

A SHORT GUIDE TO
First Confession
and
First Holy Communion



Halston Street
Parish



Introduction

Welcome to this short guide on preparing your child for First Confession and First Holy Communion. Your child's journey to this day began at Baptism when they received the Holy Spirit for the first time, received their Christian name and were claimed for Christ to be his disciple in the World. First Confession and First Holy Communion are two very important milestones on your child's journey of faith.

In this short guide we will explore a little about each of the sacraments that your child is preparing to receive. We will do this in a very practical way so that you and your child can explore and discover together.

The Hail Mary will be the prayer we use at the beginning and the end of each topic. I invite you to pray this with your child. Mary is our mother, and she guides us into a deeper relationship with her son. In First Holy Confession your child will experience the mercy and compassion of Christ and in First Holy Communion they will receive his body for the first time. First Confession and First Holy Communion are not the end of anything but rather the next step on a lifelong voyage of discovery.

May the Lord bless you and your child as you prepare for these special days.

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June 2021

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Section 1 – First Confession

Introduction

The confessional is not a torture chamber, but the place in which the Lord's mercy motivates us to do better.
Pope Francis

Confession is not an experience to be dreaded or feared. At its core confession, or the Sacrament of Reconciliation, focuses on helping us to be better people. It is an opportunity for us to unburden our hearts and to experience the mercy and love of Jesus Christ. After all, it is Jesus who we meet in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and in all Sacraments.

As a parent:

- Ask your child how they feel about First Confession?
- If they express any fears, tell them it will be ok – there is nothing to fear
- Help them explore what they want to confess. One way to do this is to help them do a little review of a day or a week and ask, 'have I caused any harm or hurt to others, myself or the world around me?'

Some important notes

- In the past we learned off sins to say at confession – today we like to help people see sin in terms of their impact on others and the world around us. Some examples might be – excluding others from games, using unkind words or gestures, throwing litter on the ground, using bad language or taking things out on others.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation is all about helping your child build better, stronger and healthier relationships with God, others, themselves and the world around them.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation is there to help each of us reconcile (put back together) the broken parts of our lives. It will help your child as they grow and mature to understand that what we say and do has an impact on everyone and everything around us.
- Confession is a wonderful opportunity to get things off our chest. It's not something we should be afraid of but rather something we can look forward to.

First Confession – What to expect

Your child's First Confession will take place in the church. I would very much encourage you to bring your child to Mass as often as possible. Our Parish Church is such a wonderful place to visit with so many different sights and sounds. The more you bring your child to our Parish Church the more they will come to know and value it as a very important place for them – a place they will feel welcomed and at home in.

In advance of the ceremony:

- Talk through this section of the booklet with your child
- Read the story of Zacchaeus with them and ask them what they think is happening in the story (See Appendix 1)
- Pray the Hail Mary with them each day (See Appendix 3)
- Help them reflect on what sins they want to confess.
- Take some time to write down the sins you want to tell the Priest before you come to the church for your First Confession. You can bring these up with you and read them out. When you are finished, you can give these to the Priest who will give you a candle in return.

At the Ceremony

The ceremony for First Confession is a very simple ceremony. We listen together to the Word of God and in particular we listen to the Gospel story of Zacchaeus – the tax collector who welcomed Jesus into his house (See Appendix 1).

When we have finished listening to the readings you and your child will be invited up. A sheet will be provided with all the prayers they need on it. We ask the parent to bring their child to their seat and to introduce them to the Priest. You can sit nearby – a chair will be provided for you.

The Sacrament of Confession goes like this:

The Rite of Confession

- Child: Bless me Father, this is my First Confession
- Priest: You are very welcome. What would you like to confess to Jesus in your First Confession?
- Child: Tells the priest their sins – the times they have hurt others or the world around them.
- Priest: Thank you for making such a good confession. Remember that Jesus loves you and is always there to help you. Never be afraid to come to Jesus for help or to say sorry if you need to. For your penance I ask you to pray 2 Hail Mary's. When you are ready say the 'Act of Contrition'
- Child: O My God, I thank you for loving me and I am sorry for all my sins. For not loving others and not loving you. Help me to live like Jesus and not sin again. Amen.
- Priest: *(Raises his hand in blessing over the child and says the words of Absolution)*. The Priest then congratulates your child and takes their list of sins from them – this symbolises that their sins have now been handed over to Jesus. In return the Priest gives your child a candle to symbolise that they have received the light of God's Love and Mercy in the Sacrament of Confession.

Parent (You can collect your child and light the candle with them at the altar rail)



Penance

The penance the priest gives us to say is an expression of our sorrow for our sins and our commitment to try to do better next time.

