

Lesson 29 – Penance

Grades 6-8

Lesson Preparation:

Read Lesson 29 in the Baltimore Catechism.

Opening Prayer:

Scripture: “[Jesus] said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.’” John 20:21-23

Leader: Lord, the sacrament of penance is almost too good to believe – yet we know it is true – in the confessional really is healing and forgiveness for all of our sins. Teach us to love this sacrament, and to receive it often. 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:

Today’s lesson is about the sacrament of penance (also known as confession and reconciliation). Begin with the following story:

One night an old woman, who had spent most of her life as a great sinner, was passing the church and she saw a large group of people going in, so she followed them. During the homily that night, the priest repeated over and over: “With God there is mercy even for the worst sinners, if only they repent.”

After the service, when everyone else left, the woman stayed behind to talk to the priest. She asked him miserably, “Father, will you hear my confession and tell me if there is any hope for me?” The priest invited her into the confessional, and when she was done, offered to let her stay in the warm church for the night, since she was old and it would be a bitterly cold walk home for her.

The next morning, the woman was found, lying dead at the foot of the cross, with a smile of peace and thankfulness on her old face.

Ask the students what the story is meant to teach us about the forgiveness available to us in the sacrament of penance, and the peace it offers.

Watch the Lesson 29 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 the sacrament of penance?

The sacrament in which we are forgiven the guilt of all our sins

2) What are the effects of the sacrament?

a) Restoration or increase in grace, b) Forgiveness for sin, c) Remission of eternal, and at least some temporal, punishment due to sin, d) Help avoiding sin in the future, e) Restoration of merits of our good works if they'd been lost through mortal sin

3) What are the words of absolution?

"I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." (Note: To absolve means to set free.)

4) What are the five steps to making a worthy confession?

a) Examine our conscience, b) Be sorry for our sins, c) Make a firm purpose to try not to sin again, d) Confess our sins to the priest, e) Accept our penance

5) What is an examination of conscience?

Before the sacrament of penance, we should think about what sins we have committed since our last confession, to know what to confess, and to express sorrow for them.

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) How often should we go to confession?

Answers may vary. The Church only requires once in a year for someone not in mortal sin, but no one would recommend that as ideal. It may depend on age and other factors, but once a month is a common recommendation – provided there are no mortal sins. If someone falls into mortal sin, he or she must get to confession as soon as possible.

2) Why are the three names of the sacrament appropriate?

Penance – We receive a penance, and it shows our willingness to accept the consequence of our sin and make some amends

Confession – We confess our sins, name them, accept responsibility for them, and give them up

Reconciliation – The sacrament reconciles us to God and the Church – especially for someone totally cut off through mortal sin

3) Why does Father give us a penance? Why is it important?

Sin damages us spiritually. Even when we are forgiven, the wound remains. The penance helps to heal that wound. Although we can not actually make up for our sins, (Jesus did that on the cross) the penance is an opportunity to give something good to God after offending Him through our sin.

Go Deeper:

Discuss the beauty of the sacrament of penance, and its many benefits. Forgiveness is an obvious one, but consider others. For example, the benefit of facing and acknowledging our shortcomings; the opportunity to get advice from a wise spiritual leader; the power of telling the priest the worst about ourselves and hearing him say we are forgiven. Explore other benefits with the students as well.

Activity:

Write a letter to someone who hasn't been to the sacrament of penance in a long time, maybe years. It doesn't have to be a real person, you can use your imagination. Either way, encourage the person in your letter to return to the sacrament. Explain the beauty and benefits of the sacrament and try to calm the

fears he or she may be having about the sacrament after being away from it for so long.

Closing Prayer:

Leader: Thank You, Lord, for not abandoning us. When we sin, You don't stop loving us; instead You call us to run back to You and receive your mercy. May we never be afraid to come to You, and receive the grace of 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.