal sins – what we did, and how many times – to the best of our recollection. It is good to confess venial sins, but not required.

3) What are the three chief qualities of a good confession?

Our confession should be humble (take responsibility), sincere (truthful), and entire (we do not intentionally leave out any mortal sin).

4) What are the two types of punishment due to sin?

Eternal punishment – hell, resulting from our cutting ourselves off from God through sin and not returning to Him; Temporal punishment – temporary, it is the medicine that heals the damage done to our soul by sin

5) Who can Father tell about the sins he hears in confession?

No one, under any circumstance – not our parents, not even the police. This is called the Seal of the Confessional.

Discussion Questions: *Note: These questions are for student discussion. The students should consider these questions and comment on them. There are some key points included in this lesson, after each question, that you can use to help guide their discussion toward truth. It's important that the students think about and discuss these things, but that they don't leave the discussion with false impressions about what is true.*

1) Why must we not intentionally conceal a mortal sin in confession?

Mortal sin kills the life of grace in our soul, and the sacrament of penance restores us to life. By intentionally concealing a mortal sin, we are saying we prefer to be spiritually dead than alive.

2) Why is the seal of the confessional important?

People need to know that their sins will not be spread outside the confessional. Father is there to restore our souls to grace and to reconcile us to God, not for any other purpose. The priest is an instrument in the Hands of Jesus; knowledge of our sins does not belong to him, so he has no right to do anything with that knowledge other than reconcile us to Jesus.

3) Why can only a priest hear confessions?

The power to absolve (remove the guilt of sin) belongs to God alone, so for any person to do it, the power must come from God. Jesus gives this power to a priest at his ordination. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, so only a validly ordained priest has this gift. Jesus is the one who forgives us – He is working through his priests in the sacrament of penance.

Go Deeper:

We are going to explore the Fathers of the Church again, and what they had to say about confession. The following is a small sample of their words. Read together as a class and discuss what they tell us about confession.

St. Ambrose – Concerning Repentance – A.D. 388

Therefore most evidently are we bidden by the teaching of the Lord to confer again the grace of the heavenly sacrament on those guilty even of the greatest sins, if they with open confession bear the penance due to their sin.

St. Ambrose – Concerning Repentance – A.D. 388

In like manner it seemed impossible that sins should be forgiven through repentance, but Christ gave this power to His apostles, which has been transmitted to the priestly office. That, then, has become possible which was impossible.

Cyprian of Carthage – Epistle 2 – circa A.D. 250

You see, then, brethren, that you also ought to do the like, so that even those who have fallen may amend their minds by your exhortation; and if they should be seized once more, may confess, and may so make amends for their previous sin...

The Didache – circa A.D. 80

...gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that you may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned.

Activity:

God offers us forgiveness freely for our sins. But Jesus makes it clear on many occasions in the Bible that we must also forgive others. Think about how wonderful we feel when we come out of confession, how beautiful the gift of forgiveness is. We are commanded to extend forgiveness to those who hurt us; it is not optional. Think of someone who has done something wrong to you. Write a letter of forgiveness to that person. If it is prudent, give that person the letter, or tell them that you forgive them. Either way, be sure to pray for him or her.

Closing Prayer:

Leader: Father, we thank You for giving us an opportunity to shed your light on our darkness, by confessing our sins and finding, not condemnation, but forgiveness. Amen.

Together: 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.