



First Reconciliation and
First Communion
Preparation Handbook

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General Information for Parents

Your child's third grade year is an opportunity for parents to reaffirm their commitment to the Catholic Faith and to become refreshed and renewed in their faith life. This renewed commitment involves developing a genuine desire to participate in the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church as well as a commitment to uphold the Precepts of the Church:

1. To attend Mass and rest from servile labor on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. To receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year,
3. To receive Communion at least once a year, between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday.
4. To observe the fast days and abstinence days established by the Church
5. To contribute to the material support of the Church.

About the Sacrament of Reconciliation

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1486-1498

To the eyes of faith, there is no evil worse than sin, which wounds God's honor and love. The forgiveness of sins is conferred by the Sacrament of conversion, confession, penance or reconciliation.

The penitent (the one confessing) performs three actions: repents of sins with contrition (feels sorrow for having done wrong and resolves not to commit those sins again), confesses sins to the priest, and intends to make reparation. The priest performs three actions: offers counsel, proposes a penance (actions or prayers to demonstrate the penitent's repentance), and gives absolution (forgives the sins in the name of the Holy Trinity).

All grave (mortal) sins must be confessed. Lesser (venial) sins do not need to be confessed, but it is recommended to do so anyway.

Effects of Sacramental Confession

- Restores the Penitent to God
- Reconciles the Penitent to the Church
- Remits the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins
- At least partially remits the temporal punishment resulting from sin (also occurs through purgatory)
- Provides peace of mind and a clear conscience
- Increases spiritual strength for Christian living

Priests take very seriously the seal of the confessional. Canon law strictly prohibits any priest from discussing anything uttered during sacramental confession, and many priests throughout the world have chosen to be imprisoned or killed rather than violate this sacred seal.

Child's Preparation for Reconciliation

Classroom Participation

All Third Grade Students discuss Reconciliation in their classroom sessions, which typically involve mock confession.

Preparation at Home

Take some time to talk with your child about Reconciliation. It is very common for children to be nervous or afraid before Reconciliation, but they typically feel extremely peaceful and relieved afterward. Please share your own experiences with them.

Sample Questions for Discussion

- How did you feel before, during and after receiving the Sacrament ?
- How do you feel before, during and after today?

Familiarity with the Rite of Penance

Students should be familiar with the Rite of Penance in order to feel more comfortable during their first confession.

Rite of Penance

Penitent: Bless me, Father for I have sinned. This is my first confession.

In future confessions say, "It has been (length of time) since my last confession.

The penitent now lists the sins that (s)he can remember, especially all mortal sins.

The priest will counsel you and perhaps give you advice for how to avoid these sins in the future. He will give you a penance, which will be either an action or some prayers. Ordinarily, he will then ask you to make an Act of Contrition. During First Reconciliation, we will pray the Prayer of Sorrow.

Penitent: O my God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid whatever leads to sin. Amen.

The priest then pronounces the Words of Absolution, and the penitent makes the Sign of the Cross.

The penitent thanks the priest and goes forth to do their penance.

Celebration of Reconciliation

We will celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the month of December.

About the Eucharist:

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church#1407-1419

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life; it is Jesus Himself. In this sacrament we become what we receive: the Body of Christ. At Mass, Jesus acts through the ministry of the priest to offer the sacrifice of our salvation.

Transubstantiation is a theological term that describes the complete change of the substance (what something is in its deepest being) of bread into the substance of Jesus Christ. While the substance changes, the accidents (external features remain the same –what looks like bread tastes like bread, and crumbles like bread is actually Jesus. Because of this change in substance it is proper to offer the Eucharist worship.

The Effects of Receiving the Sacrament of the Eucharist

- An increased and deepened union with Jesus
- A reinforced union with all other believers, who are the Church
- A strengthening to avoid future sins

The Church encourages the faithful to receive the Eucharist every time they attend Mass. Strictly speaking, receiving the Eucharist is only “required” at least once a year. Anyone aware of having committed a mortal sin must go to sacramental confession before receiving Jesus in the Eucharist.

Out of respect and reverence for Jesus in the Eucharist, there are several ways to prepare for Mass. The Church proscribes a one hour fast (this includes gum and coffee) before receiving the Eucharist as a way to remind ourselves that we are about to receive the Son of God. Another way to keep in mind the importance of the Eucharist is to wear respectful clothing to church.

Child's Preparation for First Communion

Formal Preparation

All Third Grade Students will discuss the meaning of the Eucharist in their classroom sessions. They will also practice how to receive the Eucharist as well as all the prayers and music for their First Communion Mass. In addition they will attend a retreat. On this day they will also have a formal presentation of the students at Mass.

Formal First Communion Practice will be held.

All religious articles will be blessed at the practice.

Preparation at Home

Take some time to talk to your child about the Eucharist. Ask what (s)he is learning at their sessions. Ask what they think about it. Share your own memories of your First Communion. Take your family to Mass every Sunday and talk about it afterward.

Some Questions to Keep the Conversation Going?

- Did you have a favorite hymn?
- What do you think the readings were about?
- Did you hear some of Father's comments in his homily?

Notes

First Communion Pennants

We will continue the tradition at St. Thomas this year. We ask that you make a pennant as a family that will be hung from the family pew at Communion. The pennant is intended to be a family project that you and your child(ren) should actively be involved in.

With your guidance, your child(ren) should design the pennant using information (scripture quotes) and art appropriate to the Eucharist.

These pennants will be returned to you after First Communion.

We will provide materials for this project.

Personal Pictures

Please do not take any pictures during the Mass, and please do not come forward and take pictures when your child is receiving the Eucharist for the first time.

This is very distracting to the priest and the children.

You may take individual pictures after we take our group photo.

First Communion Class Photo will be taken immediately following the Mass.

May Crowning

We welcome our First Communion Class to wear their First Communion Attire to the Mass on Sunday following First Holy Communion. They will lead the procession to the Grotto for Crowning. Of course they may wear their First Holy Communion attire.

Dress Code

Girls

- White Dress
- Sleeveless dresses are ok
- Socks or Stockings should be worn with appropriate dress shoes
- No purses or gloves during Mass
- Veils or a wreath are acceptable
- Students will not be permitted to carry anything into church

Boys

- White Dress Shirt and Tie
- Dress pants
- Socks are required with dress shoes
- Students will not be permitted to carry anything into church
- Jackets may be worn – however during the ceremony please remove them

Other Notes:

- Please be certain that you have given us your child's baptism record if not baptized at St. Thomas.
- Catechists will choose children to participate in the First Communion Mass
- Please make sure your child has had a good night's sleep and a healthy breakfast the day of First Communion
- No gum chewing or candy in Church ~ children and adults
- Please remember your child's certificate before leaving .