

HEART SPEAKS TO HEART: THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION

CATECHIST NOTES



SESSION 3

REFLECTION: The Call to Love (pp.38-51)

Before the session begins:

- Prepare a focal point (which may this week include a children's Bible open at the story of Moses receiving God's commandments; a card with the 10 Commandments written out on it; a card with the Examination of Conscience on page 48 written out on it; etc.)
- Serve refreshments (when this is possible)
- If the Help and Guidance handouts are to be distributed during the session or in advance for Session 4, have the sheets ready for distribution at the appropriate point in the session
- It may be a good idea to have one or two photocopies of the relevant pages of *Heart Speaks to Heart* (pages 38-51) in case some participants have forgotten their books!

Catechists should be ready to help participants who may be struggling with the discussion. It may help to have pictures or images available or to point participants to this week's focal point.

Catechists should also be aware of families' stories, lives and struggles.

See suggested timings for each section of the session below: it is anticipated that pages 38-41 will take 10 minutes in total; pages 46-47 may take 15 minutes in total.

The Lead Catechist notes below are intended to be prompts for the sort of things Lead Catechists may say rather than scripts to be read out.

Welcome and Prayer

3-5 minutes

Lead Catechist:

- Welcomes everyone
- Asks participants to turn to **page 38** in their books
- Reads out the title of the session and says something like:
"In this third session we will be thinking about the commandment of Jesus to love and how that helps us to make good choices; we will be thinking too about the bad choices we deliberately make when we sin."
- Asks everyone to join in the **prayer on page 39** ("Lord Jesus, You are the Lord of Life ..."), leads everyone in making the Sign of the Cross and then leads the prayer

Pages 40-41 ("Thinking about the choices we make")

5-7 minutes

Lead Catechist:

- Asks participants to turn to **page 40**
- Says something like:
"I hope you've had chance to read these pages, think about the questions at the bottom of page 41 and record your answers in your Reflection Book.
1. What preparation for First Reconciliation have you been doing at home since last time?
2. What are some of the right things and some of the wrong things that people do? The questions on page 48 may give you some ideas.
3. Why do you think that these things are right or wrong?
Take time now to share together your responses to these questions."
- May encourage participants to read pages 40-41 again before they talk about the questions

Pages 42-43 ("Today's virtue is Reflection")**5 minutes**

Lead Catechist:

- Asks participants to turn to **page 42**
- Says:
"This week we will be thinking about the virtue of Reflection. The virtues help us grow in friendship with Jesus and become the best person we can be. Let's read what it says about Reflection on page 42."
- **EITHER** asks participants to read page 42 together **OR** reads the text aloud to the whole group **OR** invites three participants to read out a paragraph each to the whole group

Pages 44-45 ("God's Commandments ...")**10 minutes**

Lead Catechist:

- Asks participants to turn to **page 44**
- Says something like:
"Let's listen now to a story from the Bible. As you listen, underline words which stand out for you on pages 44-45 and think about what they may mean. After you have listened to the story, share with each other the words and thoughts which meant something to you. Begin to write and draw your thoughts in the spaces beside the Bible passage. You can finish this off at home."
- **EITHER** reads the Bible passage about God's commandments slowly and clearly **OR** invites participants to read the passage to one another **OR** plays the audio of the text (found under **Audios Bible Passages > Reconciliation Session 3 – God's Commandments**)
- Asks participants to share and write down or draw their thoughts

Page 46 ("The 10 Commandments")**7-8 minutes**

Lead Catechist:

- Asks participants to turn to **page 46**
- Says something like:
"Read the left-hand column and the top of the right-hand column on page 46 together, taking it in turns to read a paragraph each, and then read the questions at the bottom of the right-hand column and talk together, trying to answer one or two of these questions."

Page 47 ("What is Love?")**7-8 minutes**

Lead Catechist:

- Asks participants to look next at **page 47**
- Says something like:
"When do you feel loved? Think for a moment and then write your thoughts in the space provided. Beneath the question are the outlines of two stone tablets. Think about 3 ways that you show love for God and write those 3 ways on the left-hand tablet. Think about 3 ways that you show your love for others and write those 3 ways on the right-hand tablet."

Pages 48-49 ("An Examination of Conscience")**5 minutes**

Lead Catechist:

- Asks participants to turn to **page 48**
- Says something like:
"Read **page 48** together, taking it in turns to read a paragraph each, and talk together about the questions there. If time, read **page 49** too."

Note: there may not be time to do this section during this session and catechists may advise participants to do it all or (if begun) to complete it at home.

Page 50 ("At home")**5 minutes**

Lead Catechist:

- Goes through the home/church activities on **page 50**
- If there has not been chance to complete all the tasks on pages 48-49, encourages participants to finish this off at home (children and adults working together)
- Asks the children to read pages 54-55 and think about the questions there in preparation for the next session

Evaluation**5 minutes**

Lead Catechist:

- Asks participants to consider two questions, talk together about them and write down thoughts on post-its.
- The two questions are:
 - 1. What did you enjoy in the session? [2 minutes]**
 - 2. If we were to do the session again, what could make it even better? [2 minutes]**

Page 51 ("Praying with reflection")**5 minutes**

Lead Catechist:

- Invites participants to sit quietly and close their eyes.
- Says something like:
"I'm going to say a little phrase three or four times. Say these words silently to yourselves and continue to say them silently after I finish speaking. I will signal the end of this quiet prayer time" [perhaps by ringing a bell]
- Says aloud, "I love you, Lord: with all my heart" three or four times and then allows for 2-3 minutes silence
- Gives the pre-arranged signal (after 2-3 minutes silence)
- Asks participants to look at the right-hand column on **page 51**
- Reads the words at the top of the column and invites everyone to pray the final prayer (the *Our Father*) together

Thank everyone for their participation in the session and let them know you are available after the session if anyone has any questions.

Finish on time!

Try and meet as a catechist & helpers team after the session to discuss how the session has gone and what could be done better in future sessions.

Please feel free to annotate these *Catechist Notes* and use them to help your reflection for future sessions.

Below you will find some teaching on relationships, forgiveness and reconciliation which you may like to share with parents and carers.

Teaching from the Catechism: Relationships, Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Below there are some reflections (based on YOUCAT and the teaching of the Church) on some of the main topics dealt with in Session 3.

Personal relationships are vital for our happiness and flourishing. God Himself lives as Father, Son and Spirit; persons who are eternally related to one another with perfect intimacy and love. As creatures made in His "image" (Genesis 1:27), we find fulfilment when we reflect His own life of love in our own relationships. God created humans to know and love Him, but also to form loving relationships with others. God teaches us through experience and revelation that "it is not good that a human being should be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

In any relationship, an ability to say "sorry" is very important. Apologising has immediate effects for the person giving and the person receiving the apology. However, it is important that the apology is genuine. In order to make a genuine apology, thought and preparation is needed. The person making the apology first needs to understand what they have done wrong, and to appreciate the harm which they have caused. When making the apology, they need to admit what they have done wrong, and offer to make up for the damage which they have caused.

Each human person possesses, from their conception, a dignity which cannot be destroyed. We possess this dignity because, even before we were conceived, God loved us, planning to create us in His own image, to offer us redemption through Christ, and to guide us to eternal life.
(See *YOUCAT*, Page 162. Para.280)

God asks parents to care for their children, so that through love and respect they might support both their physical growth and the development of their children's relationship with God.
(See *YOUCAT*, Page 204. Para.372)

Humans are created by relationships. We need relationships with others to survive and to flourish. Our most important relationship is our relationship with God, because we are meant to love Him, and because He loves us more than even our family and friends are able to. This means that our relationship with God should even take priority over our relationships with family and friends.
(See *YOUCAT*, Page 206. Para.374)

Jesus gives us many examples of genuine apology, such as the words of the Prodigal Son in his famous parable (Luke 15:21) and in the "Our Father", which we pray at the end of this session. In our family life, we often deal with disagreements and misunderstanding. We also frequently try to repair the damage caused by such conflicts, with varying degrees of success.

People often feel "saying sorry" is a sign of weakness or an inappropriate admission of guilt. Yet these attitudes perhaps show a failure to appreciate what a true apology involves. Merely making a verbal apology does not repair a damaged relationship. A false or grudging apology can even do more harm than good, by adding insult to injury. Conversely, even if we sincerely mean to apologise for our action, apologising too frequently can demean ourselves before others, perhaps indicating that we overestimate the harm caused by our actions or that we lack self-esteem.

A fruitful apology opens a space for dialogue about the harm which has been caused to a relationship, allowing the realistic admission of responsibility and progress towards reconciliation. As we saw in Session 2, such an apology requires courage. We see an example of this in Ryan's examination of conscience on page 49. He also admits his theft of the cake to Grandpa, who is ready to forgive him; Droogo likewise apologises for his actions at the end of each of his stories.

There are psychological, physical and emotional benefits to 'forgiveness'. We cannot be free or content if we are overburdened with guilt or, by contrast, wrongly held responsible for something we have not done. Many psychologists point to the fact that admitting what we have done wrong helps the healing process and heightens trust, by showing honesty and a willingness to change behaviour. Doing our best to right wrongs which we have caused also helps to remove the strain of guilt. We carry stress in our bodies and lowering stress helps with our general wellbeing. Being in good emotional relationships helps us to feel connected and supported, especially in difficult times.

The secular world and other religions have many processes to achieve healing and forgiveness, but Jesus helps us to achieve perfect reconciliation with God and with others. By offering Himself as a perfect sacrifice to God, Christ allows us to make a perfect apology to God for our sins. Christ's sacrifice also assures us that we can be reconciled with God, allowing us to experience God's forgiving love. In turn, this gives us the love and strength we need to forgive others.

“How much more will the blood of Christ (who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God) make our conscience clean from dead works so that we may worship the living God!” (Hebrews 9:14)



On the next page you will find an *Examination of Conscience for Adults* (it is a model: please adapt it as you see fit). Please encourage parents and carers to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as their children prepare for First Reconciliation and use this examination to help them. It has been produced here in such a way that you can you could download it separately and print it out on card to give to parents and carers.

Examination of Conscience before Reconciliation

Before we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is important that we reflect on the ways in which we have harmed our friendship with God through sin. In prayer, we need to recall our sins, because to receive God's forgiveness through the Sacrament we need to feel **CONTRITION** (that is, regret) for our sins and to **CONFESS** to the priest all of the serious sins which we can remember committing.

The process of reflecting on our sins is often called an **EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE**.

It can be difficult to remember all the ways in which we have turned away from God's love through our sin. Catholics often prepare to confess their sins by reflecting on **biblical passages** which explain our responsibilities as followers of Christ. Helpful passages include Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew chapters 5-7) or St. Paul's teachings on life in the Spirit (1 Corinthians chapters 12-13 or Galatians chapter 5).

The **TEN COMMANDMENTS** (found in the Old Testament in Exodus chapter 20, verses 1-17 and again in Deuteronomy chapter 5, verses 6-21) are of particular help as we reflect on the ways we have lived our lives: they provide a comprehensive list of our responsibilities to God and to one another.

Below you will find a series of questions to help you to reflect as you are making an Examination of Conscience. The questions are organised around the Ten Commandments, which are listed according to their traditional Catholic numbering. As you go through the questions, you may wish to make a mental or written note of occasions on, or ways in, which you have failed to follow God's Commandments. Although the list of questions below is quite long, our obligations to God and to one another can be summarised in the words of Christ:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbour as yourself."
(Matthew 22:37-40)

Following Christ, however, is not primarily a matter of obeying a set of rules. We develop our relationship with God by becoming the sorts of people who consciously and habitually make good choices. We need to develop the **VIRTUES** which enable us to grow in moral character and to imitate Christ. Relevant virtues are listed under each Commandment. In addition to remembering whether we have failed to follow God's Commandments, we can ask ourselves whether there are any virtues which we need to develop ourselves and as a family to help us to follow God more faithfully.

A Guide for an Examination of Conscience

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol.

