

Families with Children's Activity 1

Rewriting a Gospel

One way to give children insight into Scripture is to have them rewrite it. Creative writing can lead children to understand more deeply the meaning of the Scripture and help them to remember it. Check the Lectionary readings that will be used at Mass over the next month or season (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter). Select these readings as a focus for the activity. Children can work on different readings. There are a variety of ways that children can rewrite a Gospel story:

- Children can rewrite the Old Testament reading or the Gospel story by using a contemporary setting or issues. The parables and teachings of Jesus can easily be re-written in a contemporary style. For example, taking the parable of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan and using a contemporary setting for the story helps the children to identify with the story and its meaning for our lives today. Children can rewrite the teachings of Jesus such as the Beatitudes or sections of the Sermon on the Mount. They can also rewrite Psalms, making them a personal prayer.
- Children can rewrite the Gospel story by putting themselves into the story. Here is a simple process:
 - Read a story about Jesus.
 - Give the children a brief background on the story.
 - Ask the children to rewrite it from a first person point of view, describing the events as though they were there participating. Ask them to arrange the situation so that at the end of the story they are alone with Jesus.
 - Ask them to conclude their story with a dialogue between Jesus and themselves, discussing what happened. Their conversation will lead into thoughts and feelings about their own life.
- Children can rewrite the Gospel story as an eyewitness account of something Jesus did or as an interview script of a person who met Jesus (e.g., a person Jesus healed). They can also rewrite an Old Testament reading as an eyewitness account.
- Children can rewrite the Old Testament reading or Gospel story from a particular point of view, e.g., the different characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Children can rewrite the Old Testament reading or Gospel story using creative methods such as storyboards for a TV show or a movie, a TV newscast, a commercial, and/or a newspaper or magazine story.
- Children can rewrite the Gospel story using a letter format. Tell the children to think of Scripture as God's letter to them. Read the passage and then ask the children to respond by writing their reflections on God's Word in the form of a prayer. Ask them to use a letter format (Dear Jesus... or Dear God...) and include what they learned from reading the Gospel story, how they will try to live what God has said, and what they need from God now so they can live what God has asked them to do.

Families with Children Activity 2

Creative Ways to Reflect on the Sunday Lectionary Readings

Activity #2 is actually a collection of activities that can be used alone or in combination with each other as ways to express the children's reflection on the Sunday readings. These activities should be used as a follow-up or application of the *Listening to God's Word on Sunday* activity in the session plan.

Method: Artwork

Create artwork to illustrate a Scripture story (or teaching) from the Lectionary and provide a way for children to express the meaning it has for them. Like the artists who created stained glass windows or those who created the great religious art masterpieces, give the children an opportunity to utilize art to express the meaning of the Scripture story. They can use a wide variety of art forms, depending on the interests and abilities of the group. Art projects can include paintings (e.g., watercolor), posters (with painting or photos or a blend of art forms), a photo essay, sculptures, stained glass windows, a tapestry, a tile mosaic, a mural, a quilt, a collage, a banner, a mobile, etc. You may want to choose several art forms and then organize the children in groups to create projects.

Method: Advertisements

Create advertisements to illustrate a Scripture story (or teaching) from the Lectionary and provide a way for children to express the meaning it has for them. The children can use a variety of advertising methods: a 30 second TV or radio ad, a song, an ad in a magazine, a poster an advertisement, a billboard, etc. You may want to choose several methods and then organize the children in small groups to create advertisements.

This project involves writing the content for the advertisement (e.g., a script for a commercial or magazine ad); identifying or creating artwork, symbol, images, and photos to accompany the content; and developing the final product. Use the following process to create your advertisements:

Step One: Focus Your Advertisement

- In short phrases clearly identify what you want to communicate.

Step Two: Select Your Advertising Approaches

- Review the methods listed below.

- Select your advertising approach: a 30 second TV or radio ad, an ad in a magazine children read, a poster advertisement, a billboard, a magnet for the refrigerator, a T-shirt, etc.

Step Three: Design Your Advertisements

- Combine your message with your advertising methods to create the ad. Add color or artwork or whatever else will enhance your promotion.

Method: Comic Strip

Create comic strips to illustrate a Scripture story (or teaching) from the Lectionary and provide a way for children to express the meaning it has for them. Guide the children in creating a storyline, developing characters, drawing characters, and writing the text. Review a number of current comic series to develop ideas for how to create your own comic strip. You can create the comics in different sizes, e.g., a large copy format (poster-size) or a regular comic strip or comic book format.

Method: Drama

Use or create a dramatic enactment or role play to illustrate a Scripture story (or teaching) from the Lectionary and provide a way for children to express the meaning it has for them. The children can rehearse a drama that has already been created. Check the following resources:

- Glavich, Mary Kathleen. *Acting Out the Gospels – 40 Five-Minute Plays for Education and Worship*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1999.
- Zyromski, Page McKean. *Echo Stories for Children – Celebrating Saints and Seasons in Word and Action*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications.

