



PENANCE SERVICE

“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”

–Psalm 51:10

Penance Service

Music Suggestions:

- *Forgiveness* by Matthew West
- *Lord I Need You* by Matt Maher
- *Lead Me To the Cross* by Hillsong United
- *Lay It Down* by Matt Maher
- *Restless* by Audrey Assad

I. Greeting and Introductory Activities

Introduce the Penance service with some encouragement, and then present one or more of the introductory activities and talks outlined below as a way of preparing teens for the Celebration of the Word of God and reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Tonight, you have the amazing opportunity to encounter the infinite mercy and forgiveness of our heavenly Father. You can get right with God by having your sins forgiven and receiving his grace; you can make a new beginning in your relationship with him. God wants to lift the burden of whatever is weighing you down, whatever makes you feel you are not worthy of his love. He wants to lift that burden and embrace you with his infinite love.

As Pope Francis recently said, “God never tires of forgiving our sins; it is we who tire of asking for forgiveness.” *Do not be afraid to ask for God’s forgiveness.* God created you out of love and wants to be in relationship with you now and forever in heaven. If you have been away from the Sacrament of Reconciliation for a long time or if you have some serious sins on your soul, do not hesitate to ask God for forgiveness. Make today the first day of eternity spent with your Father who loves you.

Saint Story

The saints offer us great examples of repentance and turning back to Christ. St. Paul is provided as an example. You may also choose to include one or more additional examples.

St. Paul

Many people think being a saint means being perfect. But the paradox is that to be a saint you must know you are a sinner. St. Paul, boasting about God’s mercy, said to his friend Timothy: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

St. Paul thought he was the biggest sinner in the world. In case you did not know, St. Paul wrote more than half the New Testament. So the next time you think your sins will keep you from doing anything good for God, remember that God chose a sinner like you and me to write part of the Bible. Do not forget—every saint is just a sinner who gets back up, repents, and tries again.

Additional Examples of Saints

One of my favorites is ...

Look up the story of a favorite saint and tell his or her story, highlighting the fact that they were not perfect. Some suggestions are provided below.

- **St. Margaret of Cortona:** Her mother died when she was seven years old, and Margaret became increasingly rebellious as she grew older. Eventually, she lived as a mistress for nine years. The murder of her lover and disownment of her family shocked and then inspired Margaret into a life of penance and love for the poor.
- **St. Dominic Savio:** St. Dominic had a great desire to please God throughout his life. He loved going to Confession and Mass, eventually going to Confession once a week and receiving Communion every day. He died at the age of fourteen and is the youngest saint who was not a martyr.
- **Bl. Bartolo Longo:** He was a former satanist and persecutor of the Catholic Church who almost committed suicide. The voice of his deceased father told him to “return to God.” He built a shrine to Our Lady of the Rosary that is considered the modern founding of the city of Pompeii.

Demonstrations

Below are four demonstrations to help illustrate what Confession is like for the soul. Choose one or two if you have time, and be sure to practice beforehand and think about how you want to describe the analogy to your teens.

1. “Refill Please”

Props Needed: Two large, clear jars (or vases); four colors of food dye; bleach; vinegar; masking tape; a marker; and towels.

Directions: Fill one jar (labeled “You”) halfway with clear water and a couple of tablespoons of vinegar. Fill the other jar (labeled “Jesus”) about a quarter of the way full with bleach. Drop the different food dyes into the clear water and vinegar mix (only a drop or two per color). Explain that the colors represent different sins. As the different colors mix, the water should gradually become murkier and darker. Next, pour the bleach into the dark water. This should make the water become clear again.

Summary: God wants our souls to be like clear, clean water. We muck up our souls with sin. Confession is like a “refill” and purification of our souls. We need to strive to keep our souls clean and to constantly return to Confession to receive new graces.

2. “Dominoes”

Props Needed: One set of dominoes; masking tape; a permanent marker; a small crucifix; and a table.

List of sins: unholy curiosity, disobedience, lust, unchastity, gossip, hatred, revenge, murder, deceit, envy, greed, theft, lying, cheating, scandal, pride, arrogance, ingratitude ... (Add others as you see fit.)

List of names: Use names of participants or make up others if desired.

Directions: Write the sins and names on the tape, and label two sets of dominoes. Set up the two lines of dominoes, spacing regular dominoes in between the labeled dominoes to make it longer if desired.

Summary: Explain how one sin often leads to other sins and creates a “domino effect.” Likewise, our sins affect other people, and we can lead others to fall. Reset the dominoes, and while they are toppling, put the crucifix in the line to stop the dominoes. Jesus’ death and resurrection has brought forgiveness of our sins. Confessing our sins brings not only forgiveness, but also the grace to change lives and heal our relationships. We have hope that God can restore the damage our sins have caused.

3. “First Things First”

Props Needed: One-gallon ice cream bucket; one large rock (almost the same size as the bucket); several smaller pebbles; enough sand to fill the bucket more than halfway; and a pitcher of water.

Summary: In the beginning, keep everything hidden from view. First pull out the bucket and the large rock. Put the large rock in the bucket and ask the teens if they think the bucket is full. When everyone agrees that the bucket is full, pull out the pebbles. Fill the empty space around the rock with the pebbles. Ask the teens again if they think the bucket is full. When everyone agrees, pull out the sand. Fill the empty spaces between the rock and the pebbles with sand. Again, ask if they think the bucket is full. After this, pull out the water and fill the remainder of the space with it.

