

Synodal Catechesis

Session: Forgiveness & Sacramental Reconciliation

Blending the US Bishops' protocols for this topic with the synodal process

Prototype and experimental outline for synodal catechesis

Bill Huebsch | Autumn 2025

Designed for **parents, grandparents, youth, and children gathered around tables** as fellow disciples. May also be used in a traditional classroom. The session will be animated by a catechist or team of catechetical companions.

Theme: *Jesus heals our hearts and helps us forgive.*

1. Welcome & Hospitality — “Gather as One Family” (10 minutes)

- Warm greeting, name tags or table signs
- Light a candle at each table

Facilitator words:

“We gather as a family of faith, trusting that God’s mercy is greater than our mistakes and that Christ always welcomes us back.”

Opening Ritual:

Invite each table to complete this sentence in one word or phrase:

When I hear the word “forgiveness,” I think of...

Music (soft refrain): “Lord, Have Mercy / Kyrie Eleison” or simple Taizé chant (*optional*)

Goal: Belonging, safety, and gentle entry into the theme.

2. Listening to Life — “Where Forgiveness Touches Real Life” (10 minutes)

Prompt for table sharing:

“Think of a time when someone forgave you or you forgave someone.

How did it feel?”

Children’s alternative:

- Draw a heart and color one side “hurt” and the other “healed,” then explain.

Guiding note:

No detailed personal confessions—honor privacy, keep it pastoral and simple.

Goal: Recognize that forgiveness is part of daily life and affects our hearts.

Step 3 (Enhanced): Encounter with Scripture & Tradition

Proclamation of the Word

Luke 15:11–32 — *The Prodigal Son*

Pause in silence.

Short Catechetical Teaching

Facilitator:

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Today we hear about a father who runs to forgive his child.
Jesus gives us this story to show what God is really like —
always ready to welcome us home, always ready to heal our hearts.

Then, **with a visible Catechism nearby** (important symbolic gesture):
The Church teaches the same truth.
The Catechism tells us that God's mercy is without limit
and that when we turn back to God,
God comes to meet us with forgiveness and peace.

CCC references (explained simply, not recited):

- *God never tires of forgiving us; His mercy is infinite. (CCC 1846)*
- *The heart of the Gospel is the revelation of God's mercy in Christ. (CCC 1849)*
- *The Sacrament of Reconciliation restores us to God's grace and reconciles us with the Church. (CCC 1468–1470)*
- *Confession is a moment of healing and a celebration of God's forgiveness. (CCC 1468)*

Short, pastoral paraphrase for the room:

So when we go to Confession, we aren't going to face judgment.
We are going to meet Jesus,
who runs to us like the father in the parable,
ready to forgive, heal, and bring peace.

Intergenerational Touch

Invite participants to turn to one another:

"Share one way you've ever felt forgiven — by God, by a friend, or in your family."
Children draw a picture of God hugging them or welcoming them home.

4. Shared Reflection & Discernment — "What God Is Saying to Us Today" (15 minutes)

Guided spiritual conversation (one person speaks at a time, others listen):

- *"What part of this story touched your heart?"*
- *"Where do you need God's healing or peace today?"*
- *"How do we create a home that forgives like the father in the parable?"*

Family Conversation Card:

Parents whisper a blessing to children:

"God always welcomes you. You are loved, no matter what."

Children turn to parents and say:

"God loves you too."

Goal: Practice holy listening, tenderness, and family blessing.

5. Commitment to Mission — "Living Mercy This Week" (10 minutes)

Invite **one concrete step of mercy**, written or drawn on a shared wall or poster:

Examples:

- Say "I'm sorry" to someone this week

- Pray “Jesus, forgive me & help me forgive”
- Help someone who feels left out
- Choose kind words instead of angry ones
- Prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a family

Mini-teaching (1 minute):

“Reconciliation isn’t only a sacrament—it’s a way of living.
God forgives us so we can forgive others and bring peace.”

Goal: Move from learning to living mercy in daily life.

6. Prayer & Sending — “We Are a People of Mercy” (10 minutes)

Simple Rite of Healing Prayer

- Quiet music
- Invite each person to place a hand on their heart

Leader:

“Lord Jesus, you heal hearts.

Make our homes places of mercy and peace.”

Communal response:

“Jesus, help us forgive as you forgive us.”

Blessing gesture:

Parents and grandparents trace the sign of the cross on children’s foreheads.

Children offer a peace gesture back (hug, hand on shoulder, or simple “Peace be with you”).

For all:

“Go in peace to love and forgive one another.”

Blow out table candles together — a communal act of commissioning.

Goal: Seal the grace of the gathering; send families into mission as mercy-bearers.

Catechist Notes for Implementation

- Keep tone gentle, not moralizing: the focus is mercy, not failure.
- Use age mixes intentionally—children teach adults openness; adults teach depth.
- Emphasize reconciliation as **relationship restored**, not merely “rules followed.”

This session is less about *explaining forgiveness*
and more about **experiencing God’s merciful heart together**.

Why the doctrinal approach works

This approach:

- Grounds teaching in **Scripture first** (the pastoral heart)
- **Holds up the Catechism** visibly and with reverence
- Quotes or paraphrases briefly — not lecture style
- Shows **continuity between Jesus’ words and the Church’s teaching**
- Frames doctrine as **good news, not rules**

It satisfies those who want doctrinal clarity without sacrificing the **synodal, relational tone**.

Optional Phrase for Leaders in the Room

If a pastor or DRE wants to make it explicit, they might say:

In this synodal approach, we begin with real life, listen to God’s Word,
and stand firmly on the Church’s teaching —
not as a list of rules, but as the wisdom of the Church
helping us follow Jesus faithfully and joyfully.

Teaching Posture

Hold the Catechism **not as a textbook**, but as a **book of love that protects the dignity, freedom, and salvation of God’s people**.

That’s the tone that disarms critics and serves the Gospel.