The children can also develop their own drama by creating a storyline, identify characters, write a script, add music (if appropriate), and develop the production.

Role playing is one of the most useful methods to explore attitudes and to practice skills. To be successful when conducting a role play, it helps to know different ways to set it up (scripting).

1. **Free form.** Prepare a general scenario and ask the actors to fill in the details themselves.
2. **Prescribed.** Prepare a script with a well-prepared set of instructions that state the facts about the roles they are portraying and how they are to behave.
3. **Partially prescribed.** Provide extensive background information about the situation and the characters to be portrayed but do not tell the actors how to handle the situation.
4. **Replay life.** Ask the actors to reenact an actual situation that they have faced.
5. **Dramatic reading.** Provide the actors with a previously prepared script to act out.

Families with Children Activity 3

God's Word in Film

Children's Resources

- Children's Bible
- Creative arts materials

Teaching Resources

- *Prince of Egypt*

Scripture Focus

Select one of the two Scripture passages and the movie clips from *Prince of Egypt*.

- **Option 1: The Story of the Burning Bush** (Exodus 3:1-21)
Begin the video with Moses leaving his brother and conclude with Moses and Zipporah leaving Midian to return to Egypt.
- **Option 2: The Liberation of the Hebrews and Crossing the Red Sea** (Exodus 14:1-31)
Begin the video with the song, "Miracle," and conclude with Moses coming down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments (end of the movie).

Learning Process

1. Share the Scripture story from a children's Bible.
2. Engage the children in a creative activity on the Scripture story by using one of the following activities:
 - Draw a picture of the Scripture story.
 - Make a symbol that captures the story.
 - Write a key verse or the key message of the Scripture story on a rock, a card, a sheet of paper, a poster, a bookmark, etc.
3. View the movie clip from *Prince of Egypt*.
4. Ask the children to share the reactions to the movie:
 - How did this story make you feel?
 - What were the most memorable scenes or images to you?
 - What is God saying to us through this Scripture story?
5. Invite the children to read the great stories of the Bible, and to watch the feature films, *Prince of Egypt* and *Joseph*, and read the accompanying Scripture stories.

Families with Children Activity 4

God's Word in the Psalms

Resources

- One set of the Psalms for each family or a Bible for each family.
- White paper (8.5 x 11 or larger) or pre-printed color-framed paper (paper with a colored border) to write an individual Psalm or family Psalm.
- Creative arts materials and stickers to illustrate the Psalm.

Scripture Focus

Select responsorial psalms from the Lectionary of the coming Sundays or season. The following Psalms are also well suited to this activity.

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|------------------|---|
| ■ Psalm 8:1-7 | "What is man, that you think of him?" |
| ■ Psalm 11:1-7 | "I trust in the Lord for safety." |
| ■ Psalm 16:1-11 | "I am always aware of the Lord's presence." |
| ■ Psalm 23:1-6 | "The Lord is my shepherd." |
| ■ Psalm 25:1-14 | "Keep your promise, Lord, and forgive my sins." |
| ■ Psalm 30:1-12 | "Lord...I will give you thanks forever." |
| ■ Psalm 32:1-11 | "Happy are those whose sins are forgiven." |
| ■ Psalm 62:1-12 | "God alone protects and saves me." |
| ■ Psalm 63:1-8 | "O God....My whole being desires you." |
| ■ Psalm 86:1-13a | Teach me, Lord what you want me to do." |
| ■ Psalm 103:1-14 | "Praise the Lord, my soul!" |
| ■ Psalm 121:1-8 | Teach me, Lord, what you want me to do." |
| ■ Psalm 139:1-12 | "Lord, you have examined me and you know me." |

Learning Process

1. Select the Psalm passages that you want to focus on. List the passages and a key line from each Psalm on a poster for all to see. Provide each family with a sheet of paper, and marking pens, pens, and/or crayons.
2. Ask the families to read all of the Psalms you have selected in their Bibles or from the handout of Psalm passages that you have prepared in advance. Family members should listen to the words as if they had never read or heard them before. They should be open to new insights that may come. Ask them to read the words as if they were the words of their own prayer. Whenever they read "I," "my," "me," etc., read it as if that meant *them*.
3. Ask the families to choose a Psalm that speaks to them today. Once they have selected a Psalm ask family members to discuss questions such as:

- What part of the Psalm do you like best?
 - What part of the Psalm do you think is most important for your family?
 - What is this Psalm telling us about God (who God is, what God does for us, etc.)
 - What are we offering to God in this Psalm (thanks, petition, etc.)
4. Ask each family to write their own Family Psalm using the Psalm they have selected. Explain that they should select a phrase or one or two verses to be the words they will use to begin their Family Psalm. They should write those words down, and then phrase by phrase, write their Family Psalm together, allowing family members to offer suggestions of what to include. They should create sentences that continue the thoughts and feelings begun by the words of the Psalmist.

When they have completed their psalm, invite the families to illustrate it. When they get home they can frame it or hang it on their wall or refrigerator.

5. Ask each family to read their Psalm to the rest of the families in their group.

Integration and Application

Learning Activities

Method: Rewriting Scripture

One way to give young people insight into Scripture is to have them rewrite it. There are a variety of ways that children can rewrite a Gospel story:

- **Activity 1:** Rewrite the Old Testament reading or the Gospel story by using a contemporary setting or issues. The parables and teachings of Jesus can easily be re-written in a contemporary style. For example, taking the parable of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan and using a contemporary setting for the story helps the young people to identify with the story and its meaning for our lives today. They can rewrite the teachings of Jesus such as the Beatitudes or sections of the Sermon on the Mount. Children can also rewrite Psalms, making them a personal prayer.
- **Activity 2:** Rewrite the Gospel story by putting themselves into the story. Here is a simple process:
 - Read a story about Jesus.
 - Give the young people a brief background on the story.
 - Ask the young people to rewrite it from a first person point of view, describing the events as though they were there participating. Ask them to arrange the situation so that at the end of the story they are alone with Jesus.
 - Ask them to conclude their story with a dialogue between Jesus and themselves, discussing what happened. Their conversation will lead into thoughts and feelings about their own life.
- **Activity 3:** Rewrite the Gospel story as an eyewitness account of something Jesus did or as an interview script of a person who met Jesus (e.g., a person whom Jesus healed). They can also rewrite an Old Testament reading as an eyewitness account.
- **Activity 4:** Rewrite the Old Testament reading or Gospel story from a particular point of view, e.g., the different characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan
- **Activity 5:** Rewrite the Old Testament reading or Gospel story using creative methods such as storyboards for a TV show or a movie on the story, a TV newscast on the story, a commercial related to the story, newspaper or magazine story.
- **Activity 6:** Rewrite the Gospel story using a letter format. Tell the young people to think of Scripture as God's letter to them. Read the passage and then ask them to respond by writing their reflections on God's Word in the form of a prayer. Ask them to use a letter format (Dear Jesus... or Dear God...) and include what they learned from reading the Gospel story,

how they will try to live what God has said, and what they need from God now so they can live what God has asked of them.

Method: Artwork

Create artwork to illustrate a Scripture story (or teaching) from the Lectionary and provide a way for young people to express the meaning it has for them. Like the artists who created stained glass windows or those who created the great religious art masterpieces, give the young people an opportunity to utilize art to express the meaning of the Scripture story. They can use a wide variety of art forms, depending on the interests and abilities of the group. Art projects can include paintings (e.g., watercolor), posters (with painting or photos or a blend of art forms), a photo essay, sculptures, stained glass windows, a tapestry, a tile mosaic, a mural, a quilt, a collage, a banner, a mobile, etc. You may want to choose several art forms and then organize the young people in groups to create projects.

Method: Advertisements

Create advertisements to illustrate a Scripture story (or teaching) from the Lectionary and provide a way for young people to express the meaning it has for them. The adolescents can use a variety of advertising methods: a 30 second TV or radio ad, a song, an ad in a magazine, poster advertisement, a billboard, etc. You may want to choose several methods and then organize the children in small groups to create advertisements.

This project involves writing the content for your advertisement (e.g., a script for a commercial or magazine ad), identifying or creating artwork, symbol, images, photos, etc. to accompany the content, and developing the final product. Use the following process to create your advertisements:

Step One: Focus Your Advertisement

In short phrases clearly identify what you want to communicate.

Step Two: Select Your Advertising Approaches

- Review the methods listed below.
- Select your advertising approach. Here are several marketing methods that you can consider: a 30 second TV or radio ad, an ad in a magazine children read, a poster advertisement, a billboard, a magnet for the refrigerator, a T-shirt, etc.

Step Three: Design Your Advertisements

Combine your message with your advertising methods to create the ad. Add color or artwork or whatever else will enhance your promotion.

Method: Drama

Create a dramatic enactment or role play to illustrate a Scripture story (or teaching) from the Lectionary and provide a way for young people to express the meaning it has for them. Develop a drama by creating a storyline, identify characters, write a script, add music (if appropriate),

and develop the production. For example, young people can role play a person Jesus healed or dramatize a parable by using contemporary situations to bring the parables to life today. A second example involves creating role plays of real life events today through which you can tell the Scripture story, e.g., MTV has a show called “Real World” which follows real people through the events of their lives.

