



Office of the Bishop

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
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“Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Mt 19:13).” These words of Jesus remind us why the Church is eager to prepare children for the Sacraments in which they personally encounter Christ. One of the encounters with Christ that children most need, children from 7 to 97, is the one that happens in the Confessional, when the Good Shepherd gathers into His arms the sheep that has gone astray. We need to know Christ’s love for us in our sinfulness. We need to taste the joy of being forgiven.

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation helps us to recognize and acknowledge our sins and at the same time never to doubt God’s love, for His love is stronger than sin and more powerful than death. Every time we go to Confession, we are responding to His call, we are flooded with His mercy. Christ enlightens our mind and teaches us to think thoughts of peace and not of affliction. As Pope John Paul II said in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in America (#26), *“It is not simply a matter of thinking differently in an intellectual sense, but of revising the reasons behind one’s actions in the light of the Gospel.”*

The capacity to reason and to accept responsibility for one’s actions evolves gradually in a child. At each stage of growth, a child’s moral conscience needs to be trained and nurtured through prayer, study, and the Word of God. He or she needs to learn how to examine his or her conscience. Each needs to develop the ability to judge his or her actions in relation to objective norms of morality. This leads naturally to the need to confess one’s sins and to have genuine sorrow and an eagerness to make amends.

Where does all this spiritual and moral development best happen? Where do we first learn the path to holiness? It is of course within the family, with the help of the parents, aided by the pastor and local parish, and guided by the light of God’s grace.

I pray that this new Policy and these Guidelines of the Diocese of Phoenix will assist our children to be well prepared for their First Confession and to adopt a regular practice of receiving God’s forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. It is also my hope that it will help us all to appreciate more fully the richness of God’s mercy. Christ came to call sinners, and He assures us that there is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over 99 who know not their need for forgiveness (Cf. Lk 15).

Promulgated on January 25, 2006

+Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix

Sr. Jean Steffes, C.S.A.
Chancellor