

Liturgy of the Word with Children
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
29 September 2024
Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Catechist Background

Today's Gospel reading is difficult and worrying if we take it literally. Most scripture experts point to clues that suggest we can find symbolic meaning in Jesus' shocking words about cutting off parts of one's body, meant to alert us to the seriousness of his point. The community of those who believed in Jesus was also compared to a body in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Given the warning in today's Gospel about those who cause Jesus' followers to stumble, it may mean that Jesus was talking about cutting such people off from the community, to prevent the rest of the community being 'contaminated'.

The word that is translated into English as 'hell' in today's Gospel was originally 'Gehenna,' a real place just outside Jerusalem. Originally Gehenna was a valley where children were sacrificed to the god Molech. In Jesus' day, it was the rubbish dump for Jerusalem, presumably with maggots (worms) from rotting waste and it had fires that 'never went out' in which rubbish was burned, thus preventing contamination. This real, ghastly place probably influenced the understanding of 'hell' which was developed later and popularised in medieval paintings.

This Gospel reading can be interpreