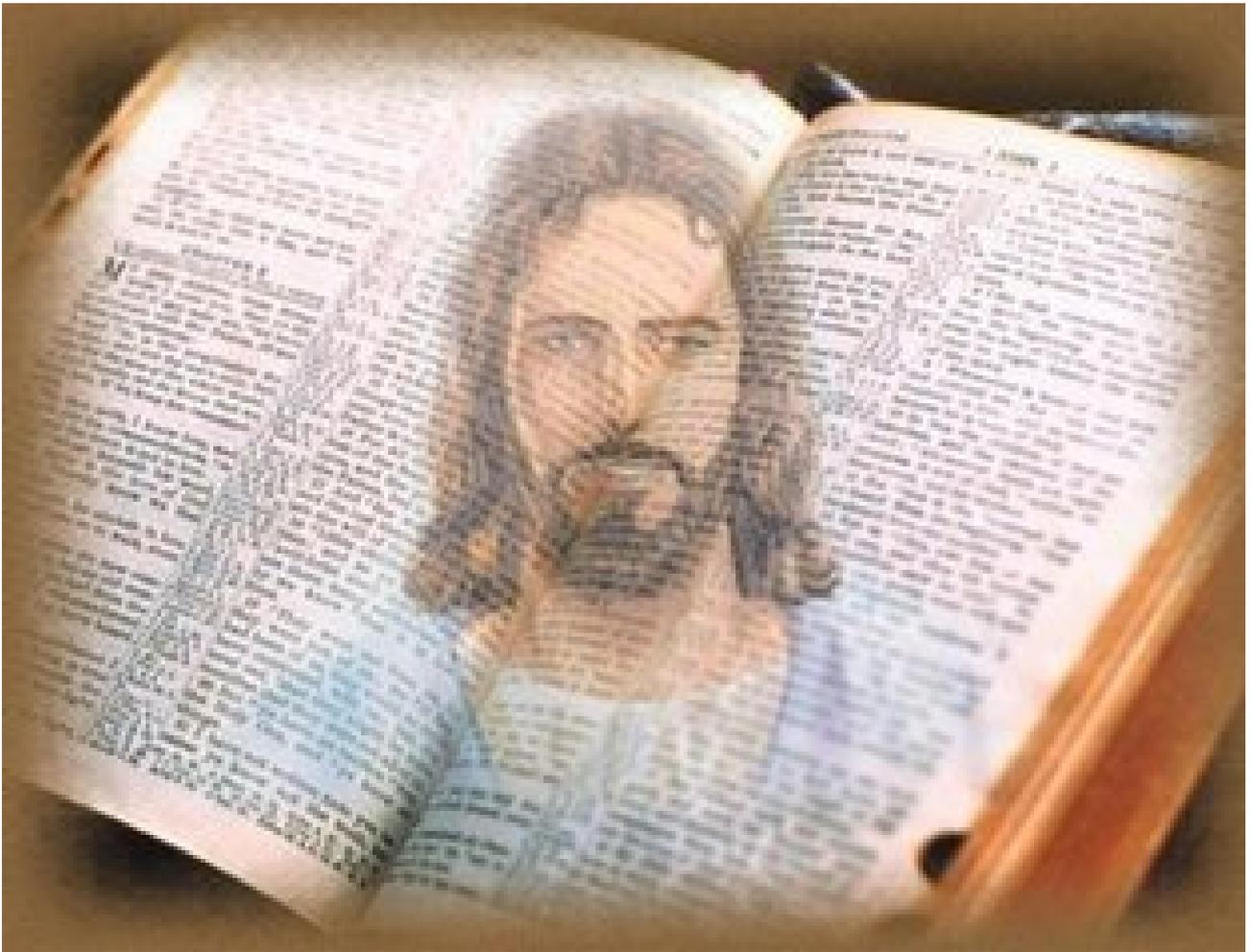


Gospel Based Catechesis



“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Mat 4:4

Cycle A - Phase 1

Greetings Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For those using this programme for the first time, we hope this overview will be useful. For those, who have used the programme before, we hope that this will help as a refresher.

The aim of Catechesis is to lead children into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. It is essential that Catechists understand that this is our objective. When we pair this with the meaning of the word Catechesis, the vision behind this programme will become apparent.

Catechesis means “echoing the Word”. If our aim is to lead children into relationship with Jesus and Jesus is the Word made flesh, then Gospel Based Catechesis starts to make sense.

Any Catechetical programme is as good as the Catechist makes it. This programme has been designed to follow the liturgical cycle and the sessions have been taken mainly from the Loyola Press Sunday Connections with doctrinal content from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Additional content sources are acknowledged as applicable.

The Sunday Connection is an American based programme and the Catechist will need to adapt lessons as applicable to suit our country and heritage.

The material includes all three Sunday readings but the sessions are centred on the Gospel reading. The Catechist needs to read all three and reflect on the key message as highlighted in the session and the background to the Gospel.

The Catechist needs to refer constantly to the Liturgical Calendar in order to highlight Feast Days and special celebrations (e.g. Patronal Feast Days) that may not be included in the material.

There has been a paradigm shift in Catechetics from the classroom model towards focussing on relationship with Christ and this programme - if used in the way it is intended - facilitates this and is flexible enough to incorporate related Parish activities.

In fact, this shift is not new – it has been in effect since Vatican II and the Church has recognised the need for a programme that will achieve this. The Catechetical Commission of the Archdiocese of Durban in recognition of this through various training workshops have inspired us to search for a programme that will embrace the objective of Catechesis. We have used the programme in our Parish for a number of years now and we can see the difference in the children and Catechists voyaging on this journey of faith. The material from the Loyola Press website is invaluable in this regard. We hope that this programme will bring about a renewal in Catechetics and that God, through the Holy Spirit will keep us faithful and committed to this calling.

Some key elements of the changes are highlighted below:

- Children are placed in age appropriate Phases as opposed to Grades (Classes)
- The Phases are made up as follows:
 - Phase 1 – Grades R, 1 and 2
 - Phase 2 – Grades 3 & 4 – (First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion)
 - Phase 3 – Grades 5,6 & 7
 - Phase 4 – Grades 8 & 9
- The First Reconciliation & First Holy Communion classes begin the year combined and then split up after Easter in order to focus on specific Sacramental preparation. The Phase 1 group continues with the Gospel based programme.
- Pre-confirmation and Confirmation Classes run separately and do not form part of this programme

- During Holy Week, we do not have sessions but send faithwork (not homework) home with the children. This is centred on the family as far as possible.
- The programme is not to be used in isolation – Catechists are required to ensure that the sessions are expanded in order that the children entrusted to them reach the basic levels of understanding of our Faith at the relevant age group. Age appropriate activities are to be added to enhance the sessions – e.g. skits / songs / debates / dramatization / crafts etc. We have provided links to various websites to assist in sourcing this material. It is very important that Catechists use material in keeping with the doctrines and dogma of the Church and the use of additional resources must be in keeping with this.

The following websites are useful:

sadlierreligion.com

<http://www.sadlierreligion.com/webelieve/weeksliturgy.cfm?section=resource&id=248>

loyolapress.com

<http://www.loyolapress.com/sunday-connection.htm>

sermons4kids.com

http://www.sermons4kids.com/not_fair.htm

catholicmom.com

<http://catholicmom.com/category/sundays-gospel/>

Every Parish is different and commences Catechism sessions at different times at the beginning of the year. In order to try and ensure that we accommodate as many as possible, we have provided material from 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time up until the end of the liturgical year, The Feast of Christ the King. We encourage Catechists to prepare family Advent reflections or activities for the children to take home.

Although we have started with the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, it is important that the first session or the first two as may be required, of any year is used for the Catechist and children to get to know each other and to set the framework for the year ahead, starting with an explanation of the Liturgical Seasons or at least a recap depending on whether this is the first year you are using the programme or not. We have included additional resources to assist in this regard.

The environment is very important and must be seen as completely different to a classroom situation, with key focus on a prayer table, draped with the colour of the season, candles and the Word of God. Appropriate pictures and other décor to compliment the session should be used. All of this and much more is covered in the training sessions, which must be attended for this programme to be effective. The training is for experienced and beginner Catechist alike.

It is incredibly difficult to try and summarise the concepts of the programme but we hope that this overview will provide some insight.

We continue to pray for all who have answered the call to lead children into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ in the immensely rewarding and challenging ministry of Catechesis and ask for your prayers.

Yours in Christ

Rita Willard (082 7130090)

Jacqui Grant (082 5672560)

Parish of Bellair-Queensburgh

Catechist's Prayer

Gracious and all-loving Father, out of love for all people you spoke your Word who became flesh for our salvation.

May your Word transform me so that the message of your Son, our Lord, may be echoed through my teaching. Allow me to guide the hearts of those whom I teach in such a way that they will enter more deeply into your way of truth and salvation. Grant me the insight needed to lead them to know, love, and serve you.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may they become hearers and followers of your Word, so that they might help transform the world to follow the way of life to which your Son has called us all, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

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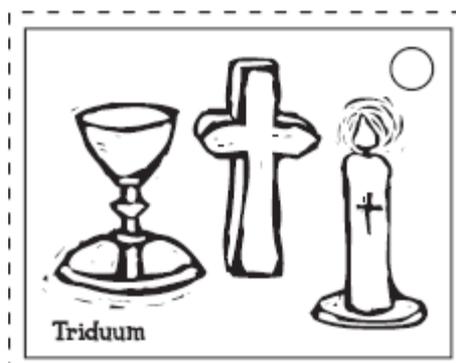
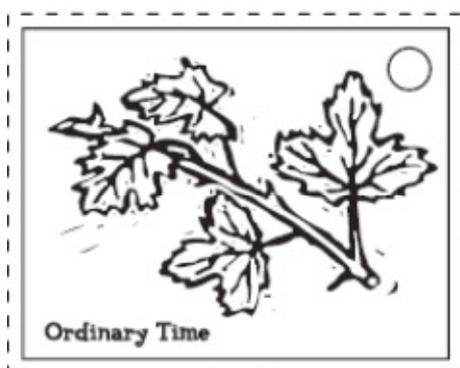
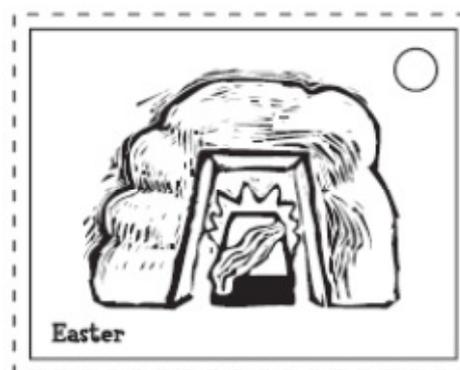
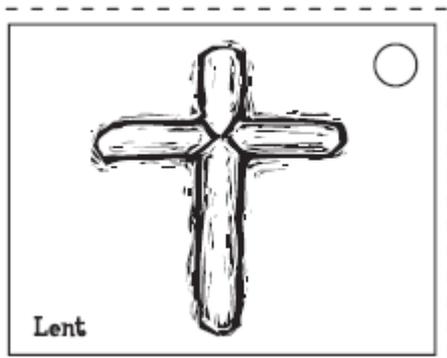
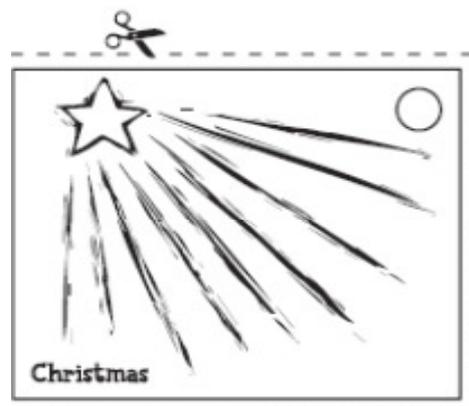
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The Liturgical Year

The following idea is from the Sadlier We believe programme (Chapter 6).

Our ancestors in faith carried journey staffs. They used the staffs to probe unknown ground or support themselves as they walked. Celebrating the liturgical seasons each year is like making a journey of faith in and out of love for Jesus.

This is a beautiful and meaningful way to introduce the liturgical season and can be used to enhance your environment. Use a stick or an old mop or broom handle. Colour each season's card according to the liturgical season represented. Cut out the cards and write a prayer for the season on the back of each card. At the beginning of each season, tie the card to the staff. Pray the prayer often during the season.



Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 8:23-9:3

The people in darkness have seen a great light.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 27:1,4,13-14

The Lord is our refuge, our light, our salvation.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17

Paul urges the community at Corinth to be united as people baptized in Christ's name.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 4:12-23

Jesus begins to preach in Galilee and calls his first disciples. (shorter form Matthew 4:12-17)

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel describes the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (called the Synoptic Gospels), Jesus' public ministry begins after his baptism by John the Baptist and after his retreat to the desert where he was tempted by the devil. When Jesus returns from the desert, he hears that John has been arrested.

The first part of today's Gospel places Jesus' ministry in the context of the writings of the prophet, Isaiah. Matthew wants to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies given to the people of Israel, and he refers to Isaiah to do so. Isaiah says that the Messiah will begin his ministry in Galilee, the land of the Gentiles. When Jesus begins to preach in Galilee, Matthew points to his ministry as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, proof that Jesus is the Messiah.

When Jesus called his first disciples, the Gospel tells us that the fishermen (Peter and Andrew, James and John) dropped everything to follow Jesus immediately. Yet this Gospel tells us little about the prior experience that the fishermen had of Jesus. Did they know him? Had they heard him preach? What kind of person must Jesus have been to invoke such a response? We can imagine that Jesus was a powerful presence to elicit a response as immediate and complete as these first disciples gave.

The Gospel concludes with a description of the ministry that Jesus begins in Galilee. Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom of God with his work. He teaches in the synagogue and preaches the kingdom. His ability to cure people's diseases and illness is a sign of the kingdom. In Jesus' ministry, we already begin to see the Kingdom of God among us.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus' life reveals God to us (#547-#548)		Signs of Jesus' followers: serving

Making the Connection

Jesus invited Peter and Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing trade to follow him. He promised that they would catch followers for Christ. They immediately followed Jesus as he traveled to many areas curing people of their ailments.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 4:12-23

Jesus begins to preach in Galilee and calls his first disciples. (shorter form Matthew 4:12-17)

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask: ***If you had just begun winning a soccer game with your friends and your parents came walking along and told you to stop playing, how do you think you'd feel? Would you want to finish your game first?*** Wait for the children to respond.
2. Then say: ***In the Gospel this week, we hear about four men who felt they were doing something very important. Then Jesus asked them to follow him instead. They were fishermen, and they went fishing every day so that they could sell the fish. But, Jesus wanted them to do something else.***
3. Say: ***Let's listen to today's Gospel and see what Jesus asked his first disciples to do.*** Read Matthew 4:12-23.
4. Ask: ***What did Jesus ask Peter and Andrew and James and John to do?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.) Say: ***He asked them to leave their fishing jobs and follow him instead. He promised that if they did so, they would bring home more than fish. They would bring people home to God. Those fishermen really liked what Jesus said, and they followed him.*** Ask: ***What did the disciples do when Jesus asked them to follow him?*** (They left their boats and immediately went with him.)
5. Say: ***When we learn how much Jesus loves us, we want more than anything to be close to him.***
6. Pray together that we will always be willing to be disciples of Jesus. Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

The Presentation of the Lord

First Reading

Malachi 3:1-4

The Lord you seek will come to the temple.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 24:7,8,9,10

The Lord is the king of glory.

Second Reading

Hebrews 2:14-18

Jesus became like us in order to save us.

Gospel Reading

Luke 2:22-40 (Shorter Form: Luke 2:22-32)

Simeon recognizes the infant Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Background on the Gospel

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the temple. The Presentation, which is celebrated 40 days after Christmas, is not mentioned in the other Gospels. Only Luke tells the story, most likely because he writes for Gentile Christians who are not familiar with the Jewish rite of presentation and purification. In addition, the intent of Luke's Gospel is to show that God's promise to Israel, fulfilled in Jesus, extends to Gentiles.

Luke recognizes Joseph and Mary as faithful Jews who bring Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem. Here they present their firstborn son to the Lord. Jesus is thus consecrated as required by the Law of Moses. Present in the temple at this time are Simeon and Anna. Both are awaiting the restoration of God's rule in Israel.

Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would see Christ the Lord, the Messiah, before he died. The holy man immediately recognized the infant Jesus as the promised Savior, a "light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." Anna also recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise of redemption and spoke about him to all.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is the light of the world (#454)	Sacramentals: Celebrating Candlemass**	We must prove ourselves faithful followers by reflecting His light

****During Candelaria or Candlemass, candles are blessed, lit, and borne in a procession in celebration to Jesus being the light of the world. In AD 638, Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, proclaimed the importance of the celebration in his sermon to the church, stating: "Our bright shining candles are a sign of divine splendor of the one who comes to expel the dark shadows of evil and to make the whole universe radiant with the brilliance of his eternal light. Our candles also show how bright our souls should be when we go to meet Christ." The candles are generally considered to represent the inner light of Christ, which he brought to share with the world.** (<http://www.sharefaith.com/guide/Christian-Holidays/candlemass.html>)

Making the Connection

Children at this age like to receive gifts. Simeon and Anna and the people of Israel waited hopefully for the greatest gift of all—a Savior. We too must prove ourselves faithful followers of Jesus by being “gifts” to all we meet.

Gospel Reading

Luke 2:22–40 (Shorter Form: Luke 2:22–32)

Simeon recognizes the infant Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Materials Needed

- Bible
- Presentation written on a sign or chalkboard
- Symbols of Baptism, such as holy water, candle, oil, white garment, and/or baptismal certificate

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Say: ***In this Sunday’s Gospel, we hear about Jesus’ Presentation. Does anyone recognize inside this long word a shorter word that would help us understand the reading? (present) Surely we know what a present is. Raise your hand if you’ve ever received a present. What’s another word we use to describe a present? (a gift) That’s right. Jesus is the greatest, the greatest gift we have ever received.***
2. Explain: ***The Gospel for this Sunday is long so we are going to read only part of it. Listen carefully and then we’ll talk about it afterward.*** Read aloud Luke 2:22–32, omitting verse 23 if desired.
3. Say: ***Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to be presented to God. Your mother and father also brought you to church to be presented to God. Look at the items in the front of the room. What are they a sign of? (Baptism) That’s right. Your parents presented you to God in church just as Jesus’ parents presented him to God in the Temple. Baptism is the first sacrament we receive.***
4. Continue: ***When Mary and Joseph arrived with baby Jesus, a holy man named Simeon was in the Temple. He was waiting for someone who would save him and all the people of Israel. He was waiting for a savior. Who is our Savior? (Jesus) Simeon knew the minute he saw the baby Jesus that he was the one he was waiting for—a Savior for all people. Simeon recognized the birth of Jesus as a great gift.***
5. Say: ***We recognize, just as Simeon did, that Jesus is the greatest gift ever given. All of us who are followers of Jesus are also asked to be “gifts” to others by caring for them. What are some ways we can show we care? (Accept all reasonable answers.)***
6. Conclude by praying the Glory Be to the Father with the children.

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 58:7-10

In the work of justice, light shall break through darkness.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 112:4-9

The just person will be a light in the darkness.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Paul shows that he came to Corinth preaching Christ crucified.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus teaches that his disciples are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Following upon the teaching of the Beatitudes, Jesus uses the now familiar metaphors of salt and light to describe the life of discipleship. We take salt and light for granted in our society, but these commodities were more precious in ancient cultures. Just as now, salt was used in Jesus' time for flavoring, as a preservative, and as a healing agent. Similarly, the widespread use of electricity in the modern world makes us less aware of the value and importance of light in our lives.

Still, our familiarity with this passage from Matthew's Gospel speaks well to the abiding power of the imagery that Jesus presented. Jesus' call to be salt for the earth and light for the world powerfully states our mission as Church and as Christians. Our commitment to social justice flows from the exhortation that Jesus gives us in today's Gospel. Some of the activities that this commitment leads us to are given more concrete expression as the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, console those who mourn, and so on, we show ourselves to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. When we do these things with the community of faith, the Church, we are indeed acting as "a city set on a mountain" that cannot be hidden!

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
God loves each of us (#356)	Eucharist: Prayer of the faithful	Making a difference / helping others

Making the Connection

Jesus said that we should improve life in the way that salt improves the flavor of food. We should be light for the world so that others will follow us in praising God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus teaches that his disciples are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Materials Needed

- Unsalted crackers
- A spray bottle of water
- A salt shaker

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Bring unsalted crackers to class (one for each child), a spray bottle filled with water, and a saltshaker. Give each child a cracker and have them all take a small bite. (Make sure there are no wheat or other food allergies.) Ask whether they like the taste. Then spray their crackers with a small amount of water and sprinkle some salt on each cracker. Ask the children to take another bite and judge its taste now.
2. Say: ***Even in Jesus' time, people used salt to make things taste better.*** Show the saltshaker. Continue: ***But, if we have salt on our table and we never use it, will it do any good for the taste of our food?***
3. Say: ***Listen to this week's Gospel and hear what Jesus said about salt.*** Read Matthew 5:13-16.
4. Ask: ***How might we make life better for others just as salt makes food taste better?*** Help the group identify at least three or four things that children might do. Say: ***When we do these things, we show ourselves to be disciples of Jesus.***
5. Conclude in prayer together by singing "This Little Light of Mine."

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Sirach 15:15–20

The eyes of God see all he has made.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 119:1–2,4–5, 17–18,33–34

Happy are those who walk in the way of the Lord.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 2:6–10

God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:17–37

I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Matthew continues the Sermon on the Mount with a three part instruction by Jesus on the Way of Life in the kingdom of heaven. Today's reading is part one and deals with the Law. Part two deals with worship and religious practice and contains the Lord's Prayer. Part three deals with trusting God and deeds of loving service to our neighbor.

When Matthew speaks of "the Law and the prophets" he means the whole Scripture. When the Messiah brings the fullness of the kingdom none of scripture will be done away with. Instead it will be fulfilled. Matthew's Jesus does not overturn the Law of Moses, nor does he set his followers free from the Law. He requires his followers to go beyond the Law by doing more than the Law requires.

The Law condemned murder. Jesus condemns anger. The Law condemned adultery. Jesus condemns even lustful looks. As Jewish Christians who had always been faithful to the Law Matthew's community need a way to understand the difference Jesus and the kingdom he brings have made. They affirmed that God had always been at work in history through "the Law and the prophets." But God's work goes beyond that to be embodied by the Messiah who reveals the definitive will of God. The written scriptures and their interpretation in tradition are surpassed by Jesus whose life and teaching are the definitive revelation of the will of God.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is our teacher (#561)	Eucharist: Our Father	Signs of Jesus' followers: keeping the commandments

Making the Connection

Children at this age consider the right course of action to be the one that allows them to avoid punishment. Jesus teaches us that obeying God's Law of love is to be done not just to avoid punishment but to show love to others.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:17–37

I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Draw an octagon on the board (the shape of a STOP sign, with eight sides)
2. Ask if any of the children recognize this shape. Explain that the shape is an octagon meaning that it has eight sides.
3. Tell the children that this shape is also used for a traffic sign and that it is colored red and has one word on it. (a STOP sign)
4. Say: ***We have STOP signs and other traffic signs to protect us and to keep us safe. These signs remind us that we have laws to obey.***
5. Write the word *LAW* on the board. Ask for volunteers to explain what a law is. (a rule that we must obey)
6. Say: ***In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus talks about the Law that God has given us and how he has come to fulfill this Law.***
7. Read aloud Matthew 5:17–37.
8. Ask: ***What does it mean to fulfill something?*** (to make it complete)
9. Say: ***Jesus tells us in this Sunday's Gospel that the best way to understand God's Law of love, is to listen to Jesus and to live like him.***
10. Conclude this time together by praying the psalm for this Sunday.

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Leviticus 19:1–2, 17–18

Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.

Psalm

Psalm 103: 1–4, 8, 10, 12–13

Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 3:16–23

Are you not aware that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Gospel

Matthew 5:38–48

My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors.

Background on the Gospel

The last two antitheses offered in the Sermon on the Mount deal with love of enemies. We should not look at “an eye for an eye” as an inordinately strict punishment. It is actually meant to limit acts of revenge by making sure the punishment is not excessive but fits the crime. However, Jesus asks his followers to take a different approach by resisting retaliation altogether. The response to a stronger person who slaps us on the cheek, takes us to court, or demands a service of us is not to resist. Similarly, for a weaker person, such as a beggar or borrower, we are to give him or her what he or she asks for. Those who are called to the Kingdom of Heaven are to go beyond the way the world usually works and serve God’s kingdom here on earth.

The other difficult demand of those who are called to the kingdom is to embrace the enemy. There is no command in the Old Testament to hate individuals in a personal or vindictive way. But there is a religious stance that calls one to hate evil and to distance oneself from those who participate in evil. In contrast, Matthew emphasizes that love of God and love of neighbour are the fundamental commands on which all else depend. Because God’s love is unconditional, we are to strive to love as God does, though, of course, it is challenging. Is it even possible?

The key is in the final verse. We are to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect. Matthew uses the Greek word *telos*, which is probably better translated here as “complete.” We are not to be perfect as in doing everything correctly, that is, as in being absolutely morally correct. We are to be perfect as in striving to reach the completeness we are called to in the Kingdom of Heaven. Attempting to love our enemies is part of striving for that completeness.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
God calls us to holiness (#1970)	Sacrament of Reconciliation	Forgiving and being forgiven

Making the Connection

Children at this age often struggle with sharing. They understand the difference between being stingy and generous, and at times are tempted to get even with someone for being stingy or greedy.

Gospel

Matthew 5:38–48

My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors.

Materials Needed

- 1 small bag of small fish-shaped crackers or other snack, plus 30 additional crackers. (Keep the bag of crackers out of sight.)
- 3 bowls

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Arrange children in three groups of fewer than 10 children each, and give each group a bowl.
2. Explain that you will give each group a snack to share while they work.
3. Pour 15 crackers in the first bowl, 12 crackers in the next bowl, and 3 crackers in the last bowl.
4. When the children ask why they all didn't get the same amount, ask: ***What can you do so that each group has the same amount of crackers?*** (The groups with more crackers can share with the group that has less.)
5. Explain that if the group with 15 crackers gives 5 to the group that only has 3, and the group with 12 crackers gives them 2 crackers, then each group will have enough for everyone.
6. After the crackers are shared evenly, give each group more crackers. Say: ***In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus teaches us to share generously with others, giving even more than what is asked instead of trying to get even with those who have wronged us.***
7. Read aloud Matthew 5:38–48.
8. Say: ***What Jesus asks his disciples to do may sound hard. However, he wants them to know that to be his followers, they must not try to get even or take revenge. Instead, they are to give more than what is asked for.***
9. Invite the children to pray silently; asking the Holy Spirit to help them recognize the times they have tried to get even with someone and for the grace to be generous with them in the future.

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

It is important that the Catechist include information or discussion on Ash Wednesday in this session.

First Reading

Isaiah 49:14–15

Can a mother forget her infant? Even should she forget, I will never forget you

Psalm

Psalm 62:2–3,6–9

Only in God be at rest, my soul.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 4:1–5

The Lord will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and manifest the intentions of the heart.

Gospel

Matthew 6:24–34

Enough, then, of worrying about tomorrow. Let tomorrow take care of itself.

Background on the Gospel

Today's Gospel reading is from part three of the Sermon on the Mount's three-part instruction by Jesus on the way of life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Part three deals with trusting God and performing deeds of loving service to our neighbour.

The Aramaic word *mammon* does not have a negative connotation. It means "property" or "money." What Matthew is pointing out is that since human beings are not self-sufficient, we are dependent on something outside ourselves. It should be God, not the material goods we own. This is not to say that we don't need material goods. But the reading goes on to remind us not to be anxious. Look at the beauty of nature. The birds do not sow or reap. The flowers do not work or spin cloth. Yet they are provided for by God. Human beings are worth much more than these. How could God not provide for us as well? If what we place first in our lives is God's kingdom and his justice, we will have what we need.

Matthew concludes by reminding us to address each day's problems as they come, confident that we are in God's loving care. He is a loving father who holds the whole world in his hands. He will certainly care for us.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
God cares for us and creation (#302-05)		Care for creation

Making the Connection

Children at this age have had experiences of taking care of something—a younger sibling, a pet, or a plant, for example. Use their experiences to build a greater understanding of how God cares for us

Gospel

Matthew 6:24–34

Enough, then, of worrying about tomorrow. Let tomorrow take care of itself.

Materials Needed

Drawing paper and crayons

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask the children to think of something that they have taken care of and to draw a picture of themselves caring for it.
2. Invite volunteers to share their work and to explain what caring for this person or object involved. Ask: ***What could happen if you did not act responsibly?*** (The plant would die; the pet could get lost; the sibling could get hurt.)
3. Explain how God cares for all of us.
4. Read aloud this Sunday's Gospel, Matthew 6:24–34.
5. Say: ***In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells us to look at how the birds and flowers are cared for. He reminds us that if God cares so much for the birds and the flowers, we can be sure that God will care for us even more. God knows what we need and provides for us.***
6. Share a personal story of a time when you experienced God's care. Then invite volunteers to share stories of their own.
7. Lead the children in quiet prayer, inviting them to use their own words to thank Jesus for taking care of them and all living creatures.
8. Close by singing an Alleluia that the children know by heart.

First Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

First Reading

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Eve and Adam eat from the tree that was forbidden to them by God.

Psalm

Psalm 51:3-4,5-6,12-13,17

A prayer for mercy

Second Reading

Romans 5:12-19 (shorter form: Romans 5:12,17-19)

Through the obedience of Jesus, many will be made righteous.

Gospel

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus fasts for 40 days in the desert and is tempted by the devil.

Background on the Gospel

In each of the three Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke), after Jesus' baptism by John, Jesus is reported to have gone to the desert to fast and pray for 40 days. In each case, while in the desert, Jesus is tempted by the devil.

Matthew and Luke give more detail than Mark does, but each one tells how the devil tempts Jesus in the desert. In Matthew, as in Luke, the devil presents three temptations to Jesus. The devil tempts Jesus to use his power to appease his hunger; he tempts Jesus to put God's promise of protection to the test; and he offers Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will worship the devil. In each case, Jesus resists the temptation, rebuking the devil with words from Scripture.

The account of Jesus' temptation in the desert is filled with allusions and parallels to the Old Testament, including the story of the people of Israel. The Israelites spent 40 days wandering in the desert in Exodus, for example, and Jesus spends 40 days in the desert. As the Israelites were tempted during the Exodus, so too is Jesus tempted.

Each temptation offers insight into both God and the human condition. Jesus' rejection of the temptations shows that he will not put God to the test. Grounding himself on the word and authority of Scripture, Jesus rebukes the devil, confident in God's protection and faithfulness.

As we start our journey through Lent, our Sunday readings call us to adopt the same confidence that Jesus had in the face of temptation: God's word alone will suffice; God's promise of protection can be trusted; God alone is God.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is truly human and truly divine (#454)	Ash Wednesday	Making choices

Making the Connection

Jesus was tempted three times in the desert by the devil. Jesus refused to serve the devil and resisted temptation by quoting Scripture. We can also learn to resist temptations by drawing strength and confidence from God's word in Scripture.

Gospel

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus fasts for 40 days in the desert and is tempted by the devil.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Say: ***Once Jesus went into the desert to pray because he loved God very much. Jesus stayed there 40 days without eating anything. The devil thought he could tempt Jesus to do wrong because Jesus was so weak from not eating. Three times the devil tried to get Jesus to believe in him instead of God, but Jesus only believed what God had said in the Bible.***
2. Say: ***In the Bible, we can find God's promises to us and to all people who love God. We can trust the Bible to tell us what's right and wrong. Listen as I read the story about Jesus in the desert as it is told in the Bible.***
3. Read the Gospel, Matthew 4:1-11, to the children.
4. Ask: ***What did the devil try to do to Jesus?*** (He tried to tempt him to prove that he was God's Son.) ***What did Jesus do?*** (He resisted temptation and told the devil to go away.) Say: ***Jesus succeeded in resisting the temptations of the devil because Jesus believed all that God had taught in the Bible. We can resist temptations too if we believe and trust in God's Word, which is found in the Bible.***
5. Conclude by praying together that we will trust God's word to us as Jesus did and resist temptation. Pray together the Lord's Prayer with particular emphasis on the words "and lead us not into temptation."

Second Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

First Reading

Genesis 12:1-4a

God promises Abram a great blessing.

Psalm

Psalms 33:4-5, 18-20, 22

God's mercy is upon those who trust in God.

Second Reading

2 Timothy 1:8b-10

Through God's grace we are called to holiness.

Gospel

Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus is transfigured on the mountain in the presence of Peter, James, and John.

Background on the Gospel

For the second Sunday of Lent, we move from Jesus' retreat to the desert to his Transfiguration. Each year on the first Sunday of Lent, our Gospel tells the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. On the second Sunday of Lent each year, we hear the story of Jesus' Transfiguration.

The story of Jesus' Transfiguration is told in the three Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In each of those Gospels, the Transfiguration follows Jesus' first prediction of his death and his teaching about the costs of discipleship. Jesus' Transfiguration is a promise of Jesus' glory, his Resurrection.

On a mountain in today's reading, a voice affirms that Jesus is God's Son in words reminiscent of the voice at Jesus' baptism. In addition, the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mountain connects this story with God's relationship to the people of Israel. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets, respectively. Together with Jesus, they represent God's complete Word.

The Transfiguration occurs in the presence of just three of Jesus' disciples: Peter, James, and John. In Matthew's Gospel, those disciples are among the first whom Jesus calls. The three men are identified as an "inner circle" among Jesus' disciples when Jesus asks them to accompany him to the Garden of Gethsemane just before his arrest.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus fulfills the Old Testament (#592)	Celebrating Lent	Making choices

Making the Connection

Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a mountaintop. Jesus' appearance was changed, and Moses and Elijah appeared. God's voice spoke from a cloud, saying that Jesus was God's own Son. Only after Jesus' Resurrection from the dead would the disciples fully understand what they had observed on the mountain.

Gospel

Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus is transfigured on the mountain in the presence of Peter, James, and John.

Materials Needed

- Drawing paper
- Crayons

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Say: ***In the Gospel this week, an amazing thing happens to Jesus. First, Jesus goes up a mountain with three of his friends—Peter, James, and John—and he became bright like a light. Second, two important men, Moses and Elijah, are seen with Jesus. They lived before Jesus, and everyone respected them because they had been strong and had obeyed God no matter what happened. Third, God himself says something very important about Jesus. Let's listen to today's Gospel to find out what God said.***
2. Read the Gospel, Matthew 17:1-9, to the children.
3. Ask: ***What did God say about Jesus?*** ("This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.") ***What happened to Jesus?*** (His face became bright and his clothes became white.) Tell the children that the change in the way Jesus looked was called the Transfiguration.
4. Ask: ***Who went to the mountain with Jesus?*** (his friends: Peter, James, and John)
5. Say: ***To help us remember what happened to Jesus, let's each draw a picture of Jesus on the mountain.***
6. Distribute paper and crayons and let each child draw their picture of the Transfiguration.
7. Using the pictures, create a place for prayer and gather the group in this area. Pray together that we will recognize Jesus as God's Son in our lives and listen to him as God told us. Pray together Psalm 33 or pray the Lord's Prayer.

Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

First Reading

Exodus 17:3-7

God tells Moses to bring forth water from the rock.

Psalm

Psalm 95:1-2,6-9

Sing joyfully in the presence of the Lord.

Second Reading

Romans 5:1-2,5-8

Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

Gospel

John 4:5-42

Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman at the well.

(shorter form: John 4:5-15,19b-26,39a,40-42)

Background on the Gospel

On this Sunday and the next two Sundays, we break from reading the Gospel of Matthew to read from John's Gospel. The Gospel of John is the only Gospel not assigned to a particular liturgical year. Instead, readings from John's Gospel are interspersed throughout our three-year liturgical cycle.

In today's Gospel, the dialogue between Jesus and a woman from Samaria is among the most lengthy and most theological found in Scripture. The most startling aspect of the conversation is that it happens at all. Jesus, an observant Jew of that time, was expected to avoid conversation with women in public. The animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans should have prevented the conversation as well. The woman herself alludes to the break from tradition: "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" Yet Jesus not only converses with the woman, he also asks to share her drinking vessel, an action that makes him unclean according to Jewish law.

The initial conversation between Jesus and the woman is better understood if we consider the importance of water, especially in the climate of Israel. At first, the woman understands Jesus' promise of "living water" in a literal sense: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." With no running water, the daily trip to the well by the women of the community was of paramount importance. The women of the town would have travelled to the well in the early morning, but this woman came to the well at noon, the hottest time of the day. The timing of her visit is a clear sign that she is an outcast within the Samaritan community. We learn in her conversation with Jesus that she is an outcast because of her "many husbands."

Behind the conversation lies the animosity and rivalry between the Jews and the Samaritans. Samaritans shared Jewish ancestry, but Samaritans had intermarried with foreigners when they lived under the rule of the Assyrians. Samaritan religion included worship of Yahweh, but was also influenced by the worship of other gods. When the Jews refused Samaritan help in the building of the Temple at Jerusalem, the Samaritans eventually built a temple for themselves at Mt. Gerizim (the same mountain mentioned by the woman at the well). Like the Jews, the Samaritans believed that a Messiah would come.

The high point of the conversation is when Jesus reveals himself to her as the Messiah. His answer to the Samaritan woman's questions about worship is meant to predict a time when worshipping in truth and spirit will become the way to worship.

After the conversation, the Samaritan woman becomes a disciple. Even though she is an outcast and not a Jew, she returns to her town to lead others to Jesus and to wonder whether she has found the Messiah. The Samaritan townspeople return with her to meet Jesus for themselves, and many are said to come to believe in him.

The significance of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman has many levels. The first is personal: The woman is herself converted to belief in Jesus as Messiah because he knows her sin but speaks with her just the same. The second is social: Having come to know Jesus as the Messiah, the Samaritan woman becomes an evangelist to her own people.

The third level of the story is educational: Jesus uses his encounter with the Samaritan woman to teach his disciples that God's mercy is without limit. The disciples return from their shopping quite confused to find Jesus talking with a Samaritan, and a woman at that! But the conversion of the Samaritan townspeople is a foretaste of the kind of open community that will be created among those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus sends us to tell his good news (#851)	Celebrating Lent	Appreciating God's gift of our senses

Making the Connection

Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for water from a well. The woman is surprised because Jews and Samaritans didn't speak to each other. Jesus uses this opportunity to tell the woman about the water that brings eternal life and to tell her that he is the Saviour sent by God. Many Samaritans come to believe when they hear the story and see Jesus.

Gospel

John 4:5-42

Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman at the well.

Materials Needed

Salted pretzels and a small cup for each child

- Eye dropper

Note: *Be aware of food allergies and make arrangements for those with special eating needs.*

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Bring a small cup for each child, an eyedropper, and salted pretzels. Give each child some pretzels to eat. After a few minutes, ask whether anyone is thirsty. Give the children a few drops of water using the eyedropper. Ask whether that was enough to drink.
2. Then say: ***If I gave you all the water you'd like to drink today, do you think you could go until next week without drinking anything? Water is so important that without it, people become sick in a very short time.***
3. Say: ***In the Gospel this week, Jesus used the need for water to explain that he offers us life in heaven with him that will not depend on water. When we have faith in Jesus, we have eternal life. Let us listen carefully to that Gospel reading.***
4. Read aloud the short form of today's Gospel, John 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42.
5. Say: ***We heard Jesus and the Samaritan woman talk a lot about water. When do we use water in church? (We bless ourselves with water when we enter church. We are baptized with water.)***
6. Say: ***Lent is a time when we remember what Baptism means. We also try harder to live as followers of Jesus. When we were baptized, we were like the woman at the well: We came to know Jesus as our Saviour, and we were sent to bring the good news of Jesus to others.***
7. Conclude by praying together today's psalm, Psalm 95, or the Lord's Prayer.

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

First Reading

1 Samuel 16:1b,6-7,10-13a

Samuel is sent to anoint David as king.

