**Sacrament of Reconciliation**

***“There is no saint without a past, no sinner without a future.” St. Augustine of Hippo***

The *Grow in Love* series stresses God’s unconditional love for each of us. The Gospels are replete with stories of forgiveness and reconciliation. Through parables and healing Jesus emphasises the need and importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. Even while Jesus hung on the cross he forgave those responsible for his crucifixion. Forgiveness is indeed the attribute of the strong” *(Gandhi)*

A two thousand year old story from the Middle East tells of a man who left his house with an empty bucket every morning. Later he returned with the bucket still empty, but with a smile on his face. His wife began to wonder where he went and what he gave him such joy. So one day she followed him. As she watched, she saw him fill his bucket with water from a nearby stream, and then, after carrying it a short distance, he poured it on the roots of an old tree. After seeing this she understood perfectly well what gave her husband such joy. For you see, they lived in Jericho, the tree was a sycamore tree and her husband’s name was Zacchaeus. Every morning he watered the memory of his forgiveness and the roots of his loving way of life.

Like Zacchaeus, we all sin and make bad choices; we all hurt other people; we all need to be forgiven and to be reconciled with God who loves us. Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus is evidence that no one is excluded from receiving God’s forgiveness and that it is God who always takes the initiative. In the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus met total acceptance and came to know that the love and forgiveness of God comes with no conditions attached. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we can all have a similar experience to Zacchaeus when we admit our sins and experience forgiveness. In this way we reconnect with God and with other people.

We all need friends who can see past our flaws and still love us; we all look for love, pardon, forgiveness and for affection that is freely given. When we find these we would be wise to follow the example of Zacchaeus in the story above, and water the locations, the memories and the loving experiences regularly.

**Examination of Conscience**

Did I pray to God today?

Did I do as my teachers and family asked?

Was I kind to my brothers, sisters or friends?

Was I lazy?

Did I steal?

Did I share my things with others?

Did I tell the truth?

Did I borrow anything without returning it?

Is there anything else I want to say sorry to God for?

**The path to reconciliation**

The path to reconciliation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation begins when

1. We recognise through our examination of conscience that we didn’t love others and didn’t love God.
2. we confess our sins to the priest
3. we accept our penance and pray the *Act of Sorrow*
4. we receive absolution from the priest and are forgiven
5. we try to live like Jesus again.

**Act of Sorrow**

O my God,

I thank you for loving me.

I’m sorry for all my sins.

For not loving others and not loving you.

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