

Liturgy of the Word with Children
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
30 September 2018
Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Catechist Background

We are presented with a gospel reading today that is difficult and very concerning if we take it absolutely literally. Most people who study scripture point to clues that suggest we can find deep symbolic meaning in Jesus' shocking words about cutting off parts of one's body, meant to alert us to the gravity of his point.

The word we have translated to us as 'hell' in today's reading was originally 'Gehenna,' a real place just outside of Jerusalem. An understanding of 'hell' as developed by later thinking and popularised by medieval paintings came much afterwards. Originally Gehenna was a valley where children were sacrificed to the god Molech. In Jesus' day, it served as the rubbish dump for Jerusalem, presumably full of maggots (worms) from putrid waste and had perpetual fires that 'never went out' for the burning of this rubbish and thus preventing contamination.

We know that the community of believers was compared to a body from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Given the dire warning in the text about those who cause little ones of Jesus' followers to stumble, it may mean that Jesus was talking about cutting off such a person from the community, to prevent the 'contamination' of the rest of the community.

The gospel can be read at another level by understanding that parts of the body were linked to different aspects or temperaments of a person's life. Hands and feet were associated with purposeful activity, for obvious reasons; if your daily activities are causing you to sin, stop them! Eyes were linked to the heart, for what we see feeds our hearts; if you are spending time looking at things that are causing your heart to sin, stop it! Stop the contamination spreading to the rest of you!

Having said all that, it is worth mentioning that some countries near Jesus' first hearers still use amputation and eye gouging as officially sanctioned forms of punishment, although it seems barbaric and inhumane to most of the rest of the world.

Setting the Scene

For the activity described below, you will need a selection of pictures (possibly from magazines or printed off of the internet) showing people doing various things—some good things, some bad things. You will also need an improvised 'traffic light,' possibly a drawing or circles of coloured paper.

We Say Sorry

Leader: Lord Jesus, you act with fairness and justice, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: You reach out the strong and the weak, Christ have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: You will lead us to God's Kingdom, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

We Pray (1)

God, fill us with your love and help us to see that our home is with you. Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

- In the first part of today's gospel, John was worried that someone wasn't doing something quite right. What was he concerned about? Why do you think that bothered him?
- There are some people in the world who do not believe in Jesus. Do you think that they can still do things that make God happy? Can they do things that help people grow closer to God?
- We have heard today that anyone who does even the smallest kindness to one of Jesus' friends will be rewarded, like giving them a cold drink. How many people do kind things like this to each other every day? Is it possible to even keep track of how many?
- But we have also heard some very serious news about people who cause others to lose faith. Do you remember what they were? How does this make you feel?

Response

We have probably all heard people speaking in slightly extreme ways to get our attention. If someone said, 'I am going to kill you if you eat the last biscuit!' do you think they would actually kill us? Probably not, but they *are* probably trying to get across to us that eating the last biscuit would make us very, very cross. Jesus is probably trying to tell us how important it is to use our hands and our feet and our eyes and every other part of us to help bring people to faith in Jesus, rather than keeping them away. Even if we think we don't have very much to offer someone, there is always something to share, even if it is as small as a smile or a giggle or a cup of cold water.

Show the children the 'traffic light,' reminding them that red means that we shouldn't do something and the green means we can go ahead. Show the children the pictures, and allow them to discuss and decide whether they should go on the 'green' side (e.g. a photo of people laughing together) or on the 'red' side (e.g. a photo of someone being made fun of). Let each child in turn place the picture in the appropriate place.

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 Creator of all that is good in the world?
- Do you believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ, sent to heal us and bring us back to God?
- Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit, who fills us with God's grace?

We Pray (2)

Again, try to relate the bidding prayers to the reading by saying, 'Our world needs help in coming to Jesus and so we pray...'

Leader: We pray for catechists and others who tell people about Jesus, that they may always be faithful in explaining God's love to others. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for the whole world, that it may become more of a place of generosity. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for all organisations in the world who work to make lives better for the poorest people. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for all people who are feeling small and fragile, especially anyone we know. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Lord, help us to be tools to bring you to the world around us by showing your love to those we meet. We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