Role playing is one of the most useful methods to explore attitudes and to practice skills. To be successful when conducting a role play, it helps to know different ways to set it up (scripting).

- **Free form.** Prepare a general scenario and ask the actors to fill in the details themselves.
- **Prescribed.** Prepare a script with a well-prepared set of instructions that state the facts about the roles they are portraying and how they are to behave.
- **Partially prescribed.** Provide extensive background information about the situation and the characters to be portrayed but do not tell the actors how to handle the situation.
- **Replay life.** Ask the actors to reenact an actual situation that they have faced.
- **Dramatic reading.** Provide the actors with a previously prepared script to act out.

Method: Music

Create a music presentation to illustrate a Scripture story (or teaching) from the Lectionary and provide a way for young people to express the meaning it has for them. The young people can write or rewrite songs (e.g., Church music or pop music), select and sing songs, produce a music video(s) or stage a concert which communicates the message of the Scripture story. For example, you can create a song by “re-writing” the Beatitudes into a rap song with one verse of the song for each beatitude or writing a song about the people Jesus healed.

Story in Our Lives

Think of your life as a story or series of stories.

- What are two or three of the most important events or turning points in your life thus far? Think about how you would tell the stories of these events to someone else.
- Are there similarities in these stories or events, any common themes? Are there differences?
- Are there stories in your life—stories you have lived—that you would call stories of birth or beginning? Are there stories of death or despair and hopelessness? Are there stories of resurrection or renewal and new life?

Think back now to your childhood.

- What were some of your favorite stories when you were a child? Can you say why you chose the ones you did?
- Who were some of your favorite storytellers when you were a child? Again can you say why?

If you had to pick a favorite story from Scripture, what story would you choose? Can you say why, and especially whether it has some connection with your own life now or in the past?

If you are a parent, do you tell the stories to your own children? What stories do you read to them?

Reflecting on the Sunday Readings using *Lectio Divina*

(Adapted from "Teaching *Lectio Divina* to Young People" by Lisa Calderone-Stewart. *Bringing the Catholic Youth and the Bible Together*. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000.)

Today a marvelous and very old way to sound the depths of Scripture is being rediscovered: *lectio divina* (divine or sacred reading). It is the name of an ancient way for praying with the Bible that comes out of the Benedictine tradition. *Lectio divina* had its origins in the monasteries during the days when books were rare and not everyone owned a personal copy of the Bible. The monks gathered in a room where one of them read aloud from the Scripture. They listened and when a passage appealed to them, they left, taking away with them that word to pray over.

Lectio divina was developed as a form of personal prayer. The original design was meant for one person, alone and in private. The process can be easily modified and shared with a group. Here are a few ways you might introduce young people to *lectio divina*. Be sure all group members have their own Bible.

Use the Old Testament or Gospel reading from the Lectionary of the Sunday you have chosen. Find a Bible commentary on the bible passage from or a article or commentary from a study Bible that provides background. (See list at the beginning of the session.)

Begin by playing instrumental music in the background (e.g., classical).

Gather people in a circle and tell them that you will be guiding them through a process of reflecting on God's Word called *lectio divina*. Give them the handout so that they can follow along with each step.

Step 1. *Lectio* (Reading)

Read the selected Scripture passage out loud or ask a person to read it. Then ask another person (different gender) to read it a second time. Finally, let everyone read it one more time, silently. Invite the group to let the words really sink in. Ask the participants to listen with an open mind and heart – to let the passage speak to them.

Note: Find the Scripture readings for the weekday and Sunday at www.usccb.org. Go to "Daily Readings."

Step 2. *Meditatio* (Meditation)

The *meditatio* is deep thinking. Present the highlights of the commentary or ask someone to read the commentary to the group. Then allow time to discuss the passage using questions such as the following which can help the everyone think through the Scripture passage.

- What does this passage say to me?
- Who am I in this Scripture?
- What do I see and hear?
- What do I think?
- Which character do I most relate to?
- What do I need to learn from this passage?

Step 3. *Oratio* (Praying)

Oratio is a time for deep feelings, a time for communicating with God, for moving into the heart of the matter. It is time to respond to God. Invite the participants to reflect on the questions below and compose a prayer to God that responds to the questions. Give them an example by sharing your own prayer based on your own feelings at this point in the *lectio divina* process. Then, play instrumental music in the background while the young people reflect. (You may want to give them paper to write their responses.)

- What do you want to communicate to God?
- What do you most want in your relationship with God?
- What emotions do you want to express to God? joy? fear? gratitude? grief?

Invite the participants to share their pray with the whole group or to share at least one word or phrase that might express to God their feelings at this time.

Step 4. *Contemplatio* (Contemplating)

Contemplatio is actually another form of prayer. It's the most difficult step to explain. It's the chance for us to receive God's communication to us. It's not a time for thinking; it's a time for removing all thoughts and distractions from your mind and heart. It's a time to just be passive and rest in God's love and tenderness – to just be.

