

The Human Experience of Reconciliation

KWL Digital Enrichment Resource

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Teacher Introduction

Instructions and Examples

Appendix (content unpacked)



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Enrichment Resource: The Human Experience of Reconciliation

Teacher Introduction

"We are dealing with walking on the edge of two great abysses. The one is that of sin. The other abyss is that of love, of goodness, of mercy, of grace, of resurrection."

Pope Paul VI - Address 1974

Since human life is a journey along the edge of two great gulfs then study of reconciliation is serious business. When humanity errs in the excursion: tangled in selfishness, leading to rivalry, jealousy, greed, violence and destruction there is an urgent need for real Reconciliation. Forgiveness is a key component for the life and stability of the domestic, national and world community.

The study of reconciliation is crucial to Catholic education not merely for the sacramental celebration in primary schools but also for the vital example of forgiveness that we are called to model for the wider community.

In this module we have selected **6 elements** of the Reconciling process:

- Relationship
- Rupture
- Estrangement
- Stirrings of Remorse
- Reconciling Encounter
- New Relationship.

The broad selection of these components is merely to assist the teacher and student to address the mystery of human sinfulness and God's saving love.

We have attempted to highlight the role played by human **awareness, commitment and behaviour** in some of the reconciling elements. Teachers will be able to expand this unit by relating stories of forgiveness from other domains: English literature, art and media studies, and the history curriculum.

We have selected the **Prodigal Son** as an exemplar study for our 6 elements and added some reflections. This model might form the basis for students to explore other stories of forgiveness noting the similarities and differences between the accounts. We have provided suggested questions for the additional scripture texts.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Throughout this module we assert that the person and mission of Christ is central to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In the light of Christ human beings gain a new vision, the recognition of the holiness of God and the wickedness of sin.

"Leave me Lord I am a sinful person." Luke 5:8

The Sacrament of Penance was instituted by Christ so that sinners might receive pardon from God's mercy for having offended him and at the same time reconciliation with the Church. In this module we have emphasized that the Sacrament of Reconciliation, not only connected to other sacraments, also belongs to the larger system of personal apology and confession as well as the need for local, national and international forgiveness.

In this segment we have noted that the experience of a reconciling encounter affects the community: reminding members of their responsibilities, alerting the group to its fragility yet asserting that a forgiving element is central to authentic communal life.

Finally, we assert that the reconciling event rests on the **power of language** to express remorse and communicate forgiveness. Talk is cheap in some areas of life, but in the serious exchange between forgiver and forgiven the language of accountability and language of the future is very powerful.



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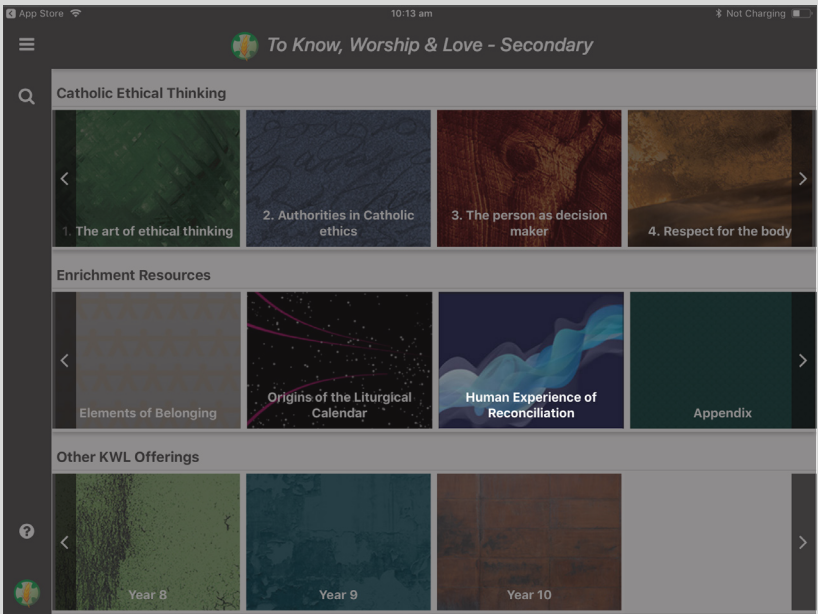
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Enrichment Resource: The Human Experience of Reconciliation

