

Family Reconciliation

Before your family celebrates the Sacrament of Reconciliation, here's a great way to prepare for it in a way that will help it all make sense for everyone. Take some time, after dinner perhaps, to do a family reconciliation.

Tell your family that we are made to be like God, and one of the greatest ways we can act like God is to forgive one another, for God always forgives us. Say that you will take turns hearing from one another about the ways that we have hurt them. Tell them it is important to just listen to the other person's point of view about how we have hurt them. It is not a time to argue about it or be defensive. If another person in the family feels that we have hurt them, then it is important to hear about it. It is also very important to tell your family that when we are telling another family member how they have hurt us, we must be gentle and compassionate about it, because we have hurt others, too.

As parents, we need to make sure that there is a gentle and loving spirit to this sharing. I suggest that you go first, asking your children and spouse to tell you how you have hurt them. It's not easy or pleasant to hear these things, but it is essential if we are to have healthy and loving relationships with one another. We simply need to listen to one another and say, "I'm so sorry that I have hurt you in this way. I'll try to do better. Please forgive me." And when family members ask us to forgive them, they need to hear us say, "I forgive you."

Gently guide your family to say these things to one another. When it is your turn to tell your children how they have hurt you, I suggest that you just mention one thing, and that you balance it by saying how happy you are with them and how much you love them. Be specific about the many ways you appreciate them. When I did this with my wife and children, I told each one how grateful I was for them and for the love that they show me. With the children, I told them that, as far as I was concerned, it was like they had gotten 99 out of 100 on a test, and that's great! I then said that we also need to learn from our mistakes, and that this one thing was something they had done wrong to me or to someone else.

It is natural for most children (and adults!) to get defensive about their mistakes, but if we say it lovingly and gently with words such as "Do you see how you do that sometimes?" and, "Do you understand how that hurt?", it makes it easier for them to accept what is being said. And the best thing about this time of family reconciliation for our children is that the only consequence for them admitting their wrongdoing is forgiveness, not punishment! Once children catch on that this is about receiving forgiveness and joy, they'll love it! And we parents can learn profound lessons, too!