Have everyone close their eyes and sit with God for a minute, longer if you think they can handle it. (Background music can help maintain a sense of prayerfulness.)

Step 5. *Actio* (action)

Actio is the option step. If you decide to use this step, explain to the group that action is a time to make a resolution or to plan a course of action. The resolution or plan can be large or small, depending on the needs of each person. Give the group an example, based on your own prayer from Step 3.

Invite the participants to consider what they might do using the questions below: \

- Do you sense a challenge from God?
- Is there something good that God is calling you to do?:
- Something harmful that God wants you to stop doing?
- What's your plan of action?

Give the group a few minutes to think about what they might want to do, based on their experience with this *lectio divina* process. Then ask them to share, even in a general way, what kind of action they have decided to do.

Reflecting on God's Word

Lectio Divina

(Adapted from "Teaching Lectio Divina to Young People" by Lisa Calderone-Stewart. *Bringing the Catholic Youth and the Bible Together*. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000.)

Step 1. *Lectio* (Reading)

Read the Scripture passage. Try reading it out loud. Read it several times. Let the words really sink in deeply. Open your mind and heart to the meaning of the words. Let the passage speak to you. Listen carefully. (Go to "Daily Readings" at www.usccb.org for the Scripture passage.)

Step 2. *Meditatio* (Meditation)

Reflect on the Scripture passage. Think deep thoughts. Ask yourself questions such as the following. Try taking notes on your answers to the questions. Try journaling about the insights gained with meditation.

- What does this passage say to me?
- Who am I in this Scripture?
- What do I see and hear?
- What do I think?
- Which character do I most relate to?
- What do I need to learn from this passage?

Step 3. *Oratio* (Prayer)

Move into the heart of the matter. Feel deep feelings. Express your intimate self to God in your own personal way. Consider the following questions as you respond to God.

- What do you want to communicate to God?
- What do you most want in your relationship with God?
- What emotions do you want to express to God? joy? fear? gratitude? grief?

Step 4. *Contemplatio* (Contemplation)

Simply rest in the presence of God. Be passive and joy enjoy God. Settle into the tenderness of God's love.

Step 5. *Action* (Action)

Ask yourself the following questions in utter honesty. Decide on a course of action (large or small). Make the commitment and follow through with your plan.

- How is God challenging me?
- Is there a good thing that God is calling me to do?:
- Is there a harmful thing that God wants me to stop doing?
- What is the next step I need to take?

Praying with Scripture Activities

Praying with Scripture can be done alone or with others. When done with others, it can be a means of sharing more deeply the faith that you attempt to live out day by day. We believe that one of the ways God is manifested to us is through the Scriptures. When we prayerfully read the Scriptures, we open our minds and hearts to the Spirit of God. We can be both challenged and affirmed by the Word of God.

To utilize these prayer activities to prepare for Sunday Mass, use the Sunday Lectionary readings, especially the Gospel reading, as a focus for your prayer. Find the Scripture readings for the weekday and Sunday at www.usccb.org. Go to "Daily Readings."

Prayer Activity 1

The following steps will help you to use the Scriptures in prayer. They can be done alone or when you gather as a group.

1. **Choose a passage of Scripture**, about five to ten verses in length. You might choose one of your favorites, part of the Scriptures from the previous or coming Sunday readings, or, use an index to help you locate a passage that seems to be appropriate for the time or occasion.
2. **Choose a comfortable place** where you can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
3. **Light a candle**. Take a few moments to get your body in harmony with your spirit. Sometimes it helps to take a few deep breaths or stretch the body and then relax.
4. **Acknowledge God's presence with you**. Ask God to send the Spirit to be with you and guide you in this time of reflection.
5. **Read the passage** you have chosen slowly, listening carefully to it. You might want to pause after a sentence or phrase.
6. **Speak aloud the words** or phrases that struck you. Do not discuss them, just speak them.
7. Read the passage a second time, slowly and prayerfully.
8. **Consider the message** the passage might have for you – a challenge, an affirmation, an insight. If doing this with others, you could invite them to share what comes to mind.
9. Read the passage a third time, slowly and prayerfully.
10. **Pause** for about ten minutes of silence and allow the Spirit to speak to you. If no words or thoughts come, just sit in the silence. Sometimes God touches us in ways that we cannot know.
11. **Consider how the passage calls you to action** following the time of prayer. Is there something you need to do to make the Scripture alive for you here and now?
12. **Close with a brief prayer** of thanksgiving or praise to God for the gift of the Spirit.