Psalm

Psalm 23:1-6

The Lord is our shepherd.

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14

The Ephesians are told to live as children of light.

Gospel

John 9:1-41 (shorter form: John 9:1,6-9,13-17,34-38)

Jesus heals the man born blind and reveals himself to him as the Son of Man.

Background on the Gospel

As we did last week, we are reading today from the Gospel of John. In today's Gospel, the healing of the man born blind invites us to focus on the physical and spiritual aspects of sight and light. In the first part of today's Gospel, we hear Jesus' response to a prevalent belief of his time: that misfortune and disability were the result of sin. That belief is why Jesus is asked the question of whose sin caused the man's blindness—his own or his parents'. Jesus does not answer directly, but instead gives the question an entirely different dimension—through this man's disability, God's power will be made manifest. Jesus then heals the man.

The healing is controversial because Jesus heals on the Sabbath. The Pharisees, the religious authorities of Jesus' time, understood that the law of Moses forbade work (including healing) on the Sabbath. They also have trouble believing that Jesus performed a miracle. To determine whether the man was really born blind, the Pharisees question him and his parents. The man challenges the leaders of the synagogue about their assessment of the good that Jesus has done. In turn, they expel the man for questioning their judgment.

The final revelation and moment of enlightenment comes when the man born blind encounters Jesus again. Having heard the news of his expulsion, Jesus seeks out the man born blind and reveals himself to him as the Son of Man. In this moment, the man born blind shows himself to be a man of faith and worships Jesus. Jesus replies by identifying the irony of the experience of many who encounter Jesus: Those who are blind will now see, and those who think they now see will be found to be blind.

As in last week's Gospel about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, today's reading has many allusions to Baptism. The washing of the man in the pool of Siloam is a prototype for Christian Baptism. Through the man's encounter with Jesus, the man born blind is healed, his sight is restored, and his conversion to discipleship begins. The man born blind gradually comes to a greater understanding about who Jesus is and what it means to be his disciple, while the Pharisees (those who should see) are the ones who remain blind.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus helps us see God (#73)	Celebrating Lent	Appreciating the gift of sight

Making the Connection

Jesus smears mud on the eyes of a blind man and enables him to see. When people question the man, he tells them what happened. Then Jesus reveals that he is God, and the man worships him.

Gospel

John 9:1-41 (shorter form: John 9:1,6-9,13-17,34-38)

Jesus heals the man born blind and reveals himself to him as the Son of Man.

Materials Needed

Index card prepared as instructed in step 1

- Red cellophane (the size of an index card)
- A pair of eyeglasses
- Magnifying glass
- Dried mud

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Before class write *I believe* in blue ink on an index card. Then write any other words in red ink to cover up the blue letters. If necessary in order to block out *I believe*, write another set of red letters over them. Put the card aside.
2. Show the children a pair of glasses, a magnifying glass, and some dried mud. Ask: ***How do you think these things are the same? After hearing the children's ideas, tell them that those things have been known to make people see better.***
3. Say: ***We know how glasses and a magnifying glass work—but, mud? Well, in the Gospel this week, Jesus used mud to bring eyesight to a man who had been blind since he was born.***
4. Read aloud today's Gospel in its shorter form, John 9:1,6-9,13-17,34-38.
5. Ask: ***How did Jesus use mud to help the man to see?*** (He smeared mud on the man's eyes and then told him to wash it off.) Say: ***When the man did as Jesus said, he could see all the things around him that he had never seen before. But, the most important thing he could see was that Jesus is God, because only God could perform such a miracle.***
6. Ask: ***Do you remember what the man said to Jesus?*** Even if the children remember, show them the index card. Ask for a volunteer to hold the red cellophane over the card and to tell the class what is written on the card. If the children cannot read yet, have the volunteer tell the letters he or she sees so you can read them to the class and explain what they spell.
7. Say: ***Sometimes even if we have good eyesight, we can't see well. When things don't go our way, for instance, we may not see that God still loves us. [Show index card.] Sometimes life gets jumbled up, and we need God's help to figure it out. But when we have faith in Jesus, he will help us see God's love.***
8. Pray together that we will have eyes of faith to see Jesus and his love for us. Pray together today's psalm, Psalm 23, or pray the Lord's Prayer.

Fifth Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

First Reading

Ezekiel 37:12-14

God will open the graves and restore the people of Israel.

Psalm

Psalm 130:1-8

With the Lord is forgiveness and mercy.

Second Reading

Romans 8:8-11

The Spirit of God dwells in you.

Gospel

John 11:1-45 (shorter version *John 11:3-7,17,20-27,33b-45*)

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Background on the Gospel

Our Gospel on this day, the fifth Sunday of Lent, is again taken from the Gospel according to John. The reading from John continues the break from Cycle A's focus on the Gospel of Matthew. Today's Gospel reading recounts another sign, or miracle, found in John's Gospel, the raising of Lazarus. As our catechumens move closer to the celebration of their Baptisms at the Triduum, today's reading invites us to reflect upon what it means to call Jesus the Resurrection and the life.

The context for the story of the raising of Lazarus is the Jewish leaders' growing animosity toward Jesus. Jesus has been in Jerusalem, taking part in the feast of the Dedication, which we have come to know as Hanukkah. The people have been pressing him to declare plainly whether he is the Messiah. Jesus tells them to look to his works, which testify to his coming from God. Many do not believe Jesus, however, and some try to stone him for blasphemy.

Into this scene of confrontation, Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, send word to Jesus that his friend is ill. Jesus is said to love Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, but he delays his journey for two days. The delay heightens the drama and shows Jesus' obedience to God, who is to be glorified through Lazarus's resurrection. When Jesus finally declares that he will journey to Bethany, his disciples fear for his life. Thomas declares that he and the other disciples should prepare to die with Jesus.

The scene described at Bethany is a sad one. Martha meets Jesus weeping and saying that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Yet she remains confident that God will do whatever Jesus asks. Martha affirms her belief that there will be a resurrection of the dead in the last days. Then Martha's sister, Mary, comes to Jesus with the same confidence, saying that Jesus could have cured Lazarus. Jesus asks to be brought to Lazarus's tomb where he prays and calls Lazarus out from the tomb. At this sign, many come to believe in Jesus, but others take word of the miracle to the Jewish authorities, who begin their plans for Jesus' death.

Set against the backdrop of Jesus' impending death, many elements of the raising of Lazarus foreshadow the good news of Jesus' own Resurrection. Jesus, facing the conflict with the Jewish authorities, acts in complete obedience to God. In raising Lazarus, Jesus shows his power over death so that when Jesus dies, those who believe in him might remember that and take hope. Just as Jesus calls for the stone to be rolled away from Lazarus's tomb, so too will the disciples find the stone rolled away from Jesus' tomb.

With our catechumens preparing for their Baptism at Easter, the Gospel today calls us to reflect on Baptism as a dying and rising with Jesus. In Baptism we die to sin's power over us, rising as children of God. In Baptism we join ourselves with Christ, who conquered death once and for all so that we who believe in him may have eternal life. With Martha and Mary, we are called to profess our belief that Jesus is indeed the Resurrection and the life.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus promises eternal life (#1052)	Celebrating Lent	Appreciating the gift of touch

Making the Connection

When Jesus heard that Lazarus had died, he went to the home of Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary. There Jesus promised life after death for all who have faith in him. As a sign of that promise, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. We are called to be like Martha and Mary, confident in Jesus' promise of eternal life.

Gospel

John 11:1-45 (shorter version John 11:3-7,17,20-27,33b-45)

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Materials Needed

- Small rubber ball
- Sheet of newspaper
- Tape

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Before class, tape a small rubber ball to the corner of a sheet of newspaper. Being careful not to reveal the ball to the children, show them the newspaper and then quickly scrunch the paper with your hands to form a ball with the rubber ball inside.
2. Ask: ***Do you think this newspaper ball will bounce? Ask for a volunteer to toss the ball on the floor or on a desktop. Say: I never knew paper could bounce, did you? There must be something more to this paper ball. [Have the volunteer open it to reveal the rubber ball.] Oh, I see, at the core of the newspaper ball is a rubber ball and that's what made it bounce. Sometimes things happen that surprise us. In the Gospel this week, Jesus brings back to life a man who had died. Jesus performs the miracle so that everyone who heard about it could believe that he was sent from God. Jesus also says that if we have faith in God, we will never die.***
3. Tell in your own words or read the story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45) to the children.
4. Say: ***God gave Jesus the power to give us all life forever.***
5. Pray together that we will always believe in Jesus' promise of eternal life. Then pray together: "Jesus, we believe that you are the Resurrection and the life."

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, Cycle A

Gospel at the Procession with Palms

Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus enters Jerusalem as the crowd waves palm branches and shouts, "Hosanna!"

First Reading

Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord's Servant will stand firm, even when persecuted.

Psalm

Psalms 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24

A cry for help to the Lord in the face of evildoers

Second Reading

Philippians 2:6-11

Christ was obedient even to death, and God has exalted him.

Gospel

Matthew 26:14—27:66 (shorter form: Matthew 27:11-54)

Jesus is crucified, and his body is placed in the tomb.

Background on the Gospel

Today we begin Holy Week, the days during which we journey with Jesus on his way of the cross and anticipate his Resurrection on Easter. Today's liturgy begins with the procession with palms to remind us of Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem.

The events of Jesus' Passion are proclaimed in their entirety in today's Liturgy of the Word. Those events will be proclaimed again when we celebrate the liturgies of the Triduum—Holy Thursday's Mass of the Lord's Supper, the Good Friday of the Lord's Passion, and the Easter Vigil. In communities that celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation with catechumens, these liturgies take on special importance because they invite the catechumens and the community to enter together into the central mysteries of our faith. These days are indeed profound and holy.

In Cycle A, we read the Passion of Jesus as found in the Gospel of Matthew on Palm, or Passion, Sunday. (On Good Friday, we will read the Passion of Jesus from the Gospel of John). The story of Jesus' Passion and death in Matthew's Gospel focuses particularly on the obedience of Jesus to the will of his Father. As Jesus sends his disciples to prepare for Passover, he indicates that the events to come are the will of the Father (Matthew 26:18). In Jesus' prayer in the garden, he prays three times to the Father to take away the cup of suffering, but each time, Jesus concludes by affirming his obedience to the Father's will (Matthew 26:39-44). Even Matthew's description of Jesus' death shows Jesus' obedience to the Father.

Another theme of Matthew's Gospel is to show Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture. Throughout the Passion narrative, Matthew cites and alludes to Scripture to show that the events of Jesus' Passion and death are in accordance with all that was foretold. And if the events were foretold, then God is in control. In addition, Matthew is particularly concerned that the reader does not miss the fact that Jesus is the Suffering Servant of the Old Testament.

Jesus acts in obedience to the Father even in death, so that sins may be forgiven. Matthew makes this clear in the story of the Lord's Supper. As Jesus blesses the cup, he says: ". . . for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28)

While the Gospels of Matthew and Mark have many parallels in their narrative of the Passion, there are a few details worth noting that are unique to Matthew. Only Matthew indicates the price paid to Judas for betraying Jesus. The story of Judas's death is also found only in Matthew, as is the detail that Pilate's wife received a warning in a dream and that Pilate washed his hands of Jesus' death. Finally, Matthew's Gospel alone mentions the earthquakes and other phenomena that happened after Jesus' death.

Matthew places the responsibility for Jesus' death on the Sanhedrin, the chief priests and elders who were responsible for the Temple. However, the animosity that those Jewish leaders and the Jewish people demonstrate toward Jesus is not to be interpreted in ways that blame the Jewish people for Jesus' death. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, the narrative reflects the tension that probably existed between the early Christian community and their Jewish contemporaries. At the Second Vatican Council, the Council Fathers made clear that all sinners share responsibility for the suffering and death of Jesus and that it is wrong to place blame for Jesus' Passion on the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus or on Jewish people today.

There are many vantage points from which to engage in Jesus' Passion. In the characters of Matthew's Gospel, we find reflections of ourselves and the many ways in which we sometimes respond to Jesus. Sometimes we are like Judas, who betrays Jesus and comes to regret it. We are sometimes like Peter, who denies him, or like the disciples, who fell asleep during Jesus' darkest hour but then act rashly and violently at his arrest. Sometimes we are like Simon, who is pressed into service to help Jesus carry his cross. Sometimes we are like the leaders who fear Jesus or like Pontius Pilate, who washed his hands of the whole affair. Jesus dies so that our sins will be forgiven.

The events of Jesus' Passion, death, and Resurrection are called the Paschal Mystery. No amount of study will exhaust or explain the depth of love that Jesus showed in offering this sacrifice for us. After we have examined and studied the stories we have received about these events, we are left with one final task—to meditate on these events and on the forgiveness that Jesus' obedience won for us.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus suffers and dies for us (#620)	Holy Week Services	Telling Jesus' Passion story

Making the Connection

On the last Sunday of Lent, we remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us when he accepted the cross. Throughout this week, Holy Week, we remember that Jesus was obedient even unto death so that our sins would be forgiven.

Gospel

Matthew 26:14—27:66 (shorter form: Matthew 27:11-54)

Jesus is crucified, and his body is placed in the tomb.

Materials Needed

- Several illustrations of the events of Jesus' Passion, such as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, Jesus at the Last Supper, Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus on the Cross

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. As you tell the children the Gospel for this Sunday, show the illustrations that you have brought.
2. Say: **For six weeks, we've been preparing ourselves for Easter. Who remembers the name of this season of the Church year? (Lent) This Sunday is the last Sunday of Lent. It has a special name. It's called Palm Sunday.**
3. Continue as you show the picture of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: **First, we hear that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he was greeted like a king. In Jesus' day, kings were greeted with great parades and travelled in chariots or on horses. People bowed before them to show respect. Something like that happened when Jesus came to Jerusalem, but Jesus was riding a humble donkey. People formed a parade, waved palm branches at him, and greeted him with names of great respect. Jesus knew their respect would not last, however, because he had not come as an earthly king.**

4. Continue as you show the picture of Jesus at the Last Supper: ***While in Jerusalem, Jesus celebrated a very special Jewish feast called Passover with his disciples. While at supper with the disciples, he told them that there would be difficult times ahead and that they would be very frightened by what would happen. But Jesus also told them that these things would be necessary so that sins would be forgiven.***
5. Continue as you show the picture of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: ***After the Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. There, terrible things began to happen, just as Jesus had said. First, Jesus was arrested. The disciples were frightened, and they ran away. Then Jesus was placed on trial and sentenced to death on the cross.***
6. Continue as you show the picture of Jesus on the cross: ***Jesus was crucified and died. But that is not the end of the story. Jesus died so that our sins would be forgiven, and then God raised him from the dead. We will celebrate that event next week at Easter. But this week, which is called Holy Week, we remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.***
7. Conclude your time together in prayer, thanking God for the love that Jesus showed us. Pray together the Lord's Prayer or sing together an appropriate song, such as "Jesus, Jesus" or "What Wondrous Love Is This."

Second Sunday of Easter, (Divine Mercy Sunday)

First Reading

Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47

The first community of Christians grows as its members meet to pray and break bread.

Psalm

Psalm 118:2-4,13-15,22-24

God's love is everlasting.

Second Reading

1 Peter 1:3-9

We have new hope because of Jesus' Resurrection.

Gospel

John 20:19-31

Thomas believes because he sees Jesus.

Background on the Gospel

The Gospels tell us that Jesus appeared to the disciples on several occasions after they discovered that his tomb was empty. Part of the mystery of Jesus' Resurrection is that he appeared to his disciples not as a spirit but in bodily form. The bodily form was not one that the disciples recognized though. In John's Gospel, Mary of Magdala does not recognize that the figure standing before her is Jesus until he speaks to her. In Luke's Gospel the disciples who meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus do not recognize him until he breaks bread with them. The resurrected Jesus had a physical presence, but the disciples couldn't recognize Jesus unless he allowed them to. His resurrected body, nonetheless, showed the marks of his crucifixion.

From readings such as today's Gospel, we also see that in his resurrected body, Jesus seems to be free of physical constraints. He appears to the disciples despite the fact that the doors were locked.

Jesus greets his disciples with the gift of peace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Jesus commissions his disciples to continue the work that he has begun: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." During the meeting, Jesus also shows the integral connection between forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The story of Thomas illustrates our Christian experience today: We are called to believe without seeing. In fact, all Christians after the first witnesses have been called to believe without seeing. Thomas's doubt is hardly surprising; the news of Jesus' appearance was incredible to the disciples who had seen him crucified and buried. Thomas's human nature compelled him to want hard evidence that the Jesus who appeared to the disciples after his death was indeed the same Jesus who had been crucified. Thomas is given the opportunity to act on that desire. He is our witness that Jesus is really risen.

Our faith is based on the witness of the Church that has preceded us, beginning with Thomas and the first disciples. Through Baptism we receive the same Holy Spirit that Jesus brought to the first disciples. We are among those who are "blessed" because we believe without having seen.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is raised up by God (#658)	The Easter Mystery	Telling the Easter story

Making the Connection

Young children can be literal, concrete thinkers. Yet their capacity to imagine is also quite strong. By attending to both traits, we can invite children to contemplate the experience of the first disciples to whom Jesus appeared. We can also lead them to both truths: "Seeing is believing" and "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Gospel

John 20:19-31

Thomas believes because he sees Jesus.

Materials Needed

- A clear glass filled with water
- A pencil

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Before class, place a pencil in a clear glass of water so that part of the pencil stands above the water. The pencil should appear to be crooked, and the underwater part of the pencil should appear to be larger than the rest of the pencil. Show the submerged pencil to the children and ask: **How many of you think that part of this pencil is bigger than the rest of it? Are you sure?** Allow children to respond and then ask: **How many of you are certain that the pencil will be straight when I take it out of the water?** Take the pencil out of the glass and ask: **How does the pencil look now? Is it straight? Is one part of it larger than the other?** Say: **We rely on our eyes to see the truth, but sometimes things are not what they seem.**
2. Say: **There was a time after Jesus' death when he appeared to his friends. They could hardly believe their eyes. They knew he had died, but then he was standing in a room with them. How do you think Jesus' friends felt to see him alive?** (happy, surprised)
3. Say: **One of the disciples, Thomas, was not with the others when Jesus visited. Thomas refused to believe them when they told him that Jesus was no longer dead. Thomas said that he would only believe when he had seen Jesus. So Jesus visited the disciples again when Thomas was there so that Thomas could see for himself.**
4. Say: **Let's listen to that story from the Gospel.** Read the Gospel, John 20:19-31, to the children.
5. Say: **The Gospel story this week ends with Jesus telling us not to rely on our eyes alone to believe. We need to believe even though we can't see Jesus face-to-face. What are some things that can help us see Jesus without relying on our eyes?** (Bible stories, priests, teachers, examples of love and kindness even at difficult times)
6. Pray together that we will see with eyes of faith. Pray together an act of faith, using Thomas's words, or pray a prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

First Reading

Acts 2:14,22-33

Peter and the apostles announce that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Psalm

Psalm 16:1-2,5,7-11

God will show us the path of life.

Second Reading

1 Peter 1:17-21

You were saved by Christ's sacrifice.

Gospel

Luke 24:13-35

Jesus appears to two disciples who are walking to Emmaus.

Background on the Gospel

On most Sundays during the Easter season in Cycle A, our Gospel is taken from the Gospel of John. This week's Gospel, however, is taken from the Gospel of Luke. As in last week's Gospel, today's Gospel shows us how the first community of disciples came to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. In these stories we gain insight into how the community of the Church came to be formed.

When we read today's Gospel, we may be surprised to learn that these friends of Jesus could walk and converse with him at some length yet not recognize him. Again we discover that the risen Jesus is not always easily recognized. Cleopas and the other disciple walk with a person whom they believe to be a stranger; only later do they discover that the stranger is Jesus. We learn that the first community met and recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, just as we meet Jesus in the Eucharist.

We can imagine the feelings of the two disciples in today's reading. They are leaving their community in Jerusalem. Their friend Jesus has been crucified. Their hope is gone. They are trying to make sense of what has occurred, so that they can put the experience behind them.

Jesus himself approaches the two men, but they take him for a stranger. Jesus asks them what they are discussing. He invites them to share their experience and interpretation of the events surrounding his crucifixion and death. When the two disciples have done so, Jesus offers his own interpretation of his crucifixion and resurrection, citing Jewish Scripture. In that encounter we find the model for our Liturgy of the Word—what we do each time we gather as a community for the Eucharist. We reflect upon our life experiences and interpret them in light of Scripture. We gather together to break open the Word of God.

In the next part of the story, we find a model for our Liturgy of the Eucharist. The disciples invite the stranger (Jesus) to stay with them. During the meal in which they share in the breaking of the bread, the disciples' eyes are opened; they recognize the stranger as Jesus. In the Eucharist too we share in the breaking of the bread and discover Jesus in our midst. Just as the disciples returned to Jerusalem to recount their experience to the other disciples, we too are sent from our Eucharistic gathering. Our experience of Jesus in the Eucharist compels us to share the story with others.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is present with us in the Church (#805)	Eucharist	Identifying Jesus' presence with us

Making the Connection

Christ appears in children's lives in various forms. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, however, young children may not yet recognize Jesus' presence in their lives. We can help children to recognize Jesus in the Scriptures, the Eucharist, and the people around them, and we can invite them into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Gospel

Luke 24:13-35

Jesus appears to two disciples who are walking to Emmaus.

Materials Needed

- Large Bag
- Several different sports balls (tennis balls, baseballs, ping-pong balls, footballs and so on)

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Play this guessing game with the children: Place a number of sports balls in a large bag. Ask for volunteers to reach into the bag and to choose a ball without removing it. Invite each volunteer to silently act out the sport that uses the ball or to describe the ball to the rest of the children by telling how the ball is used without naming the ball or the sport. After each ball has been identified, have the volunteer take it out and show it to the children.
2. When the bag is empty, say: ***It's easier for us to identify something if we can see it in action or hear about what it does, isn't it? Was it easier to identify the ball by seeing the sport acted out or by hearing about the sport?*** (Accept either answer.)
3. Say: ***In this week's Gospel, we hear how two of Jesus' disciples met Jesus as they walked from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus. Jesus told them that many stories in the Bible were about what had happened to him, but the disciples couldn't recognize Jesus until they saw him in action.*** Retell the Gospel, Luke 24:13-35, in your own words or read the Gospel to them.
4. Ask: ***When did the disciples discover that it was Jesus who had been walking with them?*** (when they were eating, as Jesus broke bread with them) ***Does the story of the meal that Jesus had with these two disciples remind you of another story about Jesus? Which one?*** (Jesus also broke bread with his disciples at the Last Supper.)
5. Ask: ***What action does Jesus do in both of those stories?*** (He breaks bread.) Say: ***At Mass we can recognize that Jesus is present in the same way during the breaking of the bread. The more we know about Jesus, the easier it will be to recognize him and follow him. What are some ways in which we can come to know Jesus?*** (through the Bible, as we gather for Mass, from other people—our family, catechists, priests, and teachers)
6. Pray together that we will continue to learn about Jesus so that we can recognize and follow him. Pray together the Lord's Prayer or today's psalm, Psalm 16.

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

First Reading

Acts of the Apostles 2:14a,36-41

Peter and the other apostles baptize 3,000 people.

Psalm

Psalm 23:1-6

The Lord is my shepherd.

Second Reading

1 Peter 2:20b-25

We have been healed by the wounds of Christ.

Gospel

John 10:1-10

Jesus is the gate for his sheep.

Background on the Gospel

This fourth Sunday of the Easter season is sometimes called Good Shepherd Sunday because in each of the three lectionary cycles, the Gospel reading invites us to reflect on Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In each cycle the reading is from the tenth chapter of John's Gospel. This chapter sets the framework for Jesus' teaching about himself as the Good Shepherd.

Today's reading falls between the stories of Jesus' healing of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus. Both of these stories were proclaimed in the Gospels found in this year's season of Lent. Following the controversy that ensued when Jesus healed the man born blind, Jesus directs his allegory about the sheep and the shepherd toward the Jewish religious leaders of his time, the Pharisees.

Throughout John's Gospel the Pharisees fail to accept Jesus' ministry and teaching. They show themselves to be "robbers and thieves" because they try to lead the sheep without entering through the gate, Jesus. Through these metaphors, Jesus is telling his listeners that those who follow him and his way will find abundant life. He identifies himself both as the shepherd and the gate. The shepherds who are faithful to him are the ones whom the sheep (Jesus' disciples) should follow.

The relationship between the sheep and their shepherd is based on familiarity. Sheep recognize their shepherd and will not follow a stranger. At the end of the day, shepherds lead their sheep from pastures to a common gated area called a sheepfold. There, one shepherd protects all of the sheep until the next day when each shepherd returns to lead his own sheep to pasture. As shepherds move among the sheep, the sheep follow only their shepherd.

Today's Gospel also gives us the opportunity to reflect on Christian leadership. Jesus' words suggest to us that those who will lead the Christian community will be known by their faithfulness to Jesus. The leaders will recognize that Jesus is the gate for all of the sheep and that having a good relationship with Jesus is the primary characteristic of a Christian leader. Jesus' allegory also suggests that faithful Christian leadership requires a good relationship with the community: the shepherd knows his sheep, and they know him. Christian leaders follow the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, by being faithful to him and by being a good shepherd.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls	Sacrament of Reconciliation	Being a disciple of Jesus / Following the example of Jesus

Making the Connection

Concrete images help young children to identify with the words and teachings of Jesus. Jesus himself used such images in his teaching, as in today's Gospel. Children in our society have less familiarity with sheep and shepherds than did those who heard Jesus' words, but with some explanation, these images can help children to know what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Gospel

John 10:1-10

Jesus is the gate for his sheep.

Materials Needed (Phase 1)

- Shoebox
- Scissors
- Tape
- Pencils
- Penny

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Prepare a shoebox in the following way. Cut out a one-inch semicircle at the bottom edge of both ends of a shoebox. Save the semicircles.
2. Show the children the shoebox. Using pencils as sticks and a penny as a puck, have the children take turns playing hockey. Give one point for each time they get the puck in their opponent's "goal." At the end of five minutes, stop the game.
3. Say: ***That game was fun. What if there were no holes in the box though?*** Tape the semicircles in place to cover the holes. Say: ***There would be no way to win the game.***
4. Say: ***In today's Gospel we hear that our life is sort of like this game. Let's listen to this week's Gospel and learn why.*** Read aloud John 10:1-10.
5. Ask: ***What did Jesus tell his disciples in today's Gospel?*** (Jesus talks about how sheep follow their shepherd and how the shepherd is the one who enters the sheepfold through the gate.) ***Should the sheep follow the person who enters the sheepfold another way?*** (No)
6. Say: ***In this Gospel, Jesus is talking about how his followers will know to follow him and how he will protect them. When Jesus died for us, he opened the gates of heaven.*** Remove the tape from the semicircles. Say: ***As long as we believe in him and follow him, he will let us in.*** Push the penny through the hole.
7. Conclude in prayer together that we will be good followers of Jesus. Pray together today's psalm, Psalm 23.

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

First Reading

Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7

The early Christian community chooses seven people to serve at table so that the Twelve can devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Psalm

Psalm 33:1-2,4-5,18-19

The Lord is merciful toward those who trust in him.

Second Reading

1 Peter 2:4-9

Those who have faith are chosen in Christ to be a holy priesthood.

Gospel

John 14:1-12

Jesus tells his disciples, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Background on the Gospel

The readings for the last few Sundays have been about the Resurrection, but today's Gospel takes us back in time to an event in Jesus' life before his Passion. Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house. He promises that where he is going, his disciples will be able to follow. Thomas, who will later doubt the disciples' reports that they have seen the Risen Lord, contradicts Jesus by saying that the disciples don't know where Jesus is going or how to get there. Jesus explains that he himself is the way, the truth, and the life. In knowing and loving Jesus, the disciples now love God the Father.

Philip then makes a request that challenges Jesus' words. Philip wants Jesus to show the Father to the disciples. Recall that Jesus has just told his disciples, "If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him." As a good teacher, Jesus responds to Philip by repeating and elaborating on what he has just told the disciples: they have seen and known Jesus, so they have seen and known the Father. Then Jesus offers another reassurance about his departure: because of faith in God and in Jesus, the disciples will do the work that Jesus has done and more.

The connection between Jesus and his Father, between Jesus' work and the work of the Father, is made clear in today's Gospel. Jesus is in the Father, and God the Father is in Jesus. As God spoke his name to Moses, "I am," so too Jesus speaks his name to his disciples: "I am the way and the truth and the life."

The revelation of the Trinity is completed in the passage that follows today's reading, and it is the Gospel for next Sunday. Because Jesus goes away, the Father will send in Jesus' name the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will continue the work of the Father and of Jesus.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is the Gateway to the Father	Eucharistic Assembly	We are God's chosen people and must live accordingly

Making the Connection

Young children can be introduced to the mystery of the Trinity using metaphors drawn from their life experience. Jesus explained to his disciples that he is one with the Father and the only way to the Father. He also promised that those who believe in him will do great things just like Jesus did.

Gospel

John 14:1-12

Jesus tells his disciples, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Materials Needed

- A quarter

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Show a quarter to the children. Say: ***Have you ever looked closely at a quarter? On one side there is a person, George Washington. On the other side is a different image. So there are two sides to the same coin.***
2. Say: ***In a way, this quarter reminds me of Jesus. He has two sides also. He's man and he's God—all at the same time. Can we split this quarter and remove one side from the other? (No) Well, we can't remove Jesus from God or God from Jesus either. They are one.***
3. Ask: ***What can we get for a quarter?*** Brainstorm some answers with the children.
4. Say: ***When we believe in Jesus, we receive all the benefits that he gives. The Gospel this week is about some of the benefits of faith in Jesus. Let's listen carefully to today's Gospel to understand what those benefits are.*** Read aloud John 14:1-12.
5. Ask: ***What does Jesus say that he is going to do for us?*** (Jesus says that he is preparing a place for us in his Father's house in heaven.) ***What does Jesus say about people who believe in him?*** (Jesus says that those who believe in him will be given the ability to do great things just as he does.) Say: ***Jesus does a lot for us, and he keeps on giving and giving!***
6. Conclude by praying together that we will choose life with God and always remember that Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life.” Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

First Reading

Acts of the Apostles 8:5-8,14-17

The people of Samaria accept the Gospel of Jesus proclaimed to them by Philip.

Psalm

Psalm 66:1-7,16,20

Sing praise to God, all the earth.

Second Reading

1 Peter 3:15-18

Be ready to give explanation for your hope in Christ.

Gospel

John 14:15-21

Jesus promises his disciples that he will send them another advocate, the Spirit of truth.

Background on the Gospel

Today's Gospel is a continuation of last week's Gospel: Jesus is speaking to his disciples at the Last Supper. In today's reading Jesus offers encouragement to his disciples, who will soon see him crucified. He reassures them that even though he will leave them, he will not abandon them. Instead he will send them the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, through whom the disciples will continue to live in union with Jesus.

Jesus uses the term *Advocate* to describe the Holy Spirit, whom the disciples will receive. Another word used to describe the Holy Spirit is *Paraclete*, a legal term meaning "one who offers defence for another." Note that Jesus says that he will send "another Advocate." Jesus himself is the first advocate, interceding for his disciples with the Father.

In today's reading Jesus contrasts his impending departure with the permanence of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus will leave to return to the Father, but the Holy Spirit will remain with the disciples.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples will come to know and appreciate the unity of the Son and the Father. They will also understand that they too participate in the communion between the Father and the Son: "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you" (John 14:20).

Today's reading is one example of the contrast that John's Gospel presents between the community of disciples, to whom God will reveal himself, and the unbelieving world, which will remain in darkness. The unbelieving world cannot accept the "Spirit of truth," whom the disciples will receive. Only through the Spirit will God's revelation and love be known.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Christ is the Spirit of Truth		Allow the Spirit of Truth to lead the Church in proclaiming God's message

Making the Connection

Children thrive when they know that they are connected to other people in meaningful ways. Likewise, their spirituality thrives when they come to appreciate their connection to God. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom we received in Baptism, Jesus promises us that we will be united with God.

Gospel

John 14:15-21

Jesus promises his disciples that he will send them another advocate, the Spirit of truth.

Materials Needed

- A hook side and loop side of a Velcro (a coin-size Velcro hook & loop fastener)
- Two index cards

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Before you begin today, draw a gingerbread-type figure on one of the index cards.
2. Say: ***In the Gospel this week Jesus says that because we love him, we will obey him. Jesus also says that he will ask his Father to send us the Holy Spirit, who will help us to stay close to Jesus and his Father. Let's listen carefully to today's Gospel to hear what Jesus says.***
3. Read aloud today's Gospel, John 14:15-21.
4. Say: ***Perhaps we can think of Jesus' message in this way. Let's pretend that one of these parts of the Velcro is Jesus and the other one is the Father. [Remove the backing from one part of the Velcro and attach that part to the drawing on the index card.] The sticky back of the Velcro is like the Holy Spirit. When we love Jesus and try to be like him, his Father sends the Holy Spirit to hold us close to Jesus. Jesus loves his Father as much as he loves us, and Jesus wants to be close to him too. So do you know what that means? [Attach the other part of the Velcro to the blank index card. Then stick the two index cards together.] We are also attached to the Father. Through the Holy Spirit, we have Jesus and his Father close to us. That's why Jesus said in today's Gospel that he will not leave us orphaned. Orphans don't have any family. We have family when we are attached to Jesus and his Father through the Holy Spirit.***
5. Conclude by praying together that we will remember the importance of Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Pray together the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.
And kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.
And you will renew the face of the earth.
Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit
you have taught the hearts of your faithful.
In the same Spirit help us to relish what is right
and always rejoice in your consolation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

First Reading

Acts of the Apostles 1:12-14

After Jesus' ascension to heaven, the apostles return to Jerusalem and gather in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Psalm

Psalm 27:1,4,7-8

The Lord is our salvation.

Second Reading

1 Peter 4:13-16

If you suffer for Christ, you will be blessed.

Gospel

John 17:1-11a

Jesus prays for his disciples.

Background on the Gospel

Today's reading is a prayer, which appears at the conclusion of Jesus' Last Supper discourse. At the end of the prayer, Jesus is arrested in the garden. The prayer might be read as Jesus' final commendation of himself to the Father. In the prayer, Jesus also expresses care and concern for his disciples.

Jesus' prayer reaffirms the complete union between Jesus and the Father. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus has been presented as the Word, who pre-existed with the Father and was sent to do the Father's work on earth. In this prayer we learn that Jesus' life and ministry have been directed toward one purpose, revealing the Father. When this work is accomplished, Jesus is to return to the Father to be glorified. Regardless of what happens to Jesus, in John's Gospel, Jesus and the Father are in charge. Even in the description of Jesus' death, Jesus does not simply die but instead hands over his spirit.

In today's Gospel we also note the distinction found in John's Gospel between the world and the disciples. The disciples are in the world, but they are separate from it because they have been given to Jesus. They are chosen from the world to be in service to the world for its salvation. This salvation has been accomplished in Jesus because Jesus has revealed the Father to the world, but the disciples will be sent by Jesus to make both the Father and Jesus known to the world. Jesus' prayer is for the disciples' work in the world.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
The Holy Spirit is the source of prayer and praise of the whole Church	Prayer	Praying through the Holy Spirit to praise and glorify God

Making the Connection

Young children take comfort and reassurance in the expressions of care and concern that the adults in their lives give to them. Many would be pleased to know that people in their lives pray for them. Children may also feel loved and important by knowing that Jesus himself prays for them and all of his disciples.

Gospel

John 17:1-11a

Jesus prays for his disciples.

Materials Needed

- A clear plastic drinking glass
- A sheet of newspaper
- A bowl half filled with water

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. For a polished presentation, practice today's demonstration before showing it to the children.
2. Say: ***Did you know that Jesus prays for us just as we pray for one another? The Gospel this week tells how Jesus prayed to God for all who follow him. Let's listen carefully to today's Gospel.***
3. Read aloud today's Gospel, John 17:1-11a.
4. Ask: ***Do you know what happens when Jesus prays for us? Let me show you.*** Show the glass to the children. ***Let's say that this glass represents God and that this newspaper represents us, his followers.*** Stuff the newspaper tightly into the bottom of the glass. ***Jesus brings us very close to God by showing us how much love God has for us. Then Jesus protects us with his prayers so that we will never fall away from God.*** Turn the glass over and shake it, showing the class that the newspaper doesn't fall out.
5. Say: ***Let's say that this bowl of water is the world.*** Hold the drinking glass, open end down, over the bowl and put the glass into the water without tilting the glass. Ask: ***Do you think the paper will get soaked by the water?*** Remove the glass without tilting it. If the demonstration is done without tilting the glass, an air pocket between the paper and the water will protect the paper from the water. Show the children that the paper did not get soaked and say: ***Jesus' prayers are very powerful and he prays for us.***
6. Conclude by praying together that we will always stay faithful to Jesus, who protects us by his prayer. Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Pentecost Sunday, Cycle A

First Reading

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11

The Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles gathered in Jerusalem.

Psalm

Psalm 104:1,24,29-31,34

God's Spirit renews the earth.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7,12-13

We are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gospel

John 20:19-23

Jesus appears to his disciples and gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Background on the Gospel

The Season of Easter concludes with today's celebration, the Feast of Pentecost. On Pentecost we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem; this event marks the beginning of the Church. The story of Pentecost is found in the Acts of the Apostles, today's first reading. The account in today's Gospel, John 20:19-23, also recounts how Jesus gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to his disciples. Yet the event in John's Gospel takes place on Easter Sunday. There is no need to try to reconcile these two accounts. It is enough that we know that after his death, Jesus fulfilled his promise to send to his disciples a helper, an advocate, who would enable them to be his witnesses throughout the world.

We already heard today's Gospel proclaimed on the Second Sunday of Easter this year (Lectionary Cycle A). That Gospel passage, however, also included the description of Jesus' appearance to Thomas. In that context, we were led reflect on belief and unbelief.

In the context of the Feast of Pentecost, John 20:19-23 reminds us about the integral connection between the gifts of peace and forgiveness and the action of the Holy Spirit. Jesus greets his disciples with the gift of peace. Jesus then commissions his disciples to continue the work that he has begun, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He breathes the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and sends them to continue his work of reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' act of breathing the Holy Spirit mirrors God's act of breathing life into Adam at the time of Creation. In fact, both the Greek and Hebrew words for "spirit" can also be translated as "breath."

This Gospel reminds us that the Church is called to be a reconciling presence in the world. The reconciling presence of Christ is celebrated in the Church's sacramental life. In the Sacrament of Baptism, we are cleansed of sin and become a new creation in Christ. In the Sacrament of Penance, the Church celebrates the mercy of God through the forgiving of sins. This reconciling presence is also to be a way of life for Christians. In situations of conflict, we are to be agents of peace and harmony among people.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Christ filled the Church with the Power of the Holy Spirit	Celebrating Pentecost (the birth of the Church)	Allowing the Holy Spirit to help us renew the face of the earth
		Using the gifts of the Holy Spirit

Making the Connection

Young children are beginning to be aware that there are times when they do not do the things that they should. They can be very sensitive to the frustration and anger of those around them when they have done wrong. Today's Gospel offers them the reassurance that God has sent his forgiving mercy to us.

Gospel

John 20:19-23

Jesus appears to his disciples and gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Materials Needed

- Ping-pong ball
- Styrofoam cup

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Bring a ping-pong ball and a Styrofoam cup to class. Say: ***After Jesus was killed, his friends were afraid they would be punished as well. They hid in a room and hoped they would not be discovered.*** Drop the ping-pong ball into the cup and cover the cup with your hand.
2. Say: ***Jesus did not want his friends to hide in fear. He wanted them to be brave and to show people the love and forgiveness of God. He could see that his friends needed help to do this. Today's Gospel tells us about what Jesus did to help his disciples. Let's listen carefully as we read today's Gospel.*** Read John 20:19-23.
3. Say: ***Jesus knew that his disciples would need the courage of the Holy Spirit—the same courage that Jesus had when he died so that our sins would be forgiven. Jesus released the disciples from fear by breathing the Holy Spirit on them.*** Blow into the Styrofoam cup, and the ball will come flying out.
4. Say: ***But Jesus did even more. The Gospel this week tells us that Jesus gave his friends courage and the power to release others from fear by forgiving their sins.*** Place the ping-pong ball in the cup again. ***When we do something that we know God would not like, we fear God's punishment. We forget how much God loves us, and we become trapped by sin.*** Place your hand over the top of the cup. Say: ***Jesus gave his apostles—and all the priests of his Church—the power to forgive us in God's name when we are truly sorry for our sins. Then we are free to start over and to live as God wants us to live.*** Blow into the cup again to propel the ping-pong ball.
5. Conclude by praying together that the Holy Spirit will help us be confident that God will always forgive our sins. Pray together today's Psalm or the [Prayer to the Holy Spirit](#).

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, Cycle A

First Reading

Exodus 34:4b-6,8-9

Moses pleads for God's mercy on Mt. Sinai.

Psalm

Daniel 3:52-56

We praise God who is exalted above all forever.

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Paul urges the Corinthians to live in peace with one another and with God.

Gospel

John 3:16-18

God sent his Son into the world to save the world.

Background on the Gospel

This week we return to the liturgical season of Ordinary Time. This Sunday and next, however, are designated as solemnities—special days that call our attention to central mysteries of our faith. Today on Trinity Sunday we celebrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons.

Today's Gospel is from the beginning of John's Gospel. The passage we read follows Jesus' conversation with a Pharisee, Nicodemus, about what it means to be born of both water and the spirit. Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night and acknowledges Jesus as a teacher from God. Jesus tells him that only those who are born from above will see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus misunderstands and questions how a person can be born more than once. Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. Jesus is essentially explaining Baptism, which we celebrate as a sacrament today. Yet Nicodemus, we are told, still does not understand what Jesus is saying. Jesus continues by testifying to the need to be born from above so that one might have eternal life.

After the dialogue with Nicodemus, the author of the Gospel offers his own explanation of Jesus' words. This is what we read in today's Gospel, John 3:16-18.

In the context of today's focus on the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the reading calls our attention to the action of God, who reveals himself in three persons: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God the Father, out of love for the world, sent his Son into the world in order to save it. Through the death and resurrection of the Son, we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. As three persons, God acts always as a God of love; he does not condemn the world but acts to save it.

The Gospel also calls attention to the response that is required of us. God's love for us calls us to respond in faith by professing our belief in God's son, Jesus, and the salvation that he has won for us. This profession of faith is a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
The Trinity	Celebrating and understanding the life of the Holy Trinity	Proclaiming and living our faith in the Trinity (God in three Persons)

Making the Connection

Young children are just beginning to learn about the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the belief that there is one God in three Persons. In today's reading, we learn a central element of this mystery: God acts toward us with love, intending our salvation, and offering us the gift of eternal life.

Gospel

John 3:16-18

God sent his Son into the world to save the world.

Materials Needed

- A chalkboard or butcher paper

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Have the children imagine that a puppy or a kitten has been lost. Give them a moment to think about it.
2. Then say: ***Now let's make a list of what you would do to find the puppy or the kitten.*** List their suggestions on the chalkboard or butcher paper.
3. Then say: ***When we disobey God, it is like we are lost. In today's reading we will hear about how much God wants us to be found. God loves us so much that he doesn't want us to be separated from him. So he sent Jesus to find us. Jesus came so that we could be united with God the Father. If we believe in Jesus, he will bring us to heaven to be with God our Father. That is what today's Gospel tells us. Let's listen carefully.***
4. Read today's Gospel, John 3:16-18.
5. Say: ***What a loving choice God made! Let's thank God for giving us a way to be with him forever in heaven.*** Lead the children in a prayer.
6. Conclude by praying together the Glory Be to the Father or today's Psalm.

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Cycle A

First Reading

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a

Moses tells the people to remember how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

Psalm

Psalm 147:12-15, 19-20

Praise God, Jerusalem!

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Though many, we are one body when we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Gospel

John 6:51-58

Jesus says, "I am the living bread."

Background on the Gospel

This Sunday we celebrate a second solemnity during this period of Ordinary Time in the liturgical calendar. Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. This day was once called *Corpus Christi*, which is Latin for "Body of Christ." In the revised Lectionary the name for this day is expanded to reflect more completely our Eucharistic theology.

Today's Gospel is taken from the Gospel according to John. The reading is part of a discourse between Jesus and a crowd of Jews. The discourse comes shortly after the miracle of Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and fishes. In John's Gospel, miracles such as this are identified as "signs" through which people come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. These signs are followed by dialogue, or discourse that interprets and explains the miracle. In John's Gospel, Jesus' multiplication of the loaves is said to have occurred near Passover, thus linking it to the Exodus story and God's saving action toward the Israelites.

Having seen Jesus multiply the loaves and fishes, the crowd pursues him, perhaps seeking more food but also looking for another sign. Jesus tells the crowd that he is the bread of life. He explains that just as God gave the Israelites manna to sustain them in the desert, so now God has sent new manna that will give eternal life. It is in this context that Jesus repeats those words in today's Gospel and tells them again that he is the living bread that came down from heaven.

Jesus' words are not well understood by the crowd; they argue that Jesus is not from heaven but born of Mary and Joseph. The crowd also has trouble understanding how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat. Jesus tells them that when they eat his flesh and drink his blood, they will remain forever connected to him. These are difficult words, but they are important because they seek to show us our intimate connection with Jesus.

This is the mystery that is at the heart of our Eucharistic theology. In the elements of bread and wine, Jesus' Body and Blood are truly present. When we share in the Body and Blood of Christ, Jesus himself comes to dwell within us. This communion with the Lord makes us one body, brings us eternal life, and sends us forth to be Christ's Body in the world.

Making the Connection

Young children are just beginning to learn about the difficult concepts that lie behind the words of our faith. Their experiences with the community of faith can help them to understand the importance of Eucharist and Jesus' promise of eternal life to all those who partake of his Body and Blood.

Gospel

John 6:51-58

Jesus says, "I am the living bread."

Materials Needed (Phase 1)

- Box of cereal
- Box of raisins
- Bowls

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings (Phase 1)

1. Bring to class a box of cereal and a box of raisins. Cover the pictures on the boxes with construction paper. Read the list of ingredients on the back of each box. Ask the group to try to identify the contents of the box based on what you read from the label. Pour some of the contents into bowls and show them to the children.
2. Say: ***Sometimes we can tell what an item is by the ingredients listed on the box.*** Hold up the bowl of raisins. Say: ***And sometimes if we can't see the picture on the box, the list of ingredients doesn't help us know what the box contains.*** Hold up the bowl of cereal.
3. Say: ***In today's Gospel, Jesus talks about how he will give people the bread of eternal life. What is bread made from? (wheat) What is wine made from? (grapes) In today's reading, Jesus says that he will give the people living bread. The crowd thinks that he means the kind of bread that is made from wheat. But Jesus is talking about something else. Let's listen carefully to today's gospel.***
4. Read today's Gospel, John 6:51-58.
5. Ask: ***What did Jesus tell the people that he would give them?*** (living bread, his flesh and blood) Say: ***Jesus said that the bread and wine that he would give would really be his Body and Blood. And unlike regular bread and wine, which can nourish us for only a time, his Body and Blood will make us live forever. This may be hard to understand.*** Show the cereal box. Say: ***But if we believe the people who make this cereal that these are the true ingredients, then surely we can believe that Jesus who is God is the true bread and wine.***
6. Let us pray together that we will believe Jesus' words and his promise of eternal life. Pray together the Lord's Prayer or today's Psalm.

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

1 Kings 3:5,7-12

Solomon pleases God when he asks for a wise and understanding heart to better govern the people.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 119:57,72,76-77,127-130

The law of the Lord is more precious than silver and gold.

Second Gospel Reading

Romans 8:28-30

God chose us to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 13:44-52 (shorter form: Matthew 13:44-46)

Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Background on the Gospel

Today's Gospel concludes three weeks of readings from the 13th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel. Throughout these three weeks we have heard Jesus teaching crowds about the kingdom of heaven, and we have heard Jesus interpret some of his teachings for the disciples. In this week's Gospel, Jesus offers three more short parables.

The first two parables describe the great value of the kingdom of heaven. In the first parable, Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like a buried treasure that is worth possessing even if it means giving up everything else. In the second parable, Jesus proposes that the kingdom of heaven is like a pearl of great worth for which one will sell everything else to possess. These parables teach us that we are to place everything we value in the service of the pursuit of the Kingdom of God.

The third parable that Jesus proposes in today's Gospel is different from the first two, but it is reminiscent of the parable of the sower heard in last week's Gospel. The kingdom of heaven is compared to fishing with a wide net. After the fish have been collected, the good fish are kept and the bad fish are thrown away; so too, in the final judgment, will the wicked and the righteous be separated.

Today's Gospel concludes with a curious statement about the scribe who understands the kingdom of heaven. Here a metaphor is offered: this scribe is like the head of a household who "brings from his storeroom both the new and the old." The scribes referred to here are experts of Mosaic law. It is possible that Jesus is here instructing the early Christian community on how to proceed in the interpretation of Jewish law with respect to Jesus' "new" teaching. Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of heaven does not replace the Jewish tradition; it interprets it in a different light.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
It belongs to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God (#898)	Celebrating the heart of Jesus' Good News-the Kingdom of God	We are called to value God's love and will above any earthly treasure

Making the Connection

To young children everything is important. They are just beginning to learn that some things are more important than others. We can help them learn to value the kingdom of heaven, God's plan for us, by teaching them that the things that Christians consider most important are those values that lead us to God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 13:44-52 (shorter form: Matthew 13:44-46)

Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Pose the following questions to the group: ***Which is more important for good health, a piece of gum or an apple? Which is more valuable, a dollar or a nickel? Which is more important, your television or your family?***
2. Say: ***Some things are more important than others. Even if we like to chew gum, it is more important that we eat apples because our bodies need the vitamins found in apples to keep us healthy. Dollar bills and nickels are both important, but a dollar is worth more than a nickel, so it is more valuable. And, of course, our family is much more important to us than television, even if we really enjoy watching television. If we had to choose between our family and watching television, we would always choose our family.***
3. Say: ***Jesus taught people about the kingdom of heaven. To help the people understand how important the kingdom of heaven is, Jesus told two parables. Let's listen carefully to these parables so that we can also learn about the importance of the kingdom of heaven.***
4. Read today's Gospel in its shorter form, Matthew 13:44-46.
5. Ask: ***What did the person in the first parable do in order to gain the treasure buried in the field?*** (He sold everything he had to buy the field so that he could have the treasure.) ***What did the merchant do so that he could purchase the pearl of great price?*** (He sold everything he had so that he could buy this pearl.) ***Jesus wants us to understand that the kingdom of heaven is the most important and valuable thing in our lives. We should do everything we can to find God and what he wants for us.***
6. Conclude by praying together for God's help in valuing the kingdom of heaven above everything else. Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 55:1-3

The Lord will renew his covenant with the descendents of David.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 145:8-9,15-18

The Lord provides for his people.

Second Reading

Romans 8:35,37-39

Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus feeds the crowd with five loaves and two fish.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today we jump ahead in our reading of Matthew's Gospel to Chapter 14. Last week we heard Jesus conclude his discourse with the crowds about the Kingdom of Heaven. In Matthew's narrative, Jesus then leaves the crowds and returns to Nazareth, where he is rejected. Matthew then recounts the story of John the Baptist's arrest and execution at the hands of Herod. Today's Gospel reading begins at this point.

Upon hearing the news of the death of John the Baptist, Jesus seeks to withdraw, but the crowds follow him. Jesus reaches out to them in compassion and heals the sick. At the end of a long day, the disciples encourage Jesus to send the crowds away so that they might find provisions for themselves. Jesus again responds with compassion for the crowd. Jesus tells his disciples to provide food for the crowd. The disciples reply with a report of the meagerness of their own provisions—five loaves and two fish. The result is the very familiar miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Matthew's Gospel tells us that 5,000 men were fed, and this number does not even include the women and children.

Jesus' blessing brought abundance from the meager provisions of the disciples. In this action, Jesus offers us a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven that he has been teaching about in the parables. A feast results from the smallest of portions—remember the mustard seed and the yeast. In this miracle we witness an example for Christian life and ministry. Even the smallest of offerings can produce abundant results when placed in the service of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We find the story of Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and the fish in each of the four Gospels. In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Jesus performs this same miracle on two separate occasions. The story of this miracle is an anticipation of the Eucharist in which we are fed by the abundant grace of God. The importance of the Eucharist has been a defining element of Christian life from the very beginning.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian Life (#1324)	The Eucharist	The Eucharist is our food for the journey – we need to partake

Making the Connection

Young children are still learning the virtue of sharing. In Jesus' miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, we find an example of how abundantly God blesses acts of generosity and compassion.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus feeds the crowd with five loaves and two fish.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Say: ***Today we are going to talk about something that I know you all have already learned much about, sharing. What does it mean to share?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.) ***Think about a time when someone shared something with you.*** Ask a few volunteers to share their story with the group. ***How did you feel when your friend shared with you?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.) ***Now think about a time when you shared something with someone else.*** Ask a few volunteers to share their story with the group. ***How did you feel when you shared with another person? Is it easy to share what we have with others?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.)
2. Say: ***In today's Gospel we hear about a time when Jesus told his disciples to share their food with a large crowd of people. The disciples weren't sure that they wanted to share, and they told Jesus that they didn't have much food to share—only a little bread and a few fish. Has anyone ever told you to share what you had with another person? Did you think you had enough to share? How did you feel about being told to share? Keep these questions in mind as we listen to this story.***
3. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 14:13-21.
4. Ask: ***How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus asked them to share their food with the crowd?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.) ***What did Jesus tell the disciples to do with the food that they had?*** (He told them to bring it to him so that he could bless it.) ***What happened when the disciples gave the food to the people?*** (There was more than enough for everyone. They collected 12 baskets of leftover food, even after more than 5,000 people had been fed.)
5. Say: ***Jesus performed a miracle that day, feeding thousands of people with just a small amount of food. Jesus' disciples never dreamed that so many people could be fed if they shared the little food that they had. Jesus showed his disciples, and us, how important it is to share what we have with others by performing this miracle.***
6. Conclude in prayer together. Encourage children to pray that God will help them to always share what they have with others. Pray the Lord's Prayer or the Prayer of Saint Francis.

Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

The Lord appears to Elijah in a whisper.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 85:9-14

The Lord is the source of salvation.

Second Reading

Romans 9:1-5

Paul speaks of the blessings that have come to the Israelites.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus walks on water, and the disciples acknowledge him as the Son of God.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel directly follows last week's account of Jesus feeding a crowd of more than 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. For the sake of the crowds, Jesus had postponed his time of solitude. Now, at last, Jesus finds some time for quiet and prayer. He sends his disciples ahead of him by boat, dismisses the crowds, and then withdraws to the mountain to pray.

The disciples do not fare well. They struggle to weather the wind and waves, making little progress in their journey. We are reminded of a previous story in [Chapter 8](#) of Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus calms the seas. This time, however, Jesus does not calm the seas, and the disciples do not express fear until they see Jesus walking toward them on the water. In this story it is not the storm that is feared but the sight of Jesus before them, whom they mistake for a ghost.

Clues like these suggest that this story is about the disciples' growing understanding of the identity of Jesus. In continuity with [last week's Gospel](#) about the feeding of the multitude, today's Gospel is also about what the disciples' faith in Jesus will enable them to do. In last week's Gospel, when the disciples see the crowds, they ask Jesus to send the crowds away. Jesus turns the situation around, telling the disciples to feed the crowd with the provisions that they have. Both of these Gospels tell us much about ministry.

Jesus calls to the disciples and calms their fears. He is not a ghost. The impulsive Peter seeks proof that the person is indeed Jesus. He asks Jesus to call him out onto the water, and Jesus grants this request. Peter's fear and doubt overtake him, however, once he is walking on the water. Jesus reaches out to Peter and saves him. When Jesus and Peter enter the boat, Matthew reports that the wind ceases, and the disciples confess that Jesus is the Son of God.

Faith in Jesus will enable the disciples to do the work that Jesus has done. Peter walks on water. The five loaves and two fish feed a multitude of people. The disciples can and will participate in the work of the kingdom of heaven. When Peter fears and doubts the person of Jesus, however, he falters. Peter's example teaches us that true Christian ministry emerges from the faith that Jesus is the Messiah, God's only Son.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
To be a Christian, one must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (#454)	The Creed / The Eucharist / Offertory	We must carry out Jesus' work / continue His ministry in leading people to the Kingdom

Young children want to be like the adults in their lives. We encourage Christian vocations when we show children how they, too, can participate in the mission of the Church.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus walks on water, and the disciples acknowledge him as the Son of God.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Say: ***Today's Gospel tells us about a time when Jesus' disciples recognized Jesus as God's own Son. As we listen to this Gospel, let's imagine that we are there. To help us do this, I will need you to act out this Gospel story.***
2. Invite volunteers to be Jesus, Peter, and the disciples. If the entire group would like to participate, then allow everyone to be disciples.
3. As you read aloud today's Gospel, help the group to act out their roles. Read Matthew 14:22-33.
4. Ask: ***Why did the disciples become afraid in this story?*** (They thought they were seeing a ghost.) ***What did Peter want to do?*** (He wanted to walk on the water as Jesus did.) ***What happened when Peter tried to walk on the water?*** (He grew afraid and started to sink.) ***What did Jesus do?*** (Jesus helped Peter when he grew afraid.) ***What did the disciples learn about Jesus in this story?*** (They learned that Jesus is the Son of God.)
5. Say: ***Jesus teaches us an amazing thing in this story. Peter wants to be like Jesus; he wants to walk on the water. And Jesus says, "Yes!" Jesus wants us to share in the amazing and wonderful work that he can do. This is what the members of the Church are called to do today. But to do this work, we have to trust that Jesus will always be helping us to do it. If we forget this, then we can't do Jesus' work well. Like Peter, we may sink. But even if we forget and grow fearful, Jesus will still help us, just as he helped Peter.***
6. Conclude together in prayer by praying the Morning Offering or the Lord's Prayer. Encourage the group to be mindful of the ways in which Jesus works through them.

Morning Offering

My God, I offer you my prayers,
works, joys and sufferings of this day
in union with the holy sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world.
I offer them for all the intentions of your Son's Sacred Heart,
for the salvation of souls, reparation for sin,
and the reunion of Christians.
Amen.

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 56:1,6-7

The Lord reveals his salvation to all.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 67:2-3,5-6,8

All the nations will praise God.

Second Reading

Romans 11:13-15,29-32

God's favour to Israel is irrevocable.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus heals the daughter of the Canaanite woman because of her great faith.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today we move ahead in our reading of Matthew's Gospel. Last week we read about Jesus walking on the water and the disciples' confession of faith that Jesus is the Son of God. If we were reading Matthew's entire Gospel, we would have read about Jesus' debate with the Pharisees about Jewish purity laws. Jesus argues that it is not what goes into us that makes us unclean; he is referring to the strict Jewish dietary rules. Instead our words and our actions—what comes out of us—make us unclean because they emerge from a heart that is unclean.

Knowing about Jesus' debate with the Pharisees helps us to understand today's Gospel. In fact the story heightens the surprise and shock we feel as we hear Jesus' exchange with the Canaanite woman. The woman, who is not Jewish, approaches Jesus, requesting that he heal her demon-possessed daughter. At first Jesus ignores her; he says nothing. The disciples ask Jesus to send her away, and Jesus agrees, remarking that he was sent to minister to the Jews alone.

The woman persists, paying homage to Jesus, and yet Jesus denies her request again. He even insults her, using a Jewish word of derision for Gentiles, "dog." But the woman cleverly turns Jesus' insult into an affirmation of faith. Only then does Jesus grant her request and heal her daughter.

Jesus' unresponsiveness to this woman may strike us as uncharacteristic or shocking. Yet in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' ministry is directed primarily to the people of Israel. At only a very few points, such as the one found in today's Gospel, do we find Jesus anticipating the later Christian ministry to the rest of the world.