- Do I give time to God in prayer every day?
- Have I deliberately chosen to doubt or to deny God's existence or the Revelation which he has given to the Church?
- Have I worshipped any other God than the Lord?
- Have I engaged in superstitious activities such as the practice of magic, astrology, horoscopes, tarot cards or communication with spirits?
- Do I obsess over social media trends or people, so that they have become objects of my worship or devotion?
- Does my relationship with God mean more to me than achieving wealth or power or fame?

A virtue to cultivate: FAITH

The Second Commandment

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

- Have I used God's name in vain – do I swear?
- Have I failed to uphold any promises which I have made to God, or to others?
- Have I prayed for another person to be hurt or to suffer loss?

Virtues to cultivate: RESPECT & FEAR OF THE LORD

The Third Commandment

Remember to keep the Lord's Day holy.

- Is Sunday an important day for me?
- Have I missed Holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days?
- Do I try to pay attention when I am at Holy Mass or in prayer?
- Have I fasted when the Church asks me to (on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday), and abstained from meat on Fridays?
- Have I neglected to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation for a long period, or deliberately failed to confess certain sins which I have committed since last receiving the Sacrament?
- Have I received Holy Communion without confessing serious sins before I received Communion?

A virtue to cultivate: PRAYERFULNESS

The Fourth Commandment

Honour your father and your mother.

- Do I care about my relatives?
- Do I spend time with them, help them and love them in an appropriate way?
- Do I argue with my family?
- Have I encouraged my family to follow Christ by my words and by my example?
- If I have children, do I bring them to church and teach them to follow the Lord by teaching them to pray and to love their neighbour?
- Have I acted with respect and care towards my friends, colleagues and to others more generally?
- Have I broken the law, or disobeyed those in positions of authority over me?

Virtues to cultivate: COURTESY & RESPECT

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not kill.

- Have I tried to kill or to physically harm any anyone?
- Have I tried to kill or to physically harm myself; have I advised anyone to kill or to physically harm themselves?
- Have I hurt anyone with my words, or argued with them unfairly?
- Have I lost control with other people through anger or wished them harm?
- Have I engaged with media (e.g. particular TV programmes, films, computer games, etc.) which encourage violence?
- Have I abused myself or others through drugs or an excess of alcohol?
- Do I try my best to forgive others who have hurt me?
- Have I always acted with love towards others?

Virtues to cultivate: GENTLENESS & FORGIVENESS

The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

- Have I engaged in sexual activity with anyone other than my husband or wife?
- Have I engaged in inappropriate sexual activities by myself?
- Have I followed the Church's teaching that sexual acts should be open to the possibility of producing children?
- Do I care for my husband or wife?

Virtues to cultivate: LOVE & CHASTITY

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

- Have I taken what is not mine? If I have, have I returned it or made restitution?
- Do I waste time at work or at home?
- Do I spend too much time on my phone or on social media?
- Do I gamble excessively?
- Do I pay my debts promptly?
- Do I try to share what I have with the poor?
- Do I ask if I want to borrow anything?
- Do I give back everything that I have borrowed?
- Do I try to cheat?
- Do I hoard goods in times of crisis?
- Do I share with others and give generously to charity when I am able?
- Have I shown care for the environment and for the social conditions of producers when buying or using goods?

A virtue to cultivate: JUSTICE

The 8th Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

- Have I told lies?
- Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?
- Have I committed perjury (lying under oath)?
- Have I spread false or hurtful rumours about anyone?
- Do I talk about others behind their backs?
- Do I think badly of anyone?
- Do I encourage others to make the wrong choices?
- Do I try to recognise the good in others and to praise them, or do I judge people harshly and treat them as my inferiors?

A virtue to cultivate: HONESTY

The 9th Commandment

You shall not desire your neighbour's wife.

- Have I watched pornography for sexual gratification?
- Have I fantasised about sex with someone who is not my husband or wife, or encouraged feelings of lust towards them?

A virtue to cultivate: TEMPERANCE (SELF-CONTROL)

The 10th Commandment

You shall not desire your neighbour's goods.

- Am I greedy or selfish?
- Am I jealous of what other people have?
- Do I complain because I don't have the latest gadget or designer clothes?
- Do I try to follow the good examples which others set for me?
- Do I try to live simply, with respect for the environment?

A virtue to cultivate: SIMPLICITY