Prayer Activity 2

Select a Scripture passage and then read it slowly and deliberately. Identify lines or phrases that stand out for you. (In a group: read the passage once, and then ask people to call out the word or phrase that “jumped out at them.” Read it again, and invite people to call out a new word or phrase. Conclude with a third reading. Afterward, invite the group to spend a minute or two in conversation with God about what God is trying to say to them in the passage.)

Prayer Activity 3

Take a passage of Scripture and make it a first person reading, as if the lines were being spoken personally to you. For example, take 1 Corinthians 13 (“Love is patient, love is kind) and personalize the reading by inserting people’s names into the reading – (person’s name) is patient, (person’s name) is kind..., etc.

Prayer Activity 4

Create a “dialogue” between a passage of Scripture and a story or article from today’s world in a newspaper or magazine. Use a relevant newspaper or magazine article. Select an article that deals with the same topic or issue as the Scripture passage or vice versa. Read part of the article; then read part of the passage. Return to the article and then back to the passage. Name your thoughts and feelings of how the Scripture passage relates to current realities.

Prayer Activity 5

Pray the Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-31 or Matthew 22:37-39 or Luke 10:27) by making each part of the commandment a prayer reflection. For example:

- Read “Love the Lord your God with all your heart” and pause to think about how you love God and how you experience God’s love. Write down your reflections.
- Read “Love the Lord your God with all your soul” and pause for silent reflection.
- Read “Love the Lord your God with all your mind” and pause to think of ways God’s word has touched your life. Write down your reflections.
- Read “Love the Lord your God with all your strength” and pause to think of all the ways you do what God asks of you. Write down your reflections.

Praying with Scripture Meditation

Christians believe that the Bible is the living Word of God. For this Word to speak to us, though, we must read and reflect on it. We must hear what the Lord is saying to us through the particular Scripture reading. Meditation uses the mind and the heart to help us hear the word of the Lord. It engages the faculties of thinking and imagination (our minds), the love we have for God (our hearts), and also the resolutions we make to live better Christian lives (our “hands and feet”).

St. Ignatius of Loyola taught an approach to mediating on the Scriptures. He deeply believed in the value of fully engaging our imaginations in our reading and reflecting on the meaning to be found in the Bible. This is the practice Ignatius called “Application of the Senses.” The pray-er “applies” each of his or her senses to the reading, using imagination to “hear” the words and sounds of the scene, to “see” the sights, to “smell” the smells, to “taste” the food, dust, and drink, and to “feel” textures, dirt, skin, etc.

Select a Scripture passage.

Select the Sunday Gospel reading or choose your own Scripture passage or story. The following passages are especially conducive to meditation.

- The Young Jesus (Luke 2:41-50)
- Temptation in the Desert (Matthew 4:1-11)
- Calling of the First Disciples (Luke 5:1-11)
- Calming of the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)
- The Woman in Simon’s House (Luke 7:36-50)
- Jesus Instructs the Disciples (Mark 6:7-13)
- The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
- Miracle of Cana (John 2:1-12)
- “Who Do People Say I Am?” (Matthew 16:13-17)
- Curing of the Blind Man of Jericho (Luke 18:35-43)
- The Miracle of the Loaves (John 6:1-13)
- Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)
- Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
- The Woman at the Well (John 4:5-42)
- The Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)
- Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44)
- The Rich Young Man (Matthew 19:16-22)
- Driving Out the Money Changers (Mark 11:15-17)
- Washing the Apostles’ Feet (John 13:1-20)
- The Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39-46)
- The Crucifixion (Luke 23:33-49)

■ The Disciples on the Way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

Settle down.

Play some quiet instrumental music to set a prayerful environment. Take a few minutes to settle down in the place of prayer. Sit with your spine straight, feet on the floor, knees slightly apart, hands on your lap, eyes closed. Breathe deeply and slowly; be aware of the sounds around you; quiet yourself and be still.

Pray to the Holy Spirit.

You are in God's presence. Feel the warmth and the love. As you slowly inhale and exhale, ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray and to hear what the Lord is saying to you. Read the Scripture passage slowly and meditatively. Meditate on the Scripture passage.

Observe.

Step into the story and become a part of it. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples traveling with Jesus. What is happening? What kind of day is it? Who is with Jesus? What is Jesus doing? What does he say? What is the crowd or individual saying or doing?

Imagine yourself as the person who encounters Jesus. Why do you approach Jesus? What does Jesus say or do to you? What happens to you? What are your feelings? What do you do after your encounter with Jesus? Write your observations in a journal or on paper.

Reflect.

Reflect on the meaning of the passage or story. What does this story mean? What is Jesus saying to you? What is his challenge to you? What is the Gospel author stressing in this story? What strikes is the main point? Write your reflections in a journal or on paper.

Listen.

Apply the story or passage to your life. What word is being spoken to you in this Bible passage? Are you willing to listen to Jesus' answer? Prayerfully ask, "What, Lord, are you saying to me in this reading?" Write your response to the questions in a journal or on paper.