Instructions and Examples

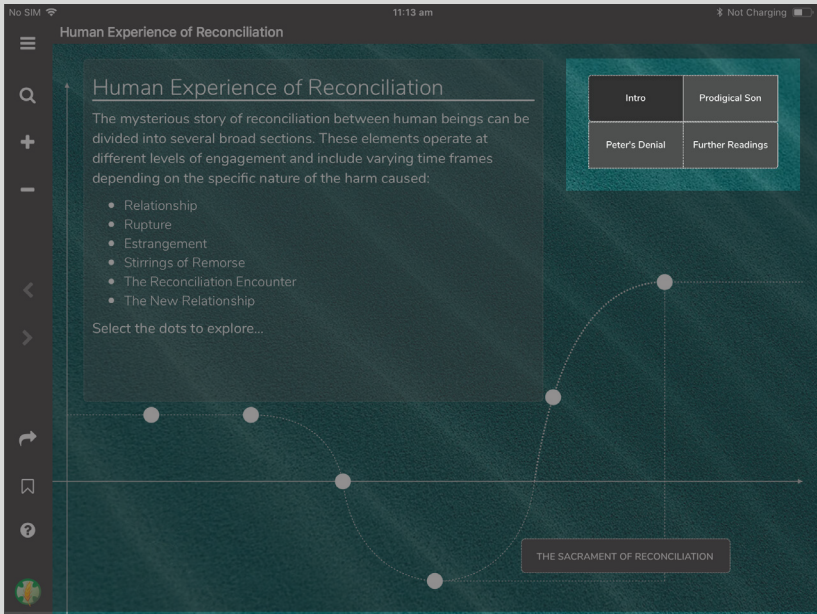
Navigation: Link Locations

The resource can be accessed via the KWL Home Page, Year 9, 9.1 The Sacrament of Reconciliation.

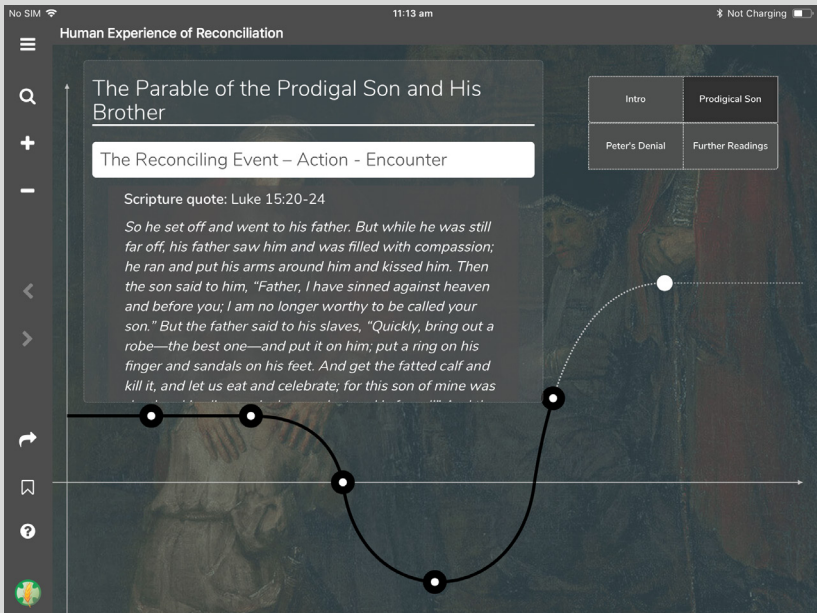


Navigation: Within the Resource

To navigate the four main sections of the resource, use the buttons located in the top right hand corner.



To navigate within one of the four sections, select the dots as shown below.



Enrichment Resource: The Human Experience of Reconciliation

Appendix (content Unpacked) INTRODUCTION

The Six Constants of Reconciliation

The mysterious story of reconciliation between human beings can be divided into several broad sections. These elements operate at different levels of engagement and include varying time frames depending on the specific nature of the harm caused:

- Relationship, Rupture, Estrangement, Stirrings of Remorse, the Reconciling Encounter and the New Relationship.

We have taken the parable of the Prodigal Son as a scriptural example of these six constants. We will specifically address the placement of the Sacrament of Reconciliation within the story of forgiveness. We will also trace the place of awareness, commitment and behaviour as key categories for the reconciling schema.

We are specifically orienting this unit toward the sacrament of Reconciliation as revised in the liturgical rites of the Catholic Church. We note clear parallels between the celebration of the sacrament and the day to day experience of forgiveness that marks authentic human life.