When your child has finished their confession, help them light the candle and place it on one of the altar rails. As they light the candle, they can say their penance. Remember to keep an atmosphere of prayerfulness and silence while others are going to Confession.

After the Ceremony

Congratulate your child on such an important achievement. They have received God's Mercy and Compassion into their lives and been strengthened by the healing power of this Sacrament. Please continue to pray with your child as they prepare to receive the Body of Christ for the first time. We will look at how to prepare for this great day in section 2.



Section 2 – First Holy Communion

*“The time of my First Communion remains engraved in my heart
as a memory without any clouds”*

St Therese of Lisieux

At the Last Supper Jesus said to his disciples – *This is my body which will be given up for you; do this in memory of me.* To receive Jesus at any time is a great privilege however to receive Him for the first time is something very special indeed. First Holy Communion Day is a day like no other – *it is the day when Jesus’ very body becomes part of ours. Our lives become intertwined forever.* What a gift to receive!

In this section we will look at how you can help your child prepare for such an amazing experience as well as what to expect on the day.

In advance of the ceremony:

Your child will have been part of the *Grow in Love* Communion preparation programme in their school. Their teachers guide them through this programme which aims at providing a solid foundation as they prepare to receive this Sacrament.

- I would encourage you to ask your child what they remember from the programme. Maybe even tell them what you remember from your First Holy Communion – if you have any photos, show them!
- Get them talking about it – what are they looking forward to? Are they a little nervous maybe? Do they know what to expect on the day?
- Pray the Hail Mary with them every day and ask Mary to help them as they prepare to receive her Son for the first time in Holy Communion.

It’s a very big day! Like all big days, they need good preparation. Alongside preparing the clothes and celebrations, it is VERY important to set aside time to prepare spiritually. First Holy Communion is a spiritual event.

Preparation:

- Make use of the online preparation programmes available on our parish website – www.halstonstreetparish.ie

- **Pray with your child** – take some time each day to pray with them. Use the Hail Mary or another prayer. Encourage them to talk to God and express how they are feeling.
- **Take your child to Mass** – there is no better way to prepare than to go to Mass. Help them understand what is going on at Mass – explain to them what the Priest is doing.
- **Practice at Home** – if you are reading at your First Confession or First Holy Communion. Read out loud in front of others. Take your time – read slowly and clearly. The more practice the better.

At the Ceremony

The Mass for First Holy Communion is very beautiful. The entire parish community delights when we celebrate First Holy Communion – it is a sign of hope for all of us. Please arrive at the church at least 20 minutes before the Mass begins. As you enter the church you will be asked to give your family name at the registration table – you will receive Mass booklets. Each family will be allocated a row in the church and you will be shown to these seats.

Readings: If your child is doing a reading or a prayer, please have a copy of these with you on the day. They will be called up by name when the time comes for their reading.

Receiving Holy Communion

When the time comes to receive Holy Communion, the child and their family will be invited up row by row to receive Communion. Your child will receive Holy Communion in the hand. They place one hand over the other with palms facing up. When the Priest place the Holy Communion in their hand they say ‘Amen’ and place the Communion in their mouth. One parent / guardian should stand with them as they receive. When you have received return to your seat. It is important that we keep a prayerful quiet. Pray with your child when they return to their seat – the Hail Mary or a prayer of thanksgiving to Jesus.

Priest: *The Body of Christ*

Response: *Amen*



Photographs / Photographers / Video

The Archdiocese of Dublin has a clear and robust Child Safeguarding Policy and the taking of photographs / video is covered as part of this. The Policy states that ‘there should be no taking of photographs during First Communion Masses or during Confirmation Masses. There will be ample time available to take photographs before and after the ceremonies.’

Privately hired photographers are not permitted to attend First Holy Communion Mass for the purpose of taking photographs or creating video.

Section 3 – Preparing as a Family

“Mother, father, teach your child to pray, to make the Sign of the Cross: this is a lovely task of mothers and fathers!”
Pope Francis

Sacraments are both family events and community events. They are a time of great rejoicing for all. Like for all important events, we need time to prepare – food, clothes, hair, decorations – however for the Sacraments we also need time to prepare internally – prepare our hearts and souls to meet Jesus. As well as preparing as individuals, we also need to prepare as a family and a parish community. The Parish prepares by praying for you and your child at Mass, by preparing and decorating the parish church for the ceremony and many people will buy Holy Communion cards and have Masses said for your child. It’s a big day for our entire parish family.

How can you prepare at home?

These are some simple suggestions to help you prepare as a family for this special day.