Make a resolution.

Resolve to do something about the insights you have gained. Whatever the resolution, thank the Lord for the moments he spent with you and for any insights you received. Write your resolution in a journal or on paper.

Reflect together on the experience.

Share your feelings and reflections on the meditation experience with others.

Example: Luke 17:11-19

1. Select a Scripture passage: Luke 17:11-19.

2. Settle down.

Play some quiet instrumental music to set a prayerful environment. Take a few minutes to settle down in the place of prayer. Sit with your spine straight, feet on the floor, knees slightly apart, hands on your lap, eyes closed. Breathe deeply and slowly; be aware of the sounds around you; quiet yourself and be still.

3. Pray to the Holy Spirit.

You are in God's presence. Feel the warmth and the love. As you slowly inhale and exhale, ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray and to hear what the Lord is saying to you. Read the Scripture passage slowly and meditatively. Meditate on the Scripture passage.

4. Read the Scripture passage slowly and meditatively.

5. Meditate on the Scripture passage.

Observe.

Step into the story and become a part of it. What is happening? What kind of day is it? Hot? What is the road like? Dusty? Who is with Jesus? Imagine yourself as one of the disciples traveling with Jesus. You can't wait to get to town to get a drink of water. See the diseased men, the sores on their arms and faces. They cover their faces. Perhaps they ring a bell to warn travelers away. Then, suddenly, you hear them cry out to Jesus. He looks at them. What is his reaction? Does he approach them? What is your reaction? Do you want your friend and teacher Jesus to shy away from them? Are you afraid he will catch their disease? Are you afraid that you will? Listen to his words. What do they mean? Do you think the men will be cured? What is their reaction? How are the other disciples reacting?

Now imagine that you are one of the sick persons. You walk away to go to the priests when suddenly you are cured. What do you do? Do you come back and thank Jesus? If you don't, what do you do? Why?

Now focus on the Samaritan. He grabs Jesus' feet. He cries with joy. He thanks Jesus and praises him. Listen to Jesus' words. Does he sound disappointed with others who were also cured? What does he mean when he says, "Your faith has saved you"?

Write their observations in a journal or on paper.

Reflect.

What does this story mean? Is it about physical sickness or spiritual sickness? Does it focus on the mercy of Jesus, his compassion for the rejected ones? Is it a call to faith? Is it about gratitude? courage? obedience to the word of the Master? What is Luke stressing in this story? What strikes you as the main point?

Write your reflections in a journal or on paper.

Listen.

What word is being spoken to you in this Bible passage? Do you have a spiritual sickness eating away at you that Jesus wants to touch and cure? Do you have the courage to approach Jesus to ask for his help and salvation? Are you willing to listen to his answer? What you need for the cure? Are you weak in faith? Do you need Jesus to strengthen your faith? Or perhaps he is telling you to say thank you for all that you have been given. Will you be like the Samaritan who came back to offer thanks? Or are you like the ones who take their healing for granted? Prayerfully ask, "What, Lord, are you saying to me in this reading?"

Write your response to the question in a journal or on paper.

6. Make a resolution.

Resolve to do something about the insights you have gained. Perhaps you will acknowledge that you are a sinner who needs to approach the Lord and ask for forgiveness. Perhaps you will resolve to thank God for their good health. Perhaps you will think of a person who has done something for you and to make some gesture of thanks to this person. Whatever the resolution, thank the Lord for the moments he spent with you and for any insights you received. Write your resolution in a journal or on paper.

7. Reflect together on the experience.

Share your feelings and reflections on the meditation experience with others.

Additional Scripture Example: John 8:1-11

Another good passage to use is: **John 8:1-11 – The Woman Caught in Adultery**. Imagine details such as the dust in the wind, the feeling of dirt under fingernails (when Jesus bends over to draw in the sand), the look on the faces of the men who drag her forward, and the “thud, thud” of the rocks hitting the ground.

[The Scripture Meditation experience is adapted from *The Way of Prayer* by Michael Pennock (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1987), pages 56-60. Used with permission.]

Praying the Scriptures

Individual Reflection

Pray the Scriptures #1

Find a quiet place this week to pray using the Sunday Gospel reading (and weekday Gospel reading). Use this simple 10-minute reflection process to guide you. Find the Scripture readings for the weekday and Sunday at www.usccb.org and go to "Daily Readings."

- *Read* the reflection prayerfully. (About one minute).
- *Think* about what struck you most as you read the reflection. Why this? (About four minutes.)
- *Speak* to God about your thoughts. (About one minute.)
- *Listen* to God's response. Simply rest in God's presence with an open mind and an open heart. (About four minutes.)
- *End* each reflection by praying the Lord's Prayer slowly and reverently.

