

Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation Guideline for Children Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish, Grand Rapids

All Saint Thomas School students in grades K-8 celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation twice per year, generally once in Advent and once in Lent. All Saint Thomas Monday night Religious Education students in grades 1-8 celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation once per year in either Advent or Lent.

Reconciliation is celebrated in two separate forms ("Form A" and "Form B"), as allowable in the Roman Ritual of Penance. This practice began when Father Jim came to Saint Thomas as a way to introduce our students to a life-long process of self-reflection and reconciliation in an age-appropriate manner. We feel this promotes a way of thinking that suggests that reconciliation is a regular part of our lives as Catholics rather than a scary, one-time event that happens to you in grade school.

Students receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time in kindergarten and in subsequent years until the fourth grade in Form B. Form B simply means that students gather as a class with Father Jim. Father Jim reads to the children from the Word of God and then leads them through an examination of conscience that is age appropriate. The students then approach Father Jim individually for the confession of sin and individual absolution. For the final portion of the service, the students and Father Jim gather together once again.

In the fourth grade, our students do not receive this Sacrament for the first time. For this reason we no longer call the fourth grade celebration "First Reconciliation." Rather, we call it Reconciliation Celebration. During the fourth grade year, all of our Parish students receive a complete and total catechesis of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and are also taught what Father Jim commonly refers to as "The art of examining one's conscience." At this time, they are introduced to the Sacrament in Form A. Form A simply means individual preparation, individual examination of conscience, and individual confession of sin, absolution, and penance. This is the first time that students at Saint Thomas complete this process entirely on their own, in the manner of adults. Students continue to receive the Sacrament in this (Form A) through the eighth grade.

In addition to making reconciliation a natural and regular occasion in the lives of our Catholic children, this practice also fulfills the requirements of our Church with regard to this Sacrament. The Catechism of the Catholic Church instructs, "Children must go to the Sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time" (#1457.58).