

Liturgy of the Word with Children
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
19 February 2017
Matthew 5:38-48

Catechist Background

This Sunday's gospel is a continuation of last weeks' Sermon on the Mount. In Jesus' day, people's tribal loyalties formed a significant part of their understanding of the limits of God's love. Jesus shows us that God's love is for everyone, and that our love should extend beyond our network of family and friends, even to people who might consider us enemies.

In the first portion of the gospel, Jesus refers to an Old Testament injunction (Exodus 21:24 and elsewhere) that was meant to instil proportionality to crime and punishment. In ancient tribal times, it would have not been unusual to have been subjected to having one's whole family slaughtered for a much more minor transgression. Even in today's urban tribal mentalities, a person may be subject to extreme retribution for allegedly showing 'disrespect.' By continuing to ask more of his followers than the Pharisees demand, Jesus expects total generosity of heart. It is practical advice as well; Gandhi is attributed to have said, 'An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.'

In Leviticus 29:18, readers of the Torah are instructed to love their neighbours, and today's first reading carries a similar teaching. Nowhere in the Old Testament does it specifically say to hate one's enemies, but the inference has been drawn by many people, even by Christian readers today. Although Jesus tells us that he has not come to drop even one letter from the Law, he encourages us to take a broader view of the Law and live by its underlying intention.

Setting the Scene

For the activity below, you will need a sun-shape for each person, preferably in yellow paper.

As today's gospel follows last week's chronologically and thematically, it may be helpful to start by asking what the children remember from last week's Liturgy of the Word.

We Say Sorry

Leader: Before we listen to the Word of God, let us remember any times that we have been spiteful and unforgiving.

You came to show us how to live, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: You came to show us how to love, Christ have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: You came to forgive us for our shortcomings, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

We Pray (1)

God in heaven, help us to be like Jesus. Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

- The scriptures that the people had in Jesus' day only told them to love their neighbours. Who do you call your neighbours? The people who live next door to you? What about the people who live down the street? People who live on the other side of the village/borough/city? People who live on the other side of the country? People who live in different countries?
- Was it okay to only love their neighbours? Why do you think people thought it was acceptable to hate some people?

Response

Hopefully from the above discussion and from last week, you will have been able to draw out the point that some people in Jesus' day were very careful to follow what God had told them in the scriptures, but they were looking for ways that they could follow their own wishes—not God's—and be nasty to people they didn't like.

It is important to recognise that it is not always easy to be kind and helpful to people we don't especially like, or to people who have been hurtful to us. But we must try to remember that God loves them as well as us, and that we should try to treat them the way God wants them to be treated, with respect and caring concern. This doesn't mean that we should ignore it if someone is harming someone else—the gospels are full of Jesus telling people when they were not living up to high enough standards of being nice to others—but that we should continue to treat them with compassion. As Valentine's Day was last week, you may wish to highlight that the love we are talking about isn't the romantic kind of love, but the kindness and generosity that we are given many examples of in scripture.

Give each child a cut-out shape of a sun. Encourage them to have a moment of silence to think about a person that they find it challenging to be kind to, and to pray for God's help in being kind to that person. Let them keep the sun shapes as a reminder throughout the week to try, with God's assistance, to see that person as God sees them, and to act accordingly.

We Believe

Relating to the creed what you have shared with the children, ask this series of questions and invite the children to reply, 'I do.'

- Do you believe in God the Father who made and loves us all?
- Do you believe in Jesus who came to show us God's generous love and show us how to love each other?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who helps us to treat each other with love and respect and dignity?

We Pray (2)

Again, try to relate the bidding prayers to the reading by saying, 'We know that God loves everyone in the world and so we now pray...'

Leader: We pray for the Church throughout the world, that it may be faithful in living out your love. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for people who give jobs to other people, that they act fairly and with justice. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for members of our parish, especially those who are having a difficult time being generous to others in need. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for people who do not have many friends to care for them. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Lord, help us to take your love to us and to shine it to the world around us. We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

