

As a gift for you this Lent, we're giving every family a copy of my new booklet, *Preparing for Confession: Receiving God's Mercy*. But we offer you a bigger gift all year round, and that is confession itself.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus forgave sinners. He empowered his disciples to forgive, and he commanded them to preach forgiveness to the ends of the earth. The Catholic Church carries out this command through the sacrament of reconciliation.

I wrote this booklet especially for people who have not been to confession for a while. They may have forgotten how to go, or even how to judge what is a sin. You can take this book home and keep it; let me highlight a few parts for you.

On page 14 you will find an examination of conscience. Instead of following the Ten Commandments, it reflects on three sayings of Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart," "Love one another as I love you," and "Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." On these pages you will find many questions to ask yourself. They will help you decide what sins to confess.

On page 4 at the bottom is a definition of sin from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: Sin is "an offense against God as well as a fault against reason, truth, and right conscience. Sin is a deliberate thought, word, deed, or omission contrary to the eternal law of God." The next paragraph distinguishes mortal sin from venial sin. In a nutshell, if we deliberately choose something contrary to God's law, we sin.

Can you be forgiven without going to confession? Yes. On page 3, I point out that God forgives us in many ways: "in Baptism, when we reconcile with those we have offended, when we pray sorrowfully, in private, when we pray together for clemency, and when we share the body and blood of Christ at communion. But we have one celebration that focuses mainly on God's mercy: the sacrament of Reconciliation." In this sacrament we enter the real presence of a God who forgives. It is our best way of experiencing God's mercy.

Page 20 tells how to go to confession privately on a typical Saturday afternoon. Page 24 starts the outline for a penance service like the one we will have this Wednesday night. I encourage you to come. Between now and then, spend some time with the questions in the booklet. Come prepared to say what you are sorry for. We start with introductory rites and a reading from scripture. Then we have the rite of reconciliation. Notice on page 25, number 7, we all make a general confession of sins together, as we do at the beginning of mass. We pray the Lord's Prayer together, and then each of you goes to a priest to confess your sins. You don't have to say an act of contrition individually. You just tell the priest what he needs to know and name your faults. He may give some advice, assign you a penance, and then comes the best part – he absolves you from your sins.

You hear the words of forgiveness. Afterward you return to your place for a time of thanksgiving and the conclusion of the ceremony.

All through Lent you have taken on some penance as a sign of sorrow for your sins. Bring that sorrow with you to church this Wednesday night. Experience the forgiveness of God for the past, and receive the strength of this sacrament to be a better disciple in the future. This week we have the opportunity as a parish to acknowledge our faults and open our hearts to the power of God's spirit. You will have a more satisfying Easter if you make a good confession this Lent.