Pray the Scriptures #2

Find a quiet place this week to pray using the Sunday Gospel reading. One way to pray with Scripture is to connect the living word with our daily lives. Here is one format:

- *Read* the Gospel for the day (church bulletins often list the daily and Sunday readings). Think about what the passage is saying.
- *Read* the Gospel again and reflect on a question such as, "Do I feel attracted or resistant to any part of the reading? Why?" or "With which character in this reading do I most identify? Why?"

Pray the Scriptures #3

Find a quiet place this week to pray using the Sunday Gospel reading.

- To pray with the Gospels, select a favorite passage from one Gospel.
- Try to imagine the place in which the event unfolds. Try also to imagine it as it would be today. Then put yourself in the position of one of the characters in the story. Make that person's attitude or words your own and listen to Jesus' response to you.

Hearing the Word of God

Committee on the Liturgy, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

When the Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself is speaking to his people and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the Gospel. (GIRM, n.29) These words from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal set before us a profound truth that we need to ponder and make our own.

The words of Sacred Scripture are unlike any other texts we will ever hear, for they not only give us information, they are the vehicle God uses to reveal himself to us, the means by which we come to know the depth of God's love for us and the responsibilities entailed by being Christ's followers, members of his Body. What is more, this Word of God proclaimed in the liturgy possesses a special sacramental power to bring about in us what it proclaims. The Word of God proclaimed at Mass is "efficacious" that is, it not only tells us of God and God's will for us, it also helps us to put that will of God into practice in our own lives.

How, then, do we respond to this wonderful gift of God's Word? We respond in word and song, in posture and gesture, in silent meditation and, most important of all, by listening attentively to that Word as it is proclaimed. Following each reading we express our gratitude for this gift with the words 'Thanks be to God' or, in the case of the Gospel, 'Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ,' and it is appropriate that a brief period of silence be observed to allow for personal reflection. Following the first reading we sing the Responsorial Psalm, a meditation on God's word through the inspired words of one of the psalms from the Psalter, the Bible's prayer book.

The Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. The readings from the Old Testament tell us of God's promises and his preparation of his people for the coming of his Son; the epistles and other pre-Gospel New Testament readings offer the reflections of St. Paul and other contemporaries of the Lord on the life and message of Christ; in the Acts of the Apostles we have a history of the early Church. We believe that all Scripture, the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the Church has always given special honor to the Gospel because in the Gospel we have not simply the preparation for and prefiguring of Christ, nor reflections on his message, but the words and deeds of Christ himself. The proclamation of the Gospel is surrounded with marks of respect and honor: the Gospel is read by an ordained minister, the deacon, or, when no deacon is present, by a priest; the Book of the Gospels is carried aloft with honor in the entrance procession and placed on the altar until the Gospel reading to show the unity of Scripture and Eucharist, of the table of the Word and the table of the Christ's body and blood; just before the Gospel is read the Gospel book is carried in procession to the ambo to the accompaniment of an acclamation sung by the people; it may be incensed before the reading and is kissed at its conclusion; finally, all stand as the Gospel is proclaimed. Through this posture and through the honor paid to the book containing the Gospel, the Church pays homage to Christ who is present in his Word and who proclaims his Gospel.

What then must we do to properly receive the Word of God proclaimed at Mass? The General Instruction tells us that these readings must be listened to by all with reverence (n. 29) and it provides that those who read the Scriptures must be truly qualified and carefully prepared for this office so that the faithful will develop a warm and lively love for Sacred Scripture from listening to the reading from the sacred texts. (n. 101)

The key word in all of this is **listening**. We are called to **listen** attentively as the reader, deacon or priest proclaims God's Word. Unless one is unable to hear, one should not be reading along with a text from a missal. Rather, taking our cue from the General Instruction itself, we should **listen** as we would if Christ himself were standing at the ambo, for in fact it is God who speaks when the Scriptures are proclaimed. Carefully following along with the printed word can cause us to miss the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit, the message that the Spirit may have for us in one of the passages because we are anxious to 'keep up,' to move along with the reader.

Perhaps the best way to understand the readings at Mass and our response to them is offered by Pope John Paul II in his Instruction *Dies Domini*. He encourages those who take part in the Eucharist, priest, ministers and faithful ... to prepare the Sunday liturgy, reflecting beforehand upon the Word of God which will be proclaimed and adds that if we do not, it is difficult for the liturgical proclamation of the Word of God alone to produce the fruit we might expect. (n. 40) In this way we till the soil, preparing our souls to receive the seeds to be planted by the Word of God so that seed may bear fruit.

The Word of God, then calls for our listening and our response in silent reflection, as well as in word and song. Most important of all, the Word of God, which is living and active, calls each of us individually and all of us together for a response that moves beyond the liturgy itself and affects our daily lives, leading us to engage fully in the task of making Christ known to the world by all that we do and say.

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