Behind Matthew's text we can hear this early Christian community's struggle to understand how God's selection of Israel is consistent with two events: Israel's rejection of Jesus and the Gentiles' acceptance of Jesus. Just as Jesus was surprised by the faith expressed by the Canaanite woman, so too the first Christians were surprised that the Gentiles would receive the salvation God offered through Christ. In today's second reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, we hear the apostle Paul considering this same concern.

The faith that the Canaanite woman expresses is an affirmation of and confidence in God's abundant mercy. Yes, salvation comes through Israel, but it overflows for the benefit of all.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Salvation is for all who believe in Jesus Christ (# 457)	Baptism / Reconciliation/Eucharist /The Creed	We are called to Discipleship – to be true followers of Christ

Making the Connection

Young children can be quite bold and persistent in making requests of the adults in their lives. We can teach them to present their needs to God with this same boldness, confident that God wants to grant us everything that we need.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus heals the daughter of the Canaanite woman because of her great faith.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask the group: ***Think about a time when you wanted something but needed another person's help to get it. Perhaps it was a special toy that you wanted for your birthday or a special treat from the grocery store. Or perhaps there was something special that you wanted to do, such as stay up late to watch a special show or go to a movie. How do you ask the grownups in your lives for something that you want very badly?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.)
2. Ask: ***What do you do when someone says no to your request? Do you give up or do you ask again?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.)
3. Say: ***In today's Gospel we hear about a woman who wanted Jesus to do something for her. Her daughter was sick, and she wanted Jesus to make her better. What do you think Jesus will say to this woman?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.) ***Let's listen carefully to this reading to see what Jesus says.***
4. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 15:21-28.
5. Ask: ***What did Jesus say to this woman who asked him to help her daughter?*** (He denied her request several times.) ***Did this surprise you? It may have surprised the woman in the story as well. What does she do?*** (She continues to tell Jesus what she needs and that she believes that he can help her daughter.) ***Does Jesus heal her daughter?*** (Yes)
6. Say: ***Jesus says that he is very surprised and pleased by this woman's great faith. She continued to tell Jesus what she wanted and that she believed he could help her daughter, even after Jesus said he wouldn't help her. We can learn something from this about how we pray to God about the things that we need. Jesus wants us to trust God and to tell God exactly what we need. When we pray this way, we are praying prayers of petition.***
7. Conclude by asking the group to think about the things that they most need from God. Ask them to think about those things that they are willing to ask God for again and again, like the woman in today's Gospel. Invite them to offer these prayers as prayers of petition.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary - August 15

Catechist to incorporate lesson on the Feast in the session preceding the Assumption – Readings and background to the gospel are provided for Catechist preparation only.

First Reading

Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a,10ab

The sign of God's salvation will be a woman clothed with the sun.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 45:10-12,16

The queen takes her place next to God.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 15:20-27

Christ has redeemed Adam's sin.

Gospel Reading

Luke 1:39-56

Mary greets Elizabeth and sings God's praise.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's feast celebrates Mary's Assumption into heaven. It is one of three feasts of Mary that are Holy Days of Obligation for Catholics in the United States. January 1 is the feast of Mary, the Mother of God, and December 8 is the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven has long been held as an important Catholic belief. The belief was not defined as dogma, however, until 1950 by Pope Pius XII. The dogma teaches that Mary, who was without sin, was taken, body and soul, into the glory of heaven.

The Gospel for this holy day recalls Mary's actions after the announcement of Jesus' birth by the Angel Gabriel. Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth who is also with child. Elizabeth greets Mary with full recognition of the roles they and their unborn children will play in God's plan for salvation. Mary responds to Elizabeth's greeting with her song of praise, the Magnificat. Both women recall and echo God's history of showing favor upon the people of Israel. Mary's Magnificat, in particular, echoes the song of praise offered by Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

The Gospel for this day reminds us that Mary's Assumption into heaven is best understood with regard for the full spectrum of Catholic beliefs about the person of Christ and the person of Mary. Only Mary, who was born without stain of original sin—the Immaculate Conception—could give birth to Christ, who is fully God and fully human. This is called the Immaculate Conception. Because of Mary's role in God's plan of salvation, she does not suffer from the effects of sin, which are death and decay. Mary is the first to receive the fullness of the redemption that her son has won for all of humanity. The Church, therefore, recognizes Mary as the sign of the salvation promised to all.

Today's Gospel highlights Mary's faith. Mary's faith enabled her to recognize the work of God in her people's history and in her own life. Her openness to God allowed God to work through her so that salvation might come to all. Mary is a model and symbol of the Church. May we be like Mary, open and cooperative in God's plan of salvation.

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 22:19-23

God will remove Shebna from his office as master of the palace.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 138:1-3,6,8

God's kindness is forever.

Second Reading

Romans 11:33-36

Paul sings praise to God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 16:13-20

Simon Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Christ and is given the key to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Background on the Gospel Reading

It is important to read today's Gospel and next week's Gospel as two parts of a single story. These readings are a turning point in Matthew's Gospel. This week we hear Jesus name Simon Peter as the rock upon which he will build his Church. Next week we will hear Jesus call this same Simon Peter "Satan" when he reacts negatively to Jesus' prediction about his passion and death.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples what people are saying about his identity. The disciples indicate that most people believe that Jesus is a prophet of Israel. Then Jesus asks his disciples who they believe that he is. Simon Peter answers, identifying Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus commends Simon Peter for this profession of faith, indicating that this insight has come from God. Because of Simon Peter's response, Jesus calls him the "rock" upon which Jesus will build the Church. This is a word play on the name Peter, which is the Greek word for "rock." Peter is then given special authority by Jesus, a symbolic key to the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter will play an important role in the early Christian community as a spokesperson and a leader.

In today's Gospel, Peter's recognition of Jesus' identity is credited to a revelation by God. This will contrast sharply with Jesus' rebuke of Peter in next week's Gospel. When Peter rejects Jesus' prediction of his passion and death, Peter is said to no longer be thinking as God does but as humans do.

The use of the term *church* in today's Gospel is one of only three such occurrences in Matthew's Gospel. Peter in this Gospel is being credited as the foundation for the Church, a privilege granted to him because of his recognition of Jesus' identity. The Church continues to be grounded in the faith that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve; Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it. (#552) "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ."	Confession of Faith (The Creed) Holy Orders	We are called to be disciples.

This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. (#85)		
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Making the Connection

As children mature they learn the importance of good leadership in community life. Through Peter's example we can teach them that Christian life and ministry must be rooted in faith in Jesus.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 16:13-20

Simon Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Christ and is given the key to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Materials Needed

- A large rock that can be safely passed among the group

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Show the group the rock that you have brought and pass it around. As it is passed, ask the group to describe it.
2. Say: ***Rocks are sometimes used as building materials. Have you ever seen a rock wall or perhaps rocks used in a house? Why might rocks be good building materials?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.)
3. Say: ***In today's Gospel, Jesus calls one of his disciples a "rock" and Jesus says that the Church will be built on this foundation. Let's listen carefully to this Gospel.***
4. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 16:13-20.
5. Ask: ***Which disciple does Jesus call a rock?*** (Peter) ***Why does Jesus call Peter a rock?*** (Peter has just recognized that Jesus is God's Son.)
6. Say: ***Because Peter recognized that Jesus was God's only Son, Jesus gave him a very important job. Jesus told Peter that he would be an important leader and would help to build the Church. Peter was given this job because he believed that Jesus was God's Son. One of the most important jobs of Church leaders today is to help us to remember the importance of our faith in Jesus, God's Son.***
7. Conclude in prayer together for the Church and its leaders. Pray together a prayer for vocations.

Simple Prayer for Vocations

God, thank you for loving me.

You have called me

to live as your child.

Help all your children

to love you and one another.

Amen.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Jeremiah laments but cannot fail to speak in God's name.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 63:2-6,8-9

Our souls yearn for God.

Second Reading

Romans 12:1-2

Paul encourages the Romans to stay faithful to God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 16:21-27

Jesus speaks of his Passion and rebukes Peter for his objection.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel continues the story that began in last week's Gospel. Simon Peter was called the "rock" upon which Jesus would build his Church, and yet Peter continues to show the limitations of his understanding of Jesus' identity. Now that the disciples have acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus confides in them the outcome of his ministry: he must suffer and die in Jerusalem to be raised on the third day. Peter rejects this prediction, and Jesus rebukes him severely, calling him "Satan." In opposing this aspect of Jesus' mission, Peter shows that he is no longer speaking based on the revelation from God but as a human being. Jesus then teaches all of the disciples about the difficult path of discipleship: to be Christ's disciple is to follow in his way of the cross.

Peter could not yet understand what it meant to call Jesus the Messiah. It is unlikely that the other disciples understood any better. Messianic expectations were a common aspect of first-century Judaism. Under Roman occupation, many in Israel hoped and prayed that God would send a Messiah to free the Jews from Roman oppression. The common view was that the Messiah would be a political figure, a king that would free Israel from Roman rule. This is perhaps what Peter envisioned when he was led to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. In this passage, however, Jesus is beginning to teach his disciples that he would be the Messiah in a different way.

Jesus would be more like the suffering servant described by the prophet Isaiah than the political liberator. Those who would be Jesus' disciples would be called to a similar life of service. Perhaps this is what Peter feared most in Jesus' prediction of his Passion. He whom Jesus had called "rock" would also be called upon to offer himself in sacrifice and service to others. Christian leaders today are still called to sacrifice and serve others as Jesus did.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Missionary paths. The Holy Spirit is the protagonist, "the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission." It is he who leads the Church on her missionary paths. "This mission continues and, in the course of history, unfolds the mission of Christ, who was sent to evangelize the poor; so the Church, urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ himself walked, a way of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice even to death, a death from which he emerged victorious by his resurrection." So it is that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians." (#852)	Holy Orders/Baptism Eucharistic Prayer/Memorial Acclamation	Servant leadership – we need to serve others in leading them to Christ

Making the Connection

Like Jesus' disciples, we sometimes find Jesus' teaching difficult to hear. We can alert children to this tendency and help them to remain open to the challenge of the Gospel and the life of discipleship.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 16:21-27

Jesus speaks of his Passion and rebukes Peter for his objection.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Tell the group: ***Think about a time when you were told something that you didn't want to hear. For example, what do you do when you are watching television and a grown up tells you that it is time to go clean your bedroom? Or perhaps you are playing outside with your friends and your parent calls you for dinner. How do you respond?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.)
2. Say: ***In today's Gospel we hear Jesus telling his disciples something that they may not have wanted to hear. Let's listen to find out what this is and how one of his disciples responds.***
3. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 16:21-27.
4. Ask: ***What was Jesus telling his disciples about in the beginning of this Gospel?*** (He was going to suffer and die.) ***How does Peter respond to Jesus?*** (Peter objects to what Jesus has said.) ***What does Jesus say to Peter?*** (He tells Peter that he doesn't understand; he is not thinking like God.) ***What does Jesus tell his disciples next?*** (Jesus says that anyone who wants to be Jesus' disciple must follow Jesus' example.)
5. Say: ***Jesus set an example for all of his followers. He loved people so much that he was willing to suffer and die for us.***
6. Ask: ***Who are some people in our world today who serve others?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.) ***These people can also be examples for us. Jesus also wants us to offer our lives in service to others.***
7. Conclude in prayer together for help in being good followers of Jesus. Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Ezekiel 33:7-9

The Son of Man is appointed as guardian of Israel.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 95:1-2,6-9

Song of praise to God, our salvation.

Second Reading

Romans 13:8-10

The Law is summarized in the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus teaches his disciples how to settle disputes in the Church.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel reading is taken from a chapter of Matthew's Gospel, which is sometimes called the "discourse on the Church" or the "church order" discourse. In this part of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks more directly about matters of Church discipline and order. In today's reading we find one of only three instances in which Jesus uses the word *church* in Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew's record of Jesus' teaching, we can hear echoes of the kinds of issues faced by the early Christian community.

In the first part of the "discourse on the Church" (Matthew 18:1-14), Matthew addresses the Christian community's concerns about rank. Jesus responds to the disciples' question about who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus indicates that those who wish to enter the kingdom of heaven must be like children, and he cautions those leaders who might lead these "little ones" astray. He also responds with the parable of the lost sheep, indicating how God will seek out and bring back those "little ones" who have strayed.

In today's Gospel reading, Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus addresses a common occurrence in the Christian community: a dispute between two members of the Church. Jesus outlines a procedure for settling such matters fairly. The victim should privately address the offender and attempt to resolve the dispute without outside involvement. If that fails, then the victim should bring two or three witnesses and confront the offender again. If the dispute is still unresolved, the matter should be brought to the attention of the entire community. If the offender refuses to adhere to the reparations prescribed by the community, then Jesus suggests that the offender may be expelled from the Church.

Jesus does not discourage disagreement within the community of the Church; he acknowledges the reality of conflict and error and offers his disciples a means for addressing such matters. It is in the conclusion to this teaching that the message of hope is found: Jesus is present with the community and will guide the community in its relations. If decisions are taken in prayer, then the community can be assured of God's assistance.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is giving the same authoritative power to bind and loose that he gave to Simon-Peter, the Vicar of His earthly Kingdom, to the leadership of the New Covenant Church.	Reconciliation/Prayer	We should live our lives in hope and forgiveness with mercy to those in conflict, not judgement. To make prayer the foundation of our lives.

Making the Connection

Conflict is a fact of life. Young children are still learning how to manage conflict in a peaceful manner and how to judge when the assistance of others is needed to settle a dispute.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus teaches his disciples how to settle disputes in the Church.

Materials Needed

- Bell or whistle

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Get the group's attention by ringing a bell or blowing a whistle. When everyone has quieted, say in a whisper: **Jesus loves you and wants you to love each other.** When the children admit to difficulty hearing you, enlist the help of one, then two, then three children to whisper the same sentence with you.
2. When everyone has heard the message or is participating in sharing the message, say: **Sometimes it takes the help of others to get a message across. You all helped me to share an important message today. In today's Gospel, Jesus talks about how we might need the help of others when a disagreement arises. Let's listen carefully to this Gospel.**
3. Read today's Gospel, Matthew 18:15-20.
4. Ask: **If you have a disagreement with someone, who does Jesus say is the first person you should talk with?** (the person with whom you have a disagreement) **Should you talk to this person loudly and in front of a lot of other people?** (No, you should talk to them privately.) **But, if this doesn't work, what does Jesus say for us to do?** (We should get the help of others and try to handle the disagreement fairly.)
5. Say: **This is a good lesson for us when we have disagreements with others. We should always try to resolve the matter first with the other person involved, by talking with them gently. If that doesn't work, then we may need to get the help of others. Jesus wants us to lovingly try to help each other obey God.**
6. Say: **Jesus also teaches us in today's reading that he will be with us when we pray to him about the conflicts in our lives. Prayer is also an important part of handling conflict. Let's conclude in prayer together that we will follow Jesus' way when we have disagreements with others.** Pray together the Lord's Prayer or the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis.

Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Sirach 27:30—28:9

Those who seek God's mercy must be merciful toward others.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 103:1-4,9-12

A song of praise to God who is kind and merciful.

Second Reading

Romans 14:7-9

We belong to the Lord.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus teaches that we must forgive one another as God has forgiven us.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel reading directly follows last week's Gospel in which Jesus taught the disciples how to handle disputes and conflict within the Christian community. In today's reading Peter asks Jesus how many times one ought to extend forgiveness to another. Peter proposes a reasonable number of times, perhaps seven. Jesus replies by extending Peter's proposal by an enormous amount; not just seven times should one forgive, but 77 times. The parable of the unforgiving servant is Jesus' elaboration of his initial reply to Peter. Through the parable we come to understand the depths of God's mercy toward us and the results of our acceptance of God's forgiveness.

The king in the parable decides to settle accounts with his servants. We are told that one servant in particular owes the king an enormous sum of money. Despite the promise of the servant, it is unlikely that he would ever be able to repay the debt that he owes. The king is moved by the humility of the pleading servant and mercifully forgives the debt. Rather than displaying gratitude for this forgiveness, the servant confronts a fellow servant who owes him a small debt—a pittance when compared with the amount that was owed to the king. The unmerciful servant refuses the pleas of his fellow servant and sends the servant to prison.

A few other servants tell the merciful king about the actions of the unforgiving servant. The king punishes the servant because he refused to show the kind of mercy he had himself received from the king. Jesus concludes by indicating that this is how it will be with God and those who refuse to forgive one another.

There is a temptation to quantify forgiveness as Peter tried to do, but Jesus' point is that forgiveness is not about quantity—the number of times we extend forgiveness to another. In the parable the king's forgiveness is like God's forgiveness, and it transforms us, helping us to be as forgiving as God. The lesson is clear: If we hoard God's mercy while showing no mercy to others, we risk forfeiting the effects of God's mercy in our lives.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Baptism is the chief sacrament of the forgiveness of sins (#2631) “Now - and this is daunting - this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our	Baptism /Reconciliation / Divine Mercy / Eucharist / Confiteor / The Lord's Prayer	We need to forgive others and extend as much mercy as we are granted through the love of God

brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace." (#2840)		
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Making the Connection

In their experiences of forgiveness, children learn to trust in God's mercy toward them. We seek to extend this lesson to show them that the forgiveness they have received must also be extended to others.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus teaches that we must forgive one another as God has forgiven us.

Materials Needed

- Box of dominoes

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask volunteers to arrange the dominoes in order so that when one falls, it triggers the chain reaction for the rest of them to fall.
2. Ask: ***Have you ever done something that you were sorry you had done? Have you ever wished you could start all over again and that no one would even remember what you had done wrong?*** Invite members of the group to give examples.
3. Say: ***In this week's Gospel, Jesus tells us that he will always forgive us for the things that we are sorry for doing and that we can start over. Let's listen carefully to what Jesus teaches us.***
4. Read today's Gospel, Matthew 18:21-35.
5. Say: ***Today's Gospel tells us that Jesus will always forgive us. But it also tells us what Jesus wants us to do. What was that?*** (to forgive others)
6. Say: ***Forgiveness starts with God, but it should also travel through us to other people. Watch what happens when God forgives us and we forgive other people.*** Demonstrate by starting the dominoes on their chain reaction.
7. Conclude in prayer together for the ability to be as forgiving as God is. Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 55:6-9

God's ways are far beyond the ways of human beings.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 145:2-3,8-9,17-18

God is near to those who call upon him.

Second Reading

Philippians 1:20c-24,27a

Paul tells the Philippians to live for Christ.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 20:1-16

In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Jesus teaches about God's generous mercy.

Background on the Gospel Reading

In today's Gospel, Jesus moves from Galilee to teach in Judea where he is sought out by great crowds and tested by the Pharisees on issues such as marriage and divorce. Jesus also encounters a rich young man who is unable to accept Jesus' demand that he leave his possessions to follow him. Jesus' response to the rich young man sounds very much like the conclusion we will find in today's Gospel: the first will be last and the last will be first.

On the surface, the parable of the workers in the vineyard appears to be an offense to common sense. Those who work a longer day ought to be paid more than those who work just an hour or two. When viewed in this way, the landowner seems unfair. That is because we are reading into the parable our own preconceived notions of how fairness and equality should be quantified.

A close read shows us that the landowner paid on the terms that were negotiated. The landowner, it seems, has acted completely justly. The parable goes beyond that, however, and we come to see that the landowner is not simply just, he is exceptionally just. He is radically just. He has given those who labored in the field for a full day their due pay. But he has also given a full-day's wage to those who worked only a single hour. No one is cheated, but a few receive abundantly from the landowner just as we receive from God more than what is merely justifiable or due. God, like the landowner, is radically just and abundantly generous. The workers who complain are made to look foolish as they lament the fact that landowner has made all workers equal. Indeed, what more could one ask for than to be treated as an equal at work or anywhere else?

The parable reminds us that although God owes us nothing, he offers abundantly and equally. We are occasionally tempted to think that our own actions deserve more reward, more of God's abundant mercy, than the actions of others. But God's generosity cannot be quantified or partitioned into different amounts for different people. When we think that way, we are trying to relate to God on our terms rather than to accept God's radically different ways.