- **Go to Mass as a family** – this is one of the best things you can do. It helps your child become accustomed to the church and the Mass.
- **Practice the Mass responses with your child** – they have a list of Mass responses in their *Grow in Love* book. The more familiar they are with these, then the more they will feel they are part of the Mass and not just a spectator.

- **Pray with your child** – take time each day to stop and pray with your child. Teach them some simple prayers like the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be to the Father.
- **Share Stories** – tell them about what you remember of your First Holy Communion – maybe even show them some photos if you have them. Encourage them to ask their Grandparents about what it was like for them.
- **Share a Family Meal** – The celebration of the Eucharist is the celebration of a family meal. It can often be difficult to find time for everyone to sit down to share a family meal, yet it is very important. Maybe take some time out of the busyness to prepare and share a special family meal. Invite your child to help with the preparation and let it be a celebration in advance of their special day. Take time to thank God before and after your meals for his goodness.
- **Share the Good News** – Take time to read the Gospel story of Zacchaeus together in preparation for their First Confession or the Gospel story of the Last Supper in preparation for their First Holy Communion.
- **Encourage them** – Take time to ask your child how they are feeling about receiving the Sacraments. Ask them what they’ve learned about them. What they are most looking forward to. What might be worrying them. Encourage them to see to the beauty of receiving the sacraments when they meet the Compassionate Jesus in Confession and receive his Body in First Holy Communion.
- **Create a Sacred Space** – A sacred space is a space in our home that helps us focus on God within our family. This can be as simple as you like – a statue, some flowers and maybe a candle for times of prayer is often enough to remind us that God has a seat at our family table.

Prayer for those preparing for First Holy Communion

*Jesus, thank you for loving me.
Please look after my family and friends.
Help me prepare well to receive you in Holy Communion.
Amen.*

Appendix 1 —

The Gospel Story of Zacchaeus (Luke Chapter 19)

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So, he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Appendix 2 —

The Gospel Story of the Last Supper (Luke Chapter 22)

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” “Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked. He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there.” They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So, they prepared the Passover.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I

suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.” After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

Appendix 3 — Simple Prayers

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail, Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory be to the Father

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning is now,
and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Appendix 4 —

My First Confession Practice Page

Before making my First Confession, I will take some time to prepare myself by thinking about something I would like to share with Jesus. I think about times when I might not have loved others or loved myself. I think about times when I might not have helped others or times when I might have been unkind to others. These are what I will bring to my First Confession. I know that I can write them down and read them out as I will be a little nervous on the day. I know that I don't have to get everything perfect. I know that I have nothing to be worried about.

When the time comes for me to go up to make my First Confession, I go up with my Mam / Dad / Guardian and they introduce me to the Priest who says hello and tells me that I am very welcome. I sit down on the chair near the Priest and I bless myself – In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I say: Bless me Father, this is my First Confession.

I know that the Priest will welcome me and make me feel at ease. Now it's my chance to talk to Jesus and to tell him about those times I haven't been loving or kind or helpful. I tell Jesus about these times and tell him that I am sorry. I tell the Priest and when I am finished the Priest gives me a candle and a prayer to say when I am lighting my candle. He tells me that the candle is a symbol of the light of Jesus that shines in us when we have gone to confession.

I now say my Act of Sorrow

O my God, I thank you for loving me

I am sorry for all my sins

For not loving others and not loving you

Help me to live like Jesus and to not sin again.

Amen.

When I am finish saying my Act of Sorrow the Priest says a special prayer and then Jesus forgives the sins I have confessed. I stay quiet as the Priest says this prayer.

When the Priest is finished praying for me, I go with my Mam / Dad / Guardian to light the candle that the Priest gave to me. As we light the candle, we pray the Hail Mary prayer together. I go back to my seat in the church.

I am very happy that I have made my First Confession and that I had a chance to tell Jesus about those things that were troubling me. I look forward to going to confession again very soon. I know that I am now ready to receive Jesus for the first time at my First Holy Communion.

Appendix 5 —

What I want to say to Jesus in my First Confession

Lord Jesus, I am sorry for the times I have not loved as you have asked

Write down an example: _____

Lord Jesus, I am sorry for not being kind and caring to others

Write down an example: _____

Lord Jesus, I am sorry for not caring for the world around me

Write down an example: _____

Lord Jesus, I give these sins to you and ask you to help me to be kinder, more helpful and more loving in the future. Amen.

Act of Sorrow

O My God, I am sorry for all my sins, for not loving others and not loving you. Help me to live like Jesus and not sin again. Amen.

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Layout and printing by
Levins Print.