

Reconciliation and Peace

Dear Parent(s),

During the Lenten season, we will be focusing on different aspects of Lent: its meaning, its symbols, its customs, and its traditions. Each week, your child will bring home Family Take-Home Pages, which are filled with activities that reinforce what we are discussing and learning in class. These Take-Home Pages are theme based and divided into three sections: Warm-Up Exercises, Getting Started, and Putting It into Practice. The theme for this week of Lent is Reconciliation with its gift of peace. May the activities suggested in these pages provide you with additional tools for nurturing your child's faith.

Warm-Up Exercises...

Gather the family around the Lenten candle. Have one member of the family light the candle and another read from Scripture. Then follow with a family discussion.

A reading from the letter to the Romans
12:17-18

Brothers and sisters: Don't mistreat someone who has mistreated you. But try to earn the respect of others, and do your best to live at peace with everyone.

Discuss the following questions with your family:

When I get upset with someone, do I yell or throw a tantrum? Or do I shut up and give the "silent treatment"? Or do I speak honestly about the way I feel?

Explain to the children: Neither a tantrum nor the "silent treatment" fosters an atmosphere of peace. But by speaking honestly and openly about our feelings, we can foster an atmosphere of understanding and respect. When we understand and respect each other, peaceful solutions are possible.

Here are a few exercises to help you work for peace:

Practice using statements such as, "I feel ... when you ..." to help each member under-

stand the other's point of view. Have each member of the family think of a few examples they can share with each other. Parent(s) should start with an example or two, then encourage children to do the same. Some suggested statements are provided to get you started:

"I feel so frustrated when you know you're going to be late but don't bother to call to let me know."

"I feel scared when I hear you arguing and fighting. I'm afraid someone will get hurt."

"I feel helpless when you don't come to me with your problems. I want to help, but I can't if you won't share your problems with me."

Practice speaking words of peace such as:

I love you.

I forgive you.

I'm sorry.

Let's start over.

I care.

I'd like to help.

Do you want to talk about it?

God bless you.

Family Take-Home Pages

Please and thank you.

Have your family think of other words to add to your list. Then use these words of healing on a daily basis.

Getting Started...

The Bible teaches us a lot about forgiveness. You can find clues in these readings from Scripture. Have someone read them aloud.

"...Forgive our sins, as we forgive everyone who has done wrong to us..." (Luke 11:4).

"So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God" (Matthew 5:23-24).

Your family can suggest additional verses, too.

Now encourage the members of your family to think of someone they need to forgive. Encourage them to also think of someone from whom they need forgiveness. Remind them that reconciliation brings about healing and healing brings about peace. Help your family not to cling to hurt and to let go of grudges. The time for forgiveness is now.

As a symbolic gesture of forgiveness, break a loaf of bread (a biscuit, dinner roll or pita loaf will do) and share it with the one you need to forgive. Allow each member of the family to do the same. Accompany that symbolic gesture with a sincere apology or a hug.



Putting It into Practice...

Share this reading from the Gospel of Matthew (5:43-48).

You have heard people say, "Love your neighbors and hate your enemies." But I tell you to love your enemies and pray for anyone who mistreats you. Then you will be acting like your Father in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both good and bad people. And he sends rain for the ones who do right and for the ones who do wrong. If you love only those people who love you, will God reward you for that? Even tax collectors love their friends. If you greet only your friends, what's so great about that? Don't even unbelievers do that? But you must always act like your Father in heaven.

Sometimes we struggle to forgive others who have caused us great pain. Sometimes forgiveness takes tremendous effort and the prayerful support of others. Help family members release pent-up pain and hurt with this gesture of "letting go."

Directions:

Go to a nearby river or creek with your family. Take along a bag of bread crumbs. Stand by the flowing water and ask God to help your family let go of their hurts. Explain to your family that the bread crumbs represent the hurts and pains they hold in their hearts. Then let everyone take a handful of bread crumbs and toss them into the river. Watch the current carry the hurts away. Then as a family, thank God for his blessing of forgiveness, and ask him to help your family begin to heal today.

Traditions create memories. Memories enrich our lives. Traditions also help us pass on valuable lessons to our children and to our children's children.

During Lent, we are called to conversion. One of the first steps we can take toward that conversion is to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament that blesses us with the healing grace of God's mercy. It is through God's gifts of mercy and forgiveness we are able to start anew.

While the sacrament of Reconciliation is only required for grievous sins, and Catholics should go to confession at least once a year, many families still consider it an essential part of their Lenten preparation for the coming celebration of Easter joy.

During Lent, many parishes offer a communal penance service in which people prepare together for confession and give thanks together for the forgiveness received. After reading from Scripture, everyone is led through a common examination of conscience and expression of sorrow. Individual confession and absolution follow. If you don't already participate in the communal penance service as a family, you might want to consider doing so. Who knows? It may become one of your family's most meaningful Lenten traditions.

In preparing to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation, whether communal or private, we take time to reflect on our thoughts, our words, our actions, and our failures to take action. Have our thoughts, words, and actions brought us closer to God or have they hardened our hearts to his love? With self-examination, we realize the need for sorrow and

change, so we can once again walk closer with Jesus. (You may want to make use of the booklet for the sacrament of Reconciliation on pages 138–140.) God blesses with his wonderful gifts of mercy and peace all of those who confess their sins with contrite hearts. As we pray the Our Father, we remember that forgiveness isn't limited to God and ourselves. If we want forgiveness, then we, too, are to forgive those who have offended us.

So start with family members, and let the healing begin.

"...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us..."