Doctrinal Content:

<i>Profession of Faith</i>	<i>Sacraments / Liturgy</i>	<i>Christian Life</i>
With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from him, our Creator. (#2007)	Baptism Reconciliation "I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof..."	We cannot earn God's grace. We must extend God's mercy, compassion and graces to others.

Making the Connection

Young children absorb early on our tendency to make comparisons and to value some jobs above others. Jesus teaches us that our worth is founded in God's great love for us, not in what or how much we do.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 20:1-16

In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Jesus teaches about God's generous mercy.

Materials Needed

- Three different kinds of pencil sharpeners

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Show the group each of the pencil sharpeners that you have brought. Ask: **Which pencil sharpener is the best?** Allow time for the children to answer and accept all reasonable answers. If they can't think of any answers, you might offer that the smallest might be best because it fits easily inside a pocket or pencil case, or that the colorful one is best because it looks nice, or that the largest one is best because it may be the most durable.
2. Say: **Actually there is only one thing that really matters with a pencil sharpener: how well does it sharpen a pencil? If the pencil sharpener can sharpen the pencil for me, it really doesn't matter how big or small it is or how colorful it is. Sometimes we forget this about lots of things. Sometimes we judge based on appearances.**
3. Say: **Jesus taught us about this when he told his disciples a parable about workers in the vineyard. A vineyard is where grapes are grown, and lots of workers are needed to work in a vineyard. Let's listen carefully to the parable that Jesus told.**
4. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 20:1-16.
5. Ask: **Why were the workers who were hired first grumbling at the end of the story?** (They were paid the same amount as those who were hired at the end of the day; they thought that they deserved more because they worked longer.) **What does Jesus say at the end of this parable?** (The last will be first, and the first will be last.)
6. Say: **Jesus has a job for each of us to do. It might be a small job or a very large job. Some of us may grow up to be very famous for doing good things. Some of us will grow up to do good things for our family and neighbors. Either way, God will love us for doing the work that God wants us to do.**
7. Conclude in prayer together for the help to do God's work with love. Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Ezekiel 18:25-28

It is possible to turn from sin and preserve one's life.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 25:4-9

A prayer to God for mercy.

Second Reading

Philippians 2:1-11 (shorter form Philippians 2:1-5)

Be like Christ who humbled himself and was exalted by God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus poses a question to the chief priests and elders on the meaning of obedience.

Background on the Gospel Reading

The context for today's Gospel is the mounting tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus has entered Jerusalem and overturned the money changers' tables in the Temple. Jesus has caught the attention of the religious authorities; the chief priests and elders question Jesus about the source of his authority. Jesus refuses to name for these religious leaders the source of his authority. Instead, he questions the priests and elders through the parable we hear in today's Gospel. The answer given by the religious leaders is correct, but it convicts them for their failure to heed the call of John the Baptist and for their inability to recognize the Kingdom of God.

The situation Jesus poses is rather straightforward. Given the same task by their father, one son asserts his disobedience in words, but then obeys in his actions; the second son obeys with his words, but disobeys in his actions. The question that Jesus poses is pointed and direct: Which son did what the father wanted? All would agree that "actions speak louder than words" and that even if his words were disobedient, the son who did the work as ordered did the father's will.

Jesus' conclusion is also direct. The chief priests and elders, the ones who speak most often about God, did not act accordingly. They did not respond to the message of repentance announced by John the Baptist with a change of heart. Instead, John's message was heeded by those one would not expect to repent—tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners. Because of their actions, these sinners will enter the Kingdom of God ahead of the religious leaders.

Jesus could ask us the same question. Do our words indicate our obedience to God? If not our words, do our actions? God desires a full conversion of heart, that our actions (and our words as well) will give evidence of our love for God.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus calls us to do his word (#561)	Full participation in the liturgy, gathering as community to worship God.	Choosing the path of obedience, repentance and conversion

Making the Connection

Children are quite observant of inconsistencies between words and actions that they witness in other people. They may be slower to recognize their own inconsistencies, however, and need to be taught that deeds matter as much as words.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus poses a question to the chief priests and elders on the meaning of obedience.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Say: ***Sometimes people say one thing and do another. Let's consider this example, which is a story that Jesus tells in today's Gospel.***
2. Choose three volunteers to act out today's Gospel as you read it. One child will be the father; the other two children will play the roles of the two sons. Read aloud Matthew 21:28-30. Stop at this point and ask the question that Jesus asks the chief priests and elders: ***Which of the two sons did what the father wanted?*** (the first). Finish reading today's Gospel, Matthew 21:31-32.
3. Ask: ***What might have made the first son change his mind and do the work that his father asked? Why might the second son have said yes, but then failed to do what his father asked? Have you ever done something similar?*** (Allow all reasonable answers.)
4. Say: ***Occasionally we don't do what we say we will do because we are forgetful or because we get distracted. Sometimes, however, we are simply being disobedient by doing what we want to do instead of doing what we have been asked to do.***
5. Say: ***Jesus wants us to know that it is not enough to say that we love God. We must also act in ways that show our obedience to God.***
6. Conclude in prayer together for the strength to obey God in actions and with words. Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 5:1-7

The Lord compares the house of Israel to a vineyard.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 80:9, 12-16, 19-20

The Lord protects his vineyard, the house of Israel.

Second Reading

Philippians 4:6-9

Paul encourages the Philippians to stay faithful to the teaching they received from him.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus tells the parable about the wicked tenants.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel follows directly after last Sunday's Gospel in which Jesus was questioned by Jewish religious leaders about the source of his teaching authority. After refusing to answer their questions, Jesus tells the parable of the two sons and then criticizes the priests and elders for their lack of belief in John the Baptist.

In today's Gospel, Jesus once again speaks to the priests and elders with a parable. In this parable, the landowner leases his vineyard to tenants and sends his servants to collect the portion of the harvest that the tenants owe to him. Several times the servants are sent to collect payment, and each time they are beaten and killed by the tenants. Finally, the landowner sends his son to collect his rent. The tenants, believing that they will inherit the vineyard if the landowner dies without an heir, plot together and kill the landowner's son.

After telling the parable, Jesus questions the chief priests and elders about what the landowner will do to the wicked tenants. They all agree that the landowner will kill the wicked tenants and give the land to new tenants who will pay the rent.

In telling the parable, Jesus is clearly drawing upon Isaiah 5:1-7, which is today's first reading and one that the priests and elders would have known well. Jesus doesn't, therefore, have to explain the symbolism of the parable; the Pharisees would have understood that the vineyard represented Israel, the landowner represented God, the servants represented the prophets, and the bad tenants represented the religious leaders. Yet Jesus nonetheless explains the meaning of the parable for his audience: the Kingdom of God will be taken from the unbelieving and given to the faithful. The chief priests and elders have condemned themselves with their answer to Jesus' question.

Today's Gospel has a parallel in Mark 12:1-12. There are some notable differences, however. In Matthew's version, the religious leaders condemn themselves; in Mark's Gospel, Jesus answers his own question. Matthew names the religious leaders as Pharisees and chief priests. Clearly this Gospel shows the tension that was mounting between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders who thought that his message was dangerous. Matthew's Gospel was written about 70 years after Jesus' death and reflects the conflicts and tensions found in the Christian community for whom Matthew was writing. Many biblical scholars believe that the tension between Matthew's community and their Jewish neighbors can also be heard in today's reading.

This Gospel reminds us of the importance of listening to God's word. God speaks to us in many ways—through Scripture, through our Church tradition, in our Church's teaching, and through modern-day prophets. Are we attentive and receptive to God's word to us through these messengers?

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
God wants us to grow (#44) God's love sustains us (#73, 620)	The Eucharistic Assembly (Mass) – partaking of the Eucharist for growth and sustenance.	Living out the teaching of Scripture and the Church

Making the Connection

Young children have much to learn about following directions. In talking about the importance of following the directions of others, we can also teach the importance of listening to God's directions given to us in his Word.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus tells the parable about the wicked tenants.

Materials Needed

- Empty two-liter bottle
- 3" by 11" strip of paper
- A pencil

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Set up the demonstration area as follows: Set the empty two-liter bottle upside down on a 3" by 11" strip of paper. Leave a few inches of the paper beyond the bottle and the rest hanging off the edge of the desk. Place the pencil on the desk.
2. Show the children the demonstration area. Invite one or more volunteers to try to remove the paper without touching the bottle with his or her hands and without causing the bottle to fall.
3. After a few volunteers have tried unsuccessfully, offer this suggestion. Using the pencil, slowly and carefully roll the paper around the pencil. When the pencil touches the mouth of the bottle, continue to roll the paper very carefully, and the paper will gradually slide out from under the bottle without knocking it over. Allow one or more volunteers to try this until someone is successful.
4. Say: ***If you were willing to follow my directions, you were able to do this task even though it seemed impossible at first. In the Gospel this week, Jesus tells the people that God has sent many messengers to help them know how to live. Not everyone listened to these messengers, and so God sent Jesus to teach them. Let's listen carefully to this Gospel.***
5. Read today's Gospel, Matthew 21:33-43.
6. Say: ***Those people who follow Jesus' directions will be a part of the Kingdom of God.***
7. Conclude by praying together for the will to be attentive to those messengers who speak for God. Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 25:6-10a

The Lord will provide richly for his people.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 23:1-6

The Lord is our shepherd.

Second Reading

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Paul tells the Philippians that God provides whatever he needs.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 22:1-14 (shorter form Matthew 22:1-10)

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Immediately after criticizing the religious leaders through the parable of the tenants in last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus proceeded to tell another parable, again directed at the religious leaders. We hear this parable in today's Gospel.

In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus offers an image of the kingdom of heaven using the symbol of a wedding banquet. In today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah and in today's psalm, the Lord's goodness is evident in the symbol of a feast of good food and wine. Jesus' listeners would have been familiar with the image of a wedding feast as a symbol for God's salvation. They would consider themselves to be the invited guests. Keeping this in mind helps us to understand the critique Jesus makes with this parable. The context for this parable is the growing tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. This has been the case for the past two Sundays and will continue to be true for the next several weeks.

The parable Jesus tells is straightforward. The king dispatches his servants to invite the guests to the wedding feast that he is planning for his son. The listeners would have been surprised to learn that the first guests refused the invitation. Who would refuse the king's invitation? A second dispatch of servants follows. Again to the listeners' great surprise, some guests ignore the invitation. Some of the invited guests even go so far as to mistreat and kill the servants. The king invokes his retribution against these murderers by destroying them and burning their city.

We might stop here for a moment. Why would some guests kill the servants sent to invite them to the king's wedding feast? It might be possible that the king was a tyrant, evidenced by the destruction of the city of those who refused his invitation. But if we follow this idea, then the allegory seems to be about something other than the kingdom of heaven. It is more likely that the destruction of the city would have been a powerful image corresponding to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, which would have been an important event for Matthew's audience.

With the invited guests now deemed unworthy to attend the king's wedding feast, the servants are sent to invite whomever they can find. The guests arrive, but it appears that accepting the king's invitation brings certain obligations. The guest who failed to dress in the appropriate wedding attire is cast out of the feast. We are reminded that while many are invited to the kingdom of heaven, not all are able to meet its requirements. God invites us to his feast, giving us his salvation. Yet he asks us to repent for our sins.

Jesus' message in the parable cautions against exclusive beliefs about the kingdom of heaven. The parable also teaches about humility. Those who assume that they are the invited guests may find that they have refused the invitation, and so others are invited in their place. To accept the invitation is also to accept its obligations. God wants our full conversion in complete acceptance of his mercy.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
The Church is a sacrament of God's union with us (#747, 1071-72)	Reconciliation /Act of Contrition/ Participation in the Mass	Our invitation to the Kingdom means following what Jesus told us to do – feed the hungry, repent, convert.

Making the Connection

Friendship is an important aspect of the lives of young children. Using this familiar concept, we can teach about Christian discipleship and evangelization.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 22:1-14 (shorter form Matthew 22:1-10)

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast.

Materials Needed

- Two magnets
- A small square of construction paper
- A rubber band
- A bolt
- A safety pin
- A paper clip
- Draw on the construction paper a small cloud and write the word *heaven* inside it. Glue the cloud to one of the magnets.

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Show the group the plain magnet. Say: ***This magnet is a very friendly fellow. Let's see how many friends the magnet has.***
2. Invite a volunteer to find the magnet's "friends" by seeing which of the items you brought—a rubber band, a bolt, a safety pin, and a paper clip—are attracted to it.
3. Say: ***In the Gospel this week, Jesus tells a story to show how some people respond to the invitation to be his disciple and how some people refuse this invitation. Let's listen carefully to this Gospel.***
4. Read today's Gospel in its shorter form, Matthew 22:1-10.
5. Ask: ***Do the first people invited to the king's banquet accept the invitation?*** (No.) ***How about the second group?*** (No.) ***Who does finally accept the invitation to the banquet?*** (people who were gathered from the streets, good and bad alike)
6. Say: ***Those who accept the invitation to be Jesus' disciples become like the items that were attracted to this magnet.*** Show the group again how the magnet picks up the bolt. Say: ***Now watch what happens to us when we become Jesus' disciples.*** Show the group how the bolt can also pick up the safety pin, and how the safety pin can now pick up the paper clip.
7. Say: ***When we accept Jesus' invitation to be his disciple, he asks us to be his "magnets" and invite others to be his disciples as well. Those of us who say yes to Jesus' invitation are in for a treat.*** Attach the magnet holding the items to the magnet with the word heaven on it.
8. Conclude in prayer together, asking for God's help to accept the invitation to be Jesus' disciple. Pray together today's psalm, Psalm 23.

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Isaiah 45:1,4-6

The Lord chooses Cyrus to subdue the nations for the sake of Israel.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 96:1,3-10

Sing praise to the Lord.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

Paul greets the Thessalonians, recalling the Gospel they received.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 22:15-21

The Pharisees send their disciples to test Jesus with a question about taxes.

Background on the Gospel Reading

In today's Gospel Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem continue their tense exchange of questions and challenges. At this point the disciples of the Pharisees, together with the Herodians, try to entrap Jesus by their question about the payment of taxes.

Matthew sets up an unusual partnership between the Pharisees and the Herodians. The Herodians were supporters of Herod Antipas, a Jewish political leader who collaborated with the Romans. Such collaboration would have required a compromised observance of the Mosaic Law. The Pharisees, on the other hand, taught scrupulous observance of the Mosaic Law and opposed Roman occupation. Herodians favored the payment of taxes; the Pharisees opposed it. The Herodians and the Pharisees approach Jesus, asking that he take sides in their dispute. If Jesus answers with the Pharisees, he shows himself to be an enemy of Rome. If he answers with the Herodians, he offends popular Jewish religious sensibilities.

Jesus' response to this attempt to trap him exposes the guile of his questioners. From his first words to them, Jesus shows that he is very much aware of what they are trying to do. He asks to see a Roman coin, which is readily provided to him. It may have come from the hand of a Herodian, but the Pharisees show themselves to be quite willing to accept this compromise. Jesus has already exposed the Pharisees as hypocrites.

Jesus takes his response one step further. He asks that his questioners examine the coin. Agreeing that it is Caesar's image on the coin, Jesus tells them that it must belong to Caesar. Avoiding the question of lawfulness altogether, Jesus answers their question with simple logic. Then, going further still, Jesus tells them that their obligation is to pay to God that which belongs to God.

Jesus' response to the Herodians and Pharisees suggests the ethic that Christians ought to adopt. It reminds us of the importance of keeping things in their proper perspective. Do we attach ourselves to worldly things at the expense of the love and honor that we owe to God?

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
God's being is truth and love (#231) God alone is God (#201-202,228,261)	Honouring and loving God through faithful observance of Mass	First and third commandments

Making the Connection

Young children have already learned that it is important to follow the rules. We can help them develop an appreciation for the importance of rules by showing them the rationale behind rules and laws.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 22:15-21

The Pharisees send their disciples to test Jesus with a question about taxes.

Materials Needed

- Can of dog food
- A jar of baby food
- A lollipop
- A stuffed dog
- A doll

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Show the group the stuffed dog and the doll. Say: ***Let's pretend that this stuffed dog is a real pet and that this doll is a real baby. Do you think that we should buy dog food if it is on sale and feed it to the baby? Do you think a dog would be as healthy eating baby food as it would be if it ate dog food?*** Discuss the children's responses.
2. Ask: ***Who do you think would best enjoy lollipops?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.) ***If instead of giving the lollipops to you, we gave them to the baby, what do you think would happen? And how do you think baby food would taste to us?***
3. Say: ***Baby food, dog food, and lollipops are each made for a different purpose. They are all best when used properly. In the Gospel this week people tried to trick Jesus by asking him if they must obey the government by paying taxes. They thought Jesus would insist only on God's rules being followed. Let's listen carefully to learn how Jesus answered this question.***
4. Read today's Gospel, Matthew 22:15-21.
5. Ask: ***What was Jesus' response to the question about taxes?*** (Pay taxes to the government and obey God's laws as well.)
6. Say: ***Jesus said that we must obey the rules of the government as well as the rules of God. Each of these sets of rules has a purpose. God's rules are all about love.***
7. Conclude in prayer together for the strength to honour God by following God's rules and our government's laws. Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Exodus 22:20-26

The Lord teaches that compassion ought to be shown to the alien and to the poor.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 18:2-4,47,51

The Lord is our strength.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

Paul tells the Thessalonians that their conversion to the Lord has been an example to all believers.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 22:34-40

The Pharisees continue to test Jesus with a question about the greatest commandment.

Background on the Gospel Reading

This week's Gospel follows close behind the Gospel read last Sunday. It is the last of three questions put to Jesus by Jewish religious leaders who are trying to trick him into saying something that might get him arrested. This reminds us that the context for today's reading is the mounting tension between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

The Herodians and the Pharisees asked the first question, which was about taxes. The Sadducees asked the second question, which was about the Resurrection (see Matthew 22:22-33). The third question, considered in today's Gospel, is asked by a Pharisee who asks Jesus about the greatest of the commandments.

The question requires Jesus to interpret the Law of Moses. The Mosaic Law consists of the Ten Commandments and many additional rules, numbering over six hundred. Adherence to the Mosaic Law, for a devout Jew, is an expression of faithfulness to God's covenant with Israel. The ranking of the Commandments was regularly debated among the teachers of the Law.

Jesus answers the Pharisees' question with a two-fold summary. Jesus says that all of the commandments can be summarized in two commandments: love God and love your neighbor. Both of these were central elements of the religious tradition Jesus learned from his Jewish community. Indeed these continue to be central aspects of contemporary Jewish religious understanding. Jesus' response to his questioners proposed an integral connection between these two aspects of the Jewish Law. Love of God finds its expression in our love for our neighbor.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus' rule is love (#228, 592)	Prayers of the Faithful	Our actions must be led by love.

Making the Connection

Young children are dependent upon concrete expressions of love and care as they grow emotionally and spiritually. Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel affirms that concrete expressions of love for our neighbor are also expressions of our love of God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 22:34-40

The Pharisees continue to test Jesus with a question about the greatest commandment.

Materials Needed

- Pictures of people doing good things—parents caring for children, a bride and groom, children sharing, someone paying for items at a checkout counter, people worshiping in church, and so on (Have at least 10 pictures.)
- Three signs, one with the word *God* written on it, one with the word *Others* written on it, and one sign, larger than the other two, with *Love* written on it

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Place the *Love* sign on the floor with the pictures placed randomly around it. Discuss the circumstances depicted in each picture and talk about what each one illustrates.
2. Now place the *God* sign and the *Others* sign near the *Love* sign. Say: ***All of these pictures can be separated into two groups—loving God and loving others.*** Invite volunteers to separate the pictures into the two categories, placing each picture above the appropriate sign.
3. Say: ***In the Gospel this week, Jesus talked about the importance of doing these two things, loving God and loving others. Let's listen carefully to this Gospel.***
4. Read today's Gospel, Matthew 22:34-40.
5. Ask: ***Which two commandments did Jesus say were the greatest?*** (Love God and love your neighbor.) ***And which did he say was first?*** (Love God.) ***Why do you think he said that?*** (If we love God, we will love our neighbor as well. Accept all reasonable answers.)
6. Conclude in prayer together asking God for help to love him and love our neighbors. Pray the Act of Love or the Lord's Prayer.