The study of Reconciliation is serious business, Blessed Pope Paul VI suggests.

"We are dealing with walking on the edge of two great abysses. The one is that of sin; today's mentality is blinding itself to the existence of sin and blocking out the dizzying sight of sin's lethal and fearsome depths.

The other abyss is that of love, of goodness, of mercy, of grace, of resurrection: it is what God offers to the freedom at the level of redemption and of the sacramental activity of the Church."

Blessed Paul VI Address 1974

Human life is a journey along the edge of these two great gulfs.

We have taken the parable of the Prodigal Son as a scriptural example of these six constants. We will specifically address the placement of the Sacrament of Reconciliation within the story of forgiveness. We will also trace the place of awareness, commitment and behaviour as key categories for the reconciling schema.

1 THE RELATIONSHIP

No relationship is perfect; no person is flawless, as Pope Francis reminds us. (Evangelii Gaudium p. 151) All people have areas that can be improved in some respect. The **awareness** of the other person, group, race or nation is an evolving element of our existence. No human person is completely aware of all elements of their mysterious being, no one grasps fully their own life and meaning.

All relationships have certain **commitments** that bind them together. They can be lofty ones or everyday tasks, legally or morally binding or rudimentary and adaptable. For a relationship to flourish these commitments, in whatever form they take, demand a certain fidelity. Often times the origin of a ruptured relationship is a broken commitment.

All relationships display a certain **behaviour** that outwardly shows the depth the affiliation enjoys. Visible behaviour symbolizes the strength of the relationship shared.

For example - the Prodigal Son

Scripture quote: Luke 15:11

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons.'

Reconciliation Reflection

A man, the forgiving father, had a family. The appreciation of this detail invokes a sense of blessing for the gift of children he has received. The father is aware of the gift of children and has certain commitments that he has to keep for their welfare - to provide for their life and future. There are certain behaviours that typify a family relationship.

Parables are always parabolic; they combine a familiar story with an unfamiliar paradox and render, in the form of a story, a new and often challenging vision of reality.

The context for this parable is crucial to our interpretation of the text. In the Old Testament the single line- 'a man had two sons' is a code for conflict. Adam had two sons- the older one killed the younger. The two sons of Isaac, Esau and Jacob, compete against each other. Jesus' audience were well aware of this genre of family fights. Though a family relationship should be a rich one many of them stumble from the start.



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2

THE RUPTURE

What causes the conflict starts the real story. The implication of this tension for the family or the wider group is often the basis of a narrative.

In each story of a relationship separation there are several levels upon which the rupture can work. Serious break-ups combine a triple failure in awareness, commitment and behaviour: biblical theology calls this sin.

The causes of the rupture may be many and varied, simple or complex. Once a person loses an awareness of God or the dignity of humankind selfish inclinations often take over; these may lead to a dispossession of the other and to radical estrangement. With important commitments abandoned people can misuse their freedom and cause harm to themselves and others.

For example - the Prodigal Son

Scripture quote: Luke 15:12-14

The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

Reconciliation Reflection

The story of the Prodigal son offers a paradoxical twist: the tension is between the younger son and his father, not with his older brother, at least not initially. The simple request to "give me my

inheritance" is code for 'drop dead.' The younger son's disregard for his father's position and esteem is scandalous. With a purely self-centred awareness he dismissed family commitments with brazen behaviour. On all three counts the younger son violates the family bond and deserves the expected banishment and disinheritance that Jesus' audience would presume.

The second twist is the Father's reaction to the rupture: he gave him the money and let him go without penalty.

3

THE ESTRANGEMENT

The story of estrangement often takes various forms from the initial realization of the rupture to the full recognition of the separation. When a relationship is seriously severed, there sometimes is a reduced awareness of the ramifications of the rupture. Human beings are hard wired for community, intimacy and love. When a serious disruption occurs in a relationship often the first feeling is unease. We are not created for human rejection, family banishment or group ostracism. It is not life giving to be at enmity with one another, to be in tension with the group and removed from a circle of friends.

The story of estrangement can take numerous paths with flexible time frames. An initial rupture may ripple out to incorporate other circles, other people and groups

For example - the Prodigal Son

Scripture quote: Luke 15:15-16

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

Reconciliation Reflection

The story of the lost son initially does not suggest what he did with the money. His squandering of the inheritance in dissolute living does not prompt a deep reflection upon his sin, his disregard for his father. Forgotten is his awareness of, and commitment to, his father and family: the boy is dead to these duties.

