

Priesthood Sunday

October 30

Three simple catechetical lessons for any age group based on this Sunday's Scripture readings.

Lesson One - Gospel

Reading: Luke 19: 1-10

Theme: How does Jesus call me?

Objective: To help students realize that God calls us regardless of our faults.

Reflection: Every priest is called to serve God's people in word and deed. This invitation can come in many different shapes and sizes and from many different directions. We never know when or how Jesus might invite us to a closer relationship with him. We might be caught off guard or surprised by his interest in us and like Zacchaeus invited to dine with Him. Our culture is filled with many competing voices demanding our attention in an attempt to distract us from God's voice. But as a faith community we have a special obligation to assist each other to hear and discern Jesus' desire to want to know us more intimately. Just as Zacchaeus' desire to want to see Jesus prompted him to climb a Sycamore tree, so we too should look for ways to discover how we can see and encounter the living Christ in our lives and in so doing promote vocations to the priesthood, religious life and the sacrament of marriage.

News Report

Do a dramatic reading of the Gospel by dividing the text into four parts: Narrator, Jesus, Zacchaeus and crowd. Assign students the roles and dramatize the Gospel passage.

After the reading appoint another student or two to act as a first century news reporter performing an interview for the Nazareth Cable Station C=NAZ. Have the student reporter perform the interview for that evening's news cast.

1. To the crowd – Why did you object to Jesus wanting to go to Zacchaeus' home for dinner? Did it surprise you that Jesus took notice of Zacchaeus in the Sycamore tree? Isn't Jesus the one who claims He can forgive sins? Do you believe he can?
2. To Zacchaeus – Why were you so interested in seeing Jesus? Did you think he would single you out and invite himself to dinner? How does it feel to be forgiven by Jesus? Don't you think giving half of your possessions to the poor is a little much?
3. To Jesus – What moved you to stop and take notice of Zacchaeus? Don't you think it's a little presumptuous to invite your self to a stranger's house for dinner? Are you willing to help anyone who seeks you with a problem or need? Is there anything else you would like

to add?

4. To the class – If Jesus were present with us today, how far would you go to see him or make contact with him? Would you climb a tree, walk a mile, camp outside a box office over night, trade your iPod? What other voices, influences, temptations make it difficult for us to see or hear Jesus today? Do you think Zacchaeus would make a good priest in today's world? Why or why not?

5. In general – How can our priests/religious help us to focus more clearly on the call of Jesus in today's world? What area of our lives need to be forgiven or healed before we are able to hear Jesus' invitation to follow him? How do priests, clergy help us deal with these areas in need of healing or forgiveness?

Disability Witness

Invite someone from your parish to class who has a disability and discuss how they are able to deal with their condition. Have them share their faith journey and how the Church has helped or hindered their participation in the life of the parish. What are some of the obstacles they have had to overcome and what "Sycamore trees" are there in their lives that have helped them see or encounter Jesus? You might have them share if a particular priest or religious person was instrumental in their faith journey. How did they help or assist them to grow in their faith.

Sycamore Leaves

Cut out paper Sycamore leaves and distribute them to the class. Explain the students that we like the Sycamore tree can either help or hinder other people from getting close to Jesus, or each other. On one side of the leaf have each student write one positive thing they can do to help other people be a better person or more Christ like. Provide examples that are age appropriate and write your own to demonstrate to the class. On the reverse side have students think of ways they hinder or distract their peers from being better persons or more Christ like. Again provide examples that are age appropriate. Collect the leaves and re distribute them to the class, making sure that everyone gets someone else's leaf. Have them read one side of the leaf then the other then invite them to come forward and tape their leaf to the bulletin board or wall. (If possible draw an outline of a tree on a large piece of news print or cardboard and display in the front of the room) Tell the class that in John's Gospel Jesus compares himself to a vine and branches. In a similar way the Sycamore tree is a representation of Jesus as the vine (trunk and limbs) and we are the branches (leaves). As we go through life we make choices that either draw us closer to Jesus or further away. These choices either keep us connected to Jesus or cut us off from his life and relationship with Him. End by reading verse 10, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost." Play an appropriate song with a theme of forgiveness and reflect on the words.

Reconciliation Room

(Get permission from your principal, DRE or pastor before you try this one)

Arrange a tour of your Church's Reconciliation room. First review the Rite of Reconciliation and explain the importance of the Sacrament and when it is necessary to receive it. If your pastor is

willing have him explain his priestly role in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and what it is like for a priest to “hear confessions” and absolve sins in the name of Jesus. This is a good time for students to ask questions about the sacrament and share their own concerns, apprehensions, or joys about going to Confession. Be sure to emphasize to the students that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven for one who is truly repentant. God’s love and forgiveness is always present for those who seek it and like Zacchaeus, Jesus comes to offer salvation to all.

Lesson Two – Second Reading

Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1: 11-2:2

Theme: God chose us to do great things.

Objective: To help students reflect on their God given gifts to be used for His glory.

Reflection: All baptized Christians share in the common priesthood of Christ. God uses us and our gifts to fulfill God’s purpose in our life. The Sacraments help us accomplish this task with the help of the Christian community. St. Paul realized this as he wrote this letter to the Thessalonians as he offered this message of encouragement. God will accomplish great things in us if we persist in our faith in Christ Jesus. Those who are ordained and share leadership in our parish communities have a special obligation to witness to God’s grace and call all of us to commit ourselves to the “worthiness” of God’s calling.

1. Baptism

Our worthiness and dignity as human beings begins at conception. We are affirmed in this dignity at our Baptism as we are initiated into the Christian community. We are called by name at Baptism and sealed with the oil of Chrism during this sacred rite.

Review with the class the ritual of Baptism and how we were called to live the life of a Christian. If the students were baptized as infants review the Rite of Baptism especially the part where the priest asks the parents, “What name do you give this child?”

Explain that all of us are called by name to live a life worthy of God’s calling. Our Baptism calls us to mission and to do great things. Emphasize that every ordained priest must first be baptized before they can receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Thus Baptism is the most important of all the Sacraments.

2. Search Activity

Pass out copies of your diocesan newspaper or other religious periodicals and ask student to search for pictures or stories of people doing “great things”. Have them cut them out and either share their picture in a small group of 3-4 students. Then have them glue the picture to a piece of poster board and title it “Worthy Of His Calling”. Then have each small group summarize their posters to the entire class in their own words. Display the posters on the wall for all to see.

4. Want Ad

Have the class reflect on the role of the priest as someone who answered God’s call to serve the community of faith, the Church. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to make a list of

qualities they would look for in today's priest.

Have each small group report on their list of qualities. Then if time permits:

Have each small group go back and write a want ad for their local parish outlining the job of a priest or pastor. Make sure they list what qualities they are looking for in the applicant. They should include items like educational background, experience, working conditions, number of hours per week, benefits, perks, etc.

Have each small group read and report on their want ad to the entire class.

Bonus round

Invite your pastor to visit your classroom and have him share his response to the student's want ads. Dialogue to see how accurate or far fetched their perceptions are of the priest's actual duties or life style.

5. Homework

Invite your students to take their want ad home and ask their parents what they think the work of a priest entails. Have them discuss what qualities their parents expect of their priest or pastor. At the next class, have each student share what they discovered from their parents with the rest of the class.

Finally

We know Paul's letter to the Thessalonians was written at a time when the second coming of Christ was eagerly anticipated. Have the students reflect on the second coming and what they would want to accomplish before its arrival. (If they did know the exact day and hour)

What "good purpose" would they want to achieve before Christ's return?

Have each student write their thoughts on an index card and invite them to place their card on a prayer table near a candle and Bible.

If possible have the students gather around the prayer table and offer any prayers or petitions for those they want to pray for. End by reading the following:

"We ask you, brothers and sister, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him, not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or not to be alarmed either by a "spirit" or by an oral statement, or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand."

End by reciting the Our Father.