Act of Love:

O my God, I love you above all things with my whole heart and soul, because you are all good and worthy of all my love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of you. I forgive all who have injured me and I ask pardon of those whom I have injured.

Amen.

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Malachi 1:14b—2:2b,8-10

Through the prophet Malachi, God judges the priests of Israel and calls them to be more faithful to the Covenant.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 131:1-3

We find peace in the Lord.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9,13

Paul gives thanks to God for the way in which the Thessalonians received the word of God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus warns against following the example of the scribes and the Pharisees and teaches that those who would be great must be servants.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel continues to elaborate on the tension between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. Our Lectionary sequence at this point, however, is not quite a continuous reading of Matthew. In between last week's reading from Matthew and this week's, we find Jesus' question to the Pharisees about the Messiah being "David's son." Having concluded a series of dialogues with the Pharisees and other religious leaders, Jesus now directs his words to the crowds, warning them not to follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes and Pharisees were teachers of the Mosaic Law. They were entrusted with its interpretation and, thus, were influential in determining Jewish practice. In order to appreciate the conflict that is evident in this passage, we must understand that Jesus was basing his teachings on the same laws and traditions available to the Pharisees. Both were interpreting the Law of Moses in order to better adapt it to contemporary Jewish life. The differences between their teachings, therefore, are often highlighted and amplified by Matthew.

This part of Matthew's Gospel reflects aspects of the conflict between his Christian community and Pharisaic Judaism. Matthew's Church is thought to have included many Jewish Christians who may not have believed that a break with the synagogue was necessary to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus tells the crowd that it is correct to do and observe what the scribes and Pharisees teach; it is their example that is to be avoided, namely, their love of being honored and exalted. Hence, the Gospel reflects the tension of an active internal debate within the early Church.

Jesus references two aspects of Jewish spiritual life prescribed by the Law of Moses. *Phylacteries* are small boxes which contain Scripture verses that are placed on the left forearm and forehead. *Tassels* refer to the fringes worn on the corners of a person's garments; the tassels help to remind those who wear them to keep the commandments.

The warning Jesus gives against seeking places of honor in the community was directed as much toward the Christian community as the named Jewish leaders. Indeed, it is a warning that resonates with us today. Christian leadership is a call to service for the glory of God; those who would be leaders among us must, like Jesus, be servants of all.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus shows us how to serve (#561)	Preparation of Gifts	Serving in love to the glory of God and not self / Servant Leadership / Sacraments of Service

Making the Connection

Our prayers and spiritual lives should transform us, making us servants of others in the model of Jesus. It is our hope and prayer that this is the kind of faith our children will observe in us.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus warns against following the example of the scribes and the Pharisees and teaches that those who would be great must be servants.

Materials Needed

- A dishpan filled with water
- A balloon
- A small paper cup
- Several paper clips

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Fill the dishpan with water and inflate the balloon. Allow volunteers to take turns trying to sink the balloon. Ask: ***Why is it impossible to get the balloon to stay under water without holding it down?*** (Allow the children to speculate about this.) Let the air out of the balloon and show the children how easily the deflated balloon sinks.
2. Try floating the paper cup, first with nothing in it. Then put paper clips in the cup, one at a time, until the weight forces the cup to sink. Explain that air is lighter than water. Say: ***When things are filled with air, they float; when heavier things are added—or the air is removed as in the case of the balloon—they sink.***
3. Say: ***Knowing this information, if you were swimming and felt tired, would you be happier to find a stick in the water or an inner tube?*** (The inner tube would be better because it is filled with air and can help you float.) ***The knowledge of things that float is useful only if we apply it to our lives.***
4. Say: ***In the Gospel this week, Jesus talks about what actions should follow from our knowledge of God. Let's listen carefully to what Jesus teaches.***
5. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 23:1-12.
6. Say: ***In this Gospel, we hear Jesus describe a problem he had observed in some religious teachers. What was the problem?*** (He said that they didn't do what they taught others to do. He said that they prayed, but their actions didn't reflect their prayers. They didn't practice what they preached.) ***Jesus says that our beliefs about God and our prayers should lead us to be more loving toward other people.***
7. Conclude in prayer together that our love for God will be seen in our actions. Pray together the Morning Prayer or the Morning Offering.

Morning Prayer

God, our Father, I offer you today
all that I think and do and say.
I offer it with what was done
on earth by Jesus Christ, your Son.
Amen.

Morning Offering

My God, I offer you my prayers,
works, joys and sufferings of this day
in union with the holy sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world.
I offer them for all the intentions of your Son's Sacred Heart,
for the salvation of souls, reparation for sin,
and the reunion of Christians.
Amen.

All Saints Day

Catechist to spend time explaining the celebration of All Souls in lesson preceding the celebration. The readings and background on the gospel are presented herein for Catechist preparation.

First Reading

Revelation 7:2-4,9-14

John describes his vision: those who have endured the trials worship the Lamb.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 24:1-2,3-4,5-6

Those who seek the face of the Lord shall be rewarded.

Second Reading

1 John 3:1-3

We are God's children now.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:1-12

Jesus teaches what it means to be happy.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Every year the Church recalls the example, witness, and prayer of the holy women and men who have been identified by the Church as Saints. These saints are more than just role models; they are family members with whom we continue to share relation, in a bond of prayer, called the Communion of Saints. Every year when we celebrate this day, the Gospel we proclaim recalls for us Jesus' teaching about happiness, the Beatitudes. We quickly note in this reading that none of those Jesus names as "blessed" or "happy" are expected . . . the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted. Jesus' blueprint for happiness reflects little of what the world might call happiness.

What does Jesus mean when he uses the word "blessed?" This word is sometimes translated as "happy" or "fortunate" or "favored." In other words, Jesus is saying that divine favor is upon those who are poor, who mourn, who are persecuted. This might have been welcome and surprising news to the crowds who heard Jesus that day.

The Beatitudes can be understood as a framework for Christian living. Because of this, it is natural that we proclaim this Gospel on the Feast of All Saints. Saints are people who lived the spirit of the Beatitudes as Jesus lived. On this day, we too are challenged to model our lives on the spirit and promises of the Beatitudes.

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls Day)

Catechist to spend time explaining the celebration of All Souls in lesson preceding the celebration. The readings and background on the gospel are presented herein for Catechist preparation.

First Reading

Wisdom 3:1-9 or Wisdom 4:7-15 or Isaiah 25:6-9

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 23:1-3a,3b-4,5,6 or Psalm 25:6,7b,17-18,20-21 or Psalm 27:1,4,7,8b,9a,13-14

Second Reading

Romans 5:5-11 or Romans 5:17-21 or Romans 6:3-9 or
Romans 8:14-23 or Romans 8:31b-35,37-39 or Romans 14:7-9,10c-12 or
1 Corinthians 15:20-28 or 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 or 2 Corinthians 4:14-5:1 or
2 Corinthians 5:1,6-10 or Philippians 3:20-21 or 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 or 2 Timothy 2:8-13

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:1-12a or Matthew 11:25-30 or Matthew 25:31-46 or
Luke 7:11-17 or Luke 23:44-46,50,52-53;24:1-6a or Luke 24:13-16,28-35; John 5:24-29 or
John 6:37-40 or John 6:51-59 or John 11:17-27 or John 11:32-45 or John 14:1-6

The readings for the Liturgy of the Word on the Feast of All Souls can be selected from among the above or chosen from among those given for the Masses for the Dead. This reflection is based on John 11:17-27: Jesus consoles Martha at the death of her brother, Lazarus, and declares that he is the Resurrection and the life.

Background on the Gospel Reading

On the Feast of All Souls, we pray for the souls of all those who have died. There are many choices of readings for this day, all focusing on our belief in the resurrection of the dead and Jesus' promise of eternal life. The Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus offers us many important insights about this aspect of our faith.

Jesus was good friends with Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Lazarus had fallen ill, and Martha and Mary had sent word to Jesus. Jesus delays his journey to them, however, and when he arrives in Bethany, he finds that Lazarus is dead and has been buried for four days.

The scene described at Bethany is a sad one; Lazarus and his family have many friends who have come to mourn his death. Martha goes out to meet Jesus when he arrives. She cries with him, saying that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Yet she remains confident that God will do whatever Jesus asks. Jesus consoles her with the promise that Lazarus would rise from the dead. Martha affirms her belief that there will be resurrection of the dead in the last days. Jesus promises her even more; he says that he himself is the Resurrection and the life for all those who believe in him. Martha professes her faith in this, acknowledging that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God.

This is the profession of faith we continue to make, and it is the promise on which we base our hope for eternal life for ourselves and for all those who have died. In his death and Resurrection, Jesus has conquered death for all those who believe in him.

We believe that we continue to share a relationship with those who have died. When we pray for the souls of the faithful departed, we are praying for those whose souls are journeying through purgatory, being prepared for eternal life in heaven. We believe that our prayers for them will help to speed their journey to eternal life with God in heaven.

Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Wisdom 6:12-16

Wisdom will come to those who seek it.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 63:2,3-4,5-6,7-8

Our souls are thirsting for God.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

(shorter form: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

God will raise all those who have died.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, teaching his disciples the importance of being prepared to receive the Kingdom of Heaven.

Background on the Gospel Reading

In this week's Gospel, Jesus talks about what it means to be prepared to receive the Kingdom of Heaven. This week's reading follows a series of warnings and predictions by Jesus about the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus wants his disciples to understand that the exact day and time cannot be predicted. He teaches the disciples that they must remain vigilant so that they will not be caught unprepared.

When thinking about the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, it is important to consider the first-century wedding traditions of Palestine. Scholars tell us that it was the custom of the day for young maidens—friends and family members of the bride—to meet the bridegroom when he came to bring his bride to her new home.

As with many of Jesus' parables, several levels of interpretation are possible. In last week's Gospel, we heard Jesus warn against following the example of the Pharisees and scribes. If read in the context of early Christianity's struggle to define itself against Pharisaic Judaism, this parable is a continuing critique of Judaism. It suggests that the Jewish leaders were like the foolish virgins, unprepared to meet Jesus, the bridegroom of Israel.

In the chapter preceding this parable, however, Jesus warns about the destruction of Jerusalem, the tribulation of the end times, and the coming of the Son of Man. When read in this context, today's parable is a warning to the Christian community to remain vigilant and prepared to receive Jesus, the Son of Man who will return at the end of time. This interpretation is supported by the reference to the delay of the bridegroom. The Christian community for whom Matthew wrote this Gospel was coming to terms with the realization that the promise of Jesus' return would not be fulfilled within their lifetimes. The question remains for us to ask ourselves, Are we ready to receive Jesus? Will we be prepared to receive him?

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus calls us to Holiness (#941,1060)	Eucharistic / Responsorial Psalm	Making Christian choices

Making the Connection

Young children need adults' help to ensure that they are prepared for most activities. As adults, we must also take the lead and set the example when teaching the importance of preparing ourselves to receive Jesus when he comes again.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, teaching his disciples the importance of being prepared to receive the Kingdom of Heaven.

Materials Needed

- A basket
- A box or backpack
- Items for a first-aid kit
- Small items that would not be found in a first-aid kit

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Prepare a basket with enough items so that each child may choose one thing. Include many items that would be found in a well-prepared first-aid kit. Also include some items that would not usually be found in a first-aid kit.
2. Tell the children that you are going on a camping trip and that you need them to help you pack a first-aid kit. Supply a box or backpack to hold the items. Have each child choose an item from the basket and say whether it should be part of the kit and why. When all the items have been selected and discussed, explain to the children that this kit will help you be prepared if you become hurt or injured.
3. Say: ***The Gospel today talks about the importance of being prepared to receive Jesus.***
4. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 25:1-13.
5. Ask: ***Who was prepared to meet the bridegroom when he arrived? (the wise virgins) What happened to those who were unprepared? (They were not able to attend the wedding feast.)***
6. Say: ***This Gospel reminds us that we must be prepared to receive Jesus. We prepare to receive Jesus by praying every day, by learning what God wants us to do, and by obeying him. If we do these things, Jesus will come to us and take us to be with him in heaven forever.***
7. Conclude in prayer together for God's help in preparing to receive Jesus. Pray together the Lord's Prayer or the Act of Hope.

Act of Hope

O my God, relying on your infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of your grace, and life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer.
Amen.

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading

Proverbs 31:10-13,19-20,30-31

The virtues of a good wife are extolled.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 128:1-2,3,4-5

Blessed are those who walk in God's ways.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Paul warns the Thessalonians to stay alert because the day of the Lord cannot be predicted.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus tells the parable of the talents, in which he teaches about the importance of using the gifts that God has given to us in service to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Background on the Gospel Reading

This week's Gospel speaks of how Jesus' disciples are to conduct themselves as they await the Kingdom of Heaven. In the preceding passages and in last week's Gospel, Jesus taught that there is no way to predict the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. His disciples must, therefore, remain vigilant and ready to receive the Son of Man at any time.

Jesus' parable talks about Christian discipleship using economic metaphors. Before he leaves on a journey, the master entrusts to his servants a different number of talents, giving to each according to their abilities. A *talent* is a coin of great value. Upon the master's return, he finds that the first and second servants have doubled their money, and both are rewarded. The third servant, however, has only preserved what was given to him because he was afraid to lose the money. He has risked nothing; he did not even deposit the money in a bank to earn interest. This servant is punished by the master, and his talent is given to the one who brought the greatest return.

Read in light of last week's parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, this parable teaches that God's judgment will be based on the service we render to God and to one another in accordance with the gifts that God has given to us. Our gifts, or talents, are given to us for the service of others. If we fail to use these gifts, God's judgment on us will be severe. On the other hand, if we make use of these gifts in service to the Kingdom of Heaven, we will be rewarded and entrusted with even more responsibilities.

This Gospel reminds us that Christian spirituality is not passive or inactive. Our life of prayer helps us to discern the gifts that have been given to us by God. This prayer and discernment ought to lead us to use our gifts in the service of God and our neighbor. God's grace allows us to share in the work of serving the Kingdom of Heaven.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
The people of God use their talents(#941)	Readings / Prayers	Responding to Grace / Using our talents to serve

Making the Connection

Young children are eager to help others. We can help to foster this desire by helping them to identify ways in which their particular talents can be used to serve others.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus tells the parable of the talents, in which he teaches about the importance of using the gifts that God has given to us in service to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Materials Needed

- A rubber band
- A cup
- A play dollar bill
- A paper bag

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Divide the class into three groups. Have each group choose a leader. Ask each leader to choose an item from the bag in which you have placed a rubber band, a cup, and a play dollar bill. Give the groups one minute to brainstorm all the things that they could do with the item that their leader chose. When time is up, ask each leader to tell the class the uses his or her group thought of. Then collect the items and put them back in the bag. Ask the children to discuss how useful these items would be if we buried the bag in the dirt.
2. Ask: ***What are some special things that you can do?*** Distribute paper and pens or pencils, and allow time for each child to prepare a list or draw pictures of these things. Ask: ***How good would it be if you never used these abilities that God gave you—if you buried all your abilities by not trying your best?*** (Allow all reasonable answers.)
3. Introduce today's Gospel: ***God tells us in the Gospel that he expects us to use the gifts he has given us. Today's Gospel uses the word talents. When Jesus used this word, he was referring to a kind of coin. Today we use this word when talking about a person's special abilities.***
4. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 25:14-30.
5. Ask: ***Why were the first two servants rewarded by the master?*** (They used the talents that they were given and returned more money to the master than they were given.) ***Why was the third servant punished by the master?*** (He buried the talents that he was given and returned to the master only the money he had received.) Say: ***Jesus wants us to use the gifts and talents that he has given to us to help other people.***
6. Invite each person to share with the entire group one of the special things that he or she listed in step 2. For each talent named, invite the entire group to try to name at least two ways in which a person might use this talent to help other people.
7. Conclude in prayer together, thanking God for his gifts and asking for his help in using these gifts to serve others. Pray together the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.
And kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.
And you will renew the face of the earth.

Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit
you have taught the hearts of your faithful.
In the same Spirit
help us to relish what is right
and always rejoice in your consolation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King (Thirty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time), Cycle A

First Reading

Ezekiel 34:11-12,15-17

God himself will shepherd the people of Israel.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 23:1-2,2-3,5-6

The Lord is our shepherd.

Second Reading

Corinthians 15:20-26,28

Because Christ has been raised from the dead, all those who have died will also be raised.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus teaches that when the Son of Man comes in glory, he will judge the nations, separating the sheep from the goats.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel passage is the conclusion of Jesus' discourse with his disciples. It is about the end of time, the coming of the Son of Man, and the final judgment. We hear this description of the final judgment at the conclusion of our liturgical year, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King. In the context of Matthew's Gospel, this passage might also be read as a conclusion of Matthew's report on Jesus' life and ministry; the remaining chapters report the events of Jesus' Passion and Resurrection.

In today's Gospel, Jesus describes to his disciples the scene of the judgment of the Son of Man. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates sheep and goats upon their return from the pasture. The judgments made by the Son of Man will be based upon the acts of mercy shown to the least ones—the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the ill, and the imprisoned. Indeed, Jesus, who suffered on the Cross, identifies himself with the least ones.

Recall that last week's parable of the talents taught us that the gifts that we have been given are intended to be used for the service of others, especially the least among us. Our judgment before God will be based not only on how we have used these gifts and talents, but also on how we have extended ourselves in service to these least ones. Indeed, Jesus tells us that whenever we have served these least ones, we have served Christ himself.

When we read today's Gospel in the context of the chapters that follow in Matthew's Gospel, we learn the extent to which Jesus identifies with the least ones. In accepting death on the cross, Jesus shows himself to be one of the hungry, the naked, the ill, and the imprisoned. To accept Jesus is to accept him who suffered and died on the Cross as one of the least ones.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Christian's are Christ's witnesses (#942, 1060)	Thanksgiving (Eucharist)	Works of Mercy
Jesus will judge us on works of mercy (#561)	Offering	

Making the Connection

Young children use simple logic to view the world: good actions ought to have good rewards; bad actions ought to be punished. However, this is not always the way of the world. We can reassure them that in God's plan all will be judged rightly in the end.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus teaches that when the Son of Man comes in glory, he will judge the nations, separating the sheep from the goats.

Materials Needed

- A picture of a crying child
- A picture of a smiling child
- A fork
- Two clear glasses
- Cooking oil
- Water

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Bring to class a picture of a crying child, a picture of a smiling child, a fork, and two clear glasses. Fill one glass with a small amount of cooking oil and the other glass with the same amount of water. Hold up both glasses for the class to see. Say: ***These two liquids look alike. By the looks of them, it is hard to tell if one tastes good and one tastes bad.***
2. Say: ***Now look at these two pictures.*** Hold up the two pictures of the children. ***Can you tell if either of the children in the pictures has been misbehaving?*** (No. The crying child might be showing kindness by being sad that someone has been hurt, and the smiling child might be showing meanness because he or she is happy that someone else has gotten into trouble.)
3. Say: ***Sometimes people escape punishment for their bad behaviour, and sometimes good actions are not rewarded. This doesn't seem fair to us. Jesus teaches us in today's Gospel that we don't have to worry about this because God will judge all behaviour when Jesus returns. Let's listen to what Jesus says.***
4. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 25:31-46.
5. Say: ***In the Gospel this week, Jesus tells us that life may seem unfair at times; the consequences of good behaviour and bad behaviour get mixed up.*** Pour the oil into the water and stir with the fork. ***But Jesus says that we should not worry about this because someday he will return to separate the good from the bad.*** Allow the liquid to settle, so the oil will separate and rise to the top. Say: ***God can tell the difference between those who serve him and others and those who reject him by not caring for others. Those who follow him will live with him forever. Those who do not have chosen not to live with him. This will be a lonely choice for them. What do you think Jesus wants us to do?*** (He wants us to be doing good things for others, especially those who are hungry, ill, naked, or imprisoned.) ***Jesus says that when we do these things for anyone, we are doing them for him.***
6. Conclude in prayer together, asking God to help us serve others. Pray together the Act of Love.

Act of Love:

O my God, I love you above all things with my whole heart and soul, because you are all good and worthy of all my love. I love my neighbour as myself for the love of you. I forgive all who have injured me and I ask pardon of those whom I have injured.
Amen.