4

THE FIRST STIRRINGS OF REMORSE

What prompts the move to be reconciled?

It could be many things – the sense of loss that is felt, a regular routine is gone. The solitude that attends the breakup between associates or close friends can stimulate a suggestion to seek reconciliation. The memory of good times shared can also prompt serious reflection. Remorse might prod a conscience to plan an apology. Nevertheless, the sincere movement towards a reunion commences with a change of view, or as scripture says "a change of heart." Occasionally alone, sometimes prompted by others, estranged people recognize the depth of division the rift has caused.



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One of the reasons we seek to repair a torn relationship is that **we resemble God**. Humankind, created in the image and likeness of God, is gifted with God's key qualities:

- we are built for unified life in the human community – God as unifier
- we desire to relate to others as a good parent does – God, the Father of all
- we have a basic DNA that seeks to share – God distributes gifts to all
- real power is seen in compassionate care – God's great power is seen in merciful actions
- we are made to be people of love – God, who created us, is pure love.

Because we resemble God we bond with people and endeavour to live in peace. Since we symbolize God we labour to unite estranged individuals or groups. We become like the Father when we connect to others in the way God relates to us.

The stirrings of reconciliation commence when we see again our divine origins, our dignity and our destiny. This recaptured awareness calls for a new heart, a new relationship of commitment and care.

For example - the Prodigal Son

Scripture quote: Luke 15:17-19

But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before

you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' "

Reconciliation Reflection

The story of the prodigal son includes the first stirrings of reconciliation. Luke suggests that the younger son "came to himself." He was not living his authentic best and traded his genuine nature for a fake.

This parable presents quite cryptically the 'coming to his senses' of a sinner, one who harms others. The Gospel highlights the son's memory of his father's farm workers. This prompts a movement toward an apology. The young son remembers the severing of a relationship but harbours no expectation of his father's loving response. His desperation is for his life: he is starving< dying> and needs saving. His apology rehearsed in the pigpen has three lines: sinfulness of his actions, rightful loss of inheritance and a request for work. The classic Catholic categories of contrition, confession and penance are found in these lines.

5

THE RECONCILING EVENT - ACTION - ENCOUNTER

The reconciling event is always an encounter between persons and includes a crucial element upon which the rest revolves: a sincere apology offered and accepted. Language is key to this meeting of estranged parties. In the serious exchange between forgiver and forgiven the language of accountability and language of the future is very powerful. The force of the statement carries the contrition, confession and forgiveness.

The essence of the reconciling encounter is the *forgiver freely choosing not to return an injury*. Just as the transgressor has to change somewhat in order to apologize so too the forgiver is asked to move.

This awareness in the forgiver of her/his own feelings, and the decision to forgo some reaction for a higher cause coupled with commitment to a new relationship is what drives the language and gestures of reconciliation.

A part of the reconciling process is the renewed awareness of the community. As social beings our best and worst elements impact upon the wider group. Similarly the experience of a reconciling encounter affects the community, reminding the members of their responsibilities, alerting the group to its fragility yet asserting that a forgiving element is central to its authentic life.

For example - the Prodigal Son

Scripture quote: Luke 15:20-24

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.



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Reconciliation Reflection

The reconciling event of the prodigal son and his forgiving father is a classic scene. The father, in God-like fashion is searching and waiting for the return of his son. The underlying action of God's mighty deeds is mercy: hearing and feeling compassion for those in need. The father freely chooses to forgive and respond in a loving way to his son who has affronted him. The physical gesture of embrace and kiss are important elements in the reconciling process.

The intriguing element in Luke's narrative is the exact repetition of the prepared apology that the son offers. Indeed, he does not even get to recite his third line, the request for a servant's role. The gifts of robe, ring and sandals are quickly sought and the celebration begins. The forgiving father hears the cry of the helpless and his mercy gives meaning to his actions.

6

THE NEW RELATIONSHIP COMMENCED

The story of a trustworthy reconciliation between parties starts a new relationship. Two elements of this stage are distinguished: Firstly, The whole sorry saga of estrangement to solidarity has opened up a new vista but there is still the memory of the pain of separation. The relationship is acutely aware of the harm caused and the 'bruised bones' so to speak, might be still felt; but rather than dwelling on strained

times the *story is overtaken by the grace of a new beginning*. The language of the future overtakes and over powers the language of separation.

In a reconciling event an awareness of the other parties and their needs, frailty and hopes becomes clarified somewhat. The knowledge of one's self, one's appreciation of the other is deepened. Though tentative at first the new dispensation is a relief and each encounter forges the new reality of people living in harmony.

The action of reconciliation, therefore, impels both parties to continue the dynamic of forgiveness. It urges others in the community to work for "justice and peace" in the world. Forgiveness is not merely a gift but it always opens and empowers within others the possibility for further acts of mercy.

For example - the Prodigal Son

Scripture quote: Luke 15:25-32

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed

your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Reconciliation Reflection

The element of the elder son in the parable works on several levels. Firstly, it must be noted that Jesus' merciful actions often caused a scandal. The first lines of Luke's chapter on 'lost people and things', ch.15, introduce a special audience for Jesus' stories: Pharisees and scribes grumbling because he dined with sinners. These are the lost sheep of the fold at whose return heaven heartily rejoices. Luke 15:7

The anger and refusal to enter the celebration is in stark contrast with the mercy and love extended by the father. Forgiveness is a free decision not to return harm but to respond in a loving way. The older son is grappling with his own emotions, pride and desire to retaliate in some way to the injury caused.

Sinfulness can be a destructive force, but forgiveness creates new opportunities for growth.



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EXCURSUS

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE /RECONCILIATION

The new Rite of Reconciliation 1973

The God of the Old Testament, a God of mercy and compassion hears and is moved by the cry of the poor and helpless. The Covenant that God made with Israel was regularly broken but divine mercy was the fundamental motive underlying all Yahweh's mighty deeds.

The Sacrament of Penance was instituted by Christ the Lord so that sinners might receive pardon from God's mercy for having offended him and at the same time reconciliation with the Church.

A Positive celebration.

The new Rite of Reconciliation in the Catholic Church commences with a reading from sacred scripture. The Rite begins with a reading of God's word, the account of God's mercy and forgiveness seen in the story of Israel and most fully found in the life, death and resurrection of Christ: the reconciling event in world history.

The Rite has as its core the ancient elements of the Sacrament of Penance:

- Contrition, Confession, Penance and Absolution.

The Rite concludes with a Prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Since the Rite commences and concludes with the Word of God and praise to God the celebration of Reconciliation is a positive event.

The Centre of the Sacrament - Two overarching themes: Consciousness of Sin overtaken by the Awareness of God's Grace

There are two overlapping themes that the sacrament celebrates. The first, noted in the elements of Contrition and Confession is the penitent's awareness of their sin. The sacrament gives focus to this 'arc of sinful awareness' by addressing heartfelt contrition as a necessary requisite for the celebration.

The second arc is God's healing and transforming grace that is poured out in the sacramental action. This gift of forgiveness moves the penitent from a self-centred guilt to a vision of the liberating grace of a renewed relationship. This 'arc of God's grace' overtakes the sin-focus and moves the celebration from the confession of failure to a prayer of thanks and praise for God's healing love.

In 1439 the Council of Florence spelt out what the sacrament involved: contrition, confession, absolution and 'satisfaction' for the sin. Each of these elements is crucial to the fullness of the process of Reconciliation for all people.

Consciousness of Sin and Awareness of God's Grace

There are two overlapping themes that the sacrament celebrates. The first, noted in the elements of Contrition and Confession is the penitent's awareness of their sin. The sacrament gives focus to this 'arc of sinful awareness' by addressing heartfelt contrition as a necessary requisite for the celebration.

The second arc is God's healing and transforming grace that is poured out in the sacramental action. This gift of forgiveness moves the penitent from a self wallowing guilt and a disproportionate preoccupation with the hurt inflicted to a vision of the liberating grace of a renewed relationship. This 'arc of God's grace' overtakes the sin-focus and moves the celebration from the confession of failure to a prayer of thanks and praise for God's healing love. The Act of Penance, rather than a penalty punishing sinful actions becomes a commencement of a new relationship. The Prayer of Absolution, recalls the ultimate content of every sacrament: the death and resurrection of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. This prayer promises pardon and peace for the road ahead and names the presence of the Trinity in the saving action: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The larger system that is embraced.

Every Sacrament belongs to a larger system. Just as Eucharist is intrinsically connected to Baptism and Confirmation it is also connected to the creation and production of bread. The reception of the Eucharist brings with it a moral obligation



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to feed the hungry in our world. Similarly the Sacrament of Reconciliation, connected to other sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, also belongs to the larger system of the Liturgical year as well as the worldwide need for local, national and international forgiveness.