Lesson Three – First Reading

Reading: Wisdom 11: 22; 12: 2

Theme: God's constant care for God's people

Objective: To help students identify God's faithfulness and mercy in their lives.

Reflection: God created the entire universe and it is good. God's love for us is constant and his mercy is abounding. God never forgets God's people and God offers forgiveness to those who repent. Further more God's spirit is working in us and in all things to bring about God's glorious plan of salvation for God's people. Just as God's love and faithfulness brings joy and consolation to those in need, so to our pastoral leaders, our priests share in God's ministry of patience and forgiveness and bring compassion to those in need.

Signs of God's Spirit

Show photos or video clips of recent natural disasters like the earthquake in Chili or Haiti. Ask the students if God indeed created the universe as good then why would God permit such events to take place? Where, if any, are there signs of God's Spirit present? (Caution: Be sure not to blame God for these natural events of nature but emphasize our response to them)

Challenge the students to think of ways we are called to respond to the needs of others during these natural disasters. What is God calling us to do to help those in need? As a Church ask how we are called to respond either by donations, prayer or even physical assistance. Finally ask how our Church leaders, priests, pastors, hierarchy call us to respond to those in need.

Home work: Have students go home and Google CRS (Catholic Relief Services) and discover all the ways the Church provides assistance to other countries in need. Have them download any stories of priests or religious who give their lives working with the poor in third world countries. Have them bring these stories back to class and share what they learned.

Reconciliation

This reading has similar themes of forgiveness found in today's Gospel. See the activity from the Gospel lesson plan regarding the Sacrament of Reconciliation and a visit from your pastor to discuss forgiveness and Penance.

Cinquains

Pass out copies of today's reading from Wisdom (or copies of the Bible) and re read the passage regarding God's constant offer of forgiveness. Invite the students to reflect on the many ways God overlooks our sinfulness and invites us into God's love.

Then have the students write a simple Cinquain about God's forgiveness. Explain that a Cinquain is a five line poem with a structured format.

Structure Sample

First line: one word **Forgiveness**
Second line: two words **We seek**
Third line: three words **from a God**
Fourth line: four words **who offers us love**
Fifth line: one word **Peace!**

Collect these poems and put them on a PowerPoint. Create a closing prayer service with some reflective background music. Begin with the reading from Wisdom, play the music and show the

Cinquains on the PowerPoint projected on a screen. Read each one silently until finished. End the prayer by reciting the Prayer of St. Francis, Make Me an Instrument of Peace.

Extra Credit

You can write Cinquains on any topic. Ask the class to reflect on the qualities of a priest. What special qualities do they believe a priest has or needs to perform his ministry. Have students write a cinquain on the priesthood, collect them, create a PowerPoint slide show, and invite your pastor to come to class and share his thoughts on his vocation. End the session by reflecting on the cinquains written by the students.

Extra Credit Homework

Invite the class to use My Facebook to connect with members of the clergy or even seminarians they might know. You might start with your diocesan director of vocations. Ask them if they would share their thoughts and experiences about their calling to the priesthood. Were there any special people who were examples, or who may have been instrumental in their vocation. You might design a few questions for them to ask as they chat with them on line.

Have the students report back to the class during your next session what they learned. If your classroom has Internet access, you might connect to the Facebook page on site and review what you learned. This might lead to an ongoing relationship with a priest or religious who is willing to periodically share aspects of his ministry throughout the school year with your class. (A note of caution, make sure you observe all safe environment policies regarding internet usage with your students and with parent permission. Check with your parish DRE or school principal for authorization.)

PAKS

Have your class perform **PAKS** or **Priestly Acts of Kindness** throughout the year. Begin by writing your pastor or priest a thank you card or letter. Be sure to mention all the things you appreciate about how Father serves the parish.

Send Father a greeting card on his birthday or a card on his feast day.

Through out the year send Father seasonal messages or cards for Valentine Day, St. Patrick's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Advent and Easter. Include a photo or picture of your class and let him know you are praying for him.

Create a Face book page and include messages and photos from the students.