The point of this exercise: Your life is the bucket. The rocks, sand, and water are things you choose to fill your life with. God is that big rock. If you do not put the big rock in first, you will never get it in at all. You can illustrate for them how putting things in the bucket in reverse order will cause the rock not to fit. Confession allows you to empty your bucket, see what things (and in what order) you have been putting in your life, and the chance to re-order these things, if needed.

4. “Backpack Skit”

Props needed: backpack and rocks

Summary: You can create a skit along the following lines. Our sins are like rocks we pile on our back in a backpack. The main character has a backpack and encounters different situations in which he or she must choose whether or not to sin. Every time the main character sins, a rock is added to the backpack. (We collect “rocks” like these over periods of months and years in our lives.) Eventually, the main character in the skit will start to stumble and fall due to the weight of the rocks.

Sometimes, people foolishly cling to enormous “backpacks” of sin out of a fear of letting go. Have another character invite the main character to go to Confession, and have the main character give all the typical reasons people have for not wanting to go to Confession. Eventually, have the main character go to Confession where Jesus takes all the rocks out of the backpack. The main character then exits Confession with an empty backpack and a feeling of freedom.

Confession Demonstration

Have two leaders demonstrate in front of the group what going to Confession looks like. Have a male leader act as the priest and either a male or female leader act as the penitent. Demonstrate two scenarios. In the first scenario, the penitent knows how to go to Confession and knows his or her sins and the Act of Contrition. Make this as realistic as possible (i.e., think of sins a teenager would typically confess and a penance a priest would typically give).

In the second scenario, the penitent does not know what to do in Confession at all. Have the “priest” walk the penitent through his or her confession. Here are some things a priest might do to help:

- *Ask permission to lead the penitent through an examination of conscience or through the Ten Commandments.*
- *Ensure that the penitent shows contrition and confesses at least one sin.*
- *Help the penitent to express sorrow for his or her sins and a determination not to commit those sins again.*
- *Give a penance that is simple and that can be carried out immediately.*

Testimony

(From a teen, if possible)

II. Celebration of the Word of God

(Optional) Entrance Hymn

Depending on how you decide to incorporate the introductory activities, you may want to include an entrance hymn at this point as a way of beginning this more formal part of the Penance service.

Sign of the Cross

Opening Prayer:

LEADER: Brothers and sisters, God calls us to conversion; let us therefore ask him for the grace of sincere repentance.

All pray in silence for a brief period.

LEADER: Lord, hear the prayers of those who call on you, forgive the sins of those who confess to you, and in your merciful love, give us your pardon and your peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

Scripture Selections:

First Reading

- Isaiah 1:16-18 – “Cease to do evil, learn to do good.”
- Isaiah 53:4-6 – “With his stripes we are healed.”
- Joel 2:12-18 – “Return to me with all your heart.”
- Ezekiel 11:14-21 – “I will give them a heart of flesh.”

Responsorial Psalm

- Psalm 38 – “I confess my iniquity, I am sorry for my sin.”
- Psalm 51 – “Create in me a clean heart, O God.”
- Psalm 62 – “On God rests my deliverance.”
- Psalm 130 – “With the Lord there is steadfast love ... and plenteous redemption.”

Second Reading

- Romans 5:1-11 – “God shows his love ... while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 – “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself.”
- Ephesians 2:1-10 – “God, who is rich in mercy ... made us alive together with Christ.”
- 1 Peter 2:21-25 – “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.”

Gospel

- Matthew 18:21-35 – Forgive your brother “seventy times seven” times.
- Mark 2:1-12 – “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”
- Luke 7:36-50 – “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.”
- Luke 18:9-14 – The tax collector, not the Pharisee, went home justified.
- John 8:1-11 – To the woman caught in adultery: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.”

Homily

III. Rite of Reconciliation with Individual Confession and Absolution

Examination of Conscience

Lead students through the “Examination of Conscience” available at CatholicFaithForTeens.com.

Act of Contrition

LEADER: Together, let us pray an Act of Contrition for our sins ...

ALL: O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they have offended you, my God, who are all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of your grace, to sin no more, to do penance, and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.

Rite of Reconciliation

- Play music. (Use songs suggested here or classical music.)
- Show a PowerPoint presentation of Scripture verses about forgiveness.
- Have the Eucharist exposed.
- Read a meditation on Christ crucified and his love for us.

Individual Confession and Absolution

- *Have teens light a candle after Confession and set it in front of a crucifix.*
- *After they have finished their penance, instruct the teens to pray for those going to Confession after them.*

IV. Concluding Prayers After Confession

The Our Father

LEADER: Jesus suffered and died on the cross in order to free us from our sins. Let us thank God for his infinite mercy, using the prayer that Jesus taught us ...

ALL: “Our Father, who art in heaven ...”

Prayer of Thanksgiving

LEADER: Lord Jesus Christ, you said, “I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

We thank you for your mercy and forgiveness. Make us living signs of your love for the whole world to see. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

LEADER: May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

ALL: Amen.

LEADER: The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Closing Song Suggestions:

- *You Are my King (Amazing Love)* by Newsboys
- *Trading My Sorrows* by Darrell Evans
- *Light the Fire* by Fusebox
- *From the Inside Out* by Hillsong United
- *Your Grace is Enough* by Matt Maher

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