In 1439 the Council of Florence spelt out what the sacrament involved: contrition, confession, absolution and 'satisfaction' for the sin. Each of these elements is crucial to the fullness of the process of Reconciliation for all people. These elements could be shared with a wide audience as a model for reconciliation of all people.

(1) Contrition- the basis of the change

The most important act of the penitent is contrition, which is "heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more."

Contrition symbolizes the profound change in the whole person by which they begin to consider, judge and re-arrange their life.

The Lesson for all is that the genuineness of the reconciling process depends on heartfelt contrition. Conversion should affect a person from within and grow towards a progressively deeper enlightenment, deeper connection to our real selves.

(2) Confession – tell of your sorrow – hear yourself say it

Confession of sins comes from true knowledge of self before God and from contrition for those sins. The announcement and ownership of the harm

caused is the highpoint of the penitent's return to right relationship with the one/s harmed. The confession is heard by the aggrieved party and by the one saying sorry. The expression of failure is crucial to the reconciling process.

The Lesson for all is that many people, less courageous than the prodigal son, shrink from a verbal apology and hope that they are fully forgiven. This rarely works. Hearing yourself say sorry actually works the reconciling process, and is a vehicle for God's healing and transforming grace. The 'arc of sin' is stated.

(3) Act of Penance

In the Rite of Reconciliation the priest offers a penance. The act of penance is necessary for the remedy for sin and a help to the renewal of life. The Act of Penance, usually a prayer, rather than a penalty punishing sinful actions becomes a commencement of a new relationship.

The Lesson for all with no new awareness, commitment or behaviour the reconciling process has not worked. Real forgiveness moves the parties along a new road. It has concrete elements; the act of penance is visible, and action, and serves as a clear break from the attitude and behaviour that caused the initial rupture.

(4) Absolution

Through the act of absolution God grants pardon to the sinners.

The priest extends his hands over the head of the penitent and during the absolution makes the

sign of the cross over the person. The absolution sets, or cuts a person free from the grasp of sin.

The formula for the revised rite:

***God, the Father of mercies
through the death and resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, +
and of the Holy Spirit.***

The penitent answers: **Amen.**

Several elements are worth noting in this prayer of God's forgiveness:

- The connection to the quality of God's mercy.
- The world has been reconciled by the life, death and resurrection of Christ.
- The Holy Spirit has been sent to forgive sins.
- The prayer promises pardon and peace and names the presence of the Trinity in this saving action: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Lesson for all is that forgiveness has to be heard for the penitent to move on. Listening to the words and receiving the gestures of sincere forgiveness initiates a new dynamic that offers a fresh vision of reality. The 'arc of God's grace' has overtaken the sweep of sin. Reconciliation
Enrichment Texts to be Explored



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Recommend Reading

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

Mark 5:21-43

The Man with a Withered Hand

Luke 6:6-11

Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman

Luke 13:10-17

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

Matthew 9:1-8

A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

John 9:1-12

Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar Near Jericho

Luke 18:35-43

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

Matthew 26:14-16

Peter Denies Jesus

Luke 22:54-62

Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

John 21:1-25

Jesus and Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

luke 10:25-37

The Woman caught in adultery

John 7:53-8:11

The Gift of Love

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

The First Sin And Its Punishment

Genesis 3:1-24

Esau and Jacob - Sin and Reconciliation

Genesis 27:1-46, 33:1-20

Joseph and His Brothers - Sin and Forgiveness

Genesis 37:1-35, 45:1-28

David, Bathsheba and Uriah

2 Samuel 11: -12:25

David's Prayer of Repentance

Psalms 51

Jonah and the Repentance of Nineveh

Jonah 1: 1 – 4:11

Jonah's Prayer for Deliverance

Jonah 2:1-10

Questions for the Reconciliation Enrichment Texts

Find in this story some of the elements of The Six Constants of Reconciliation:

- Relationship
- Rupture
- Estrangement
- Stirrings of Remorse
- Reconciling Encounter
- New Relationship.

What role, if any, does awareness, commitment and behaviour play in the story?

What is the harm caused to individuals and to the community?

What prompts the reconciling encounter?

How does the reconciling event change the individuals?

How does it touch the community?

What is the force of language used in the contrition and confession of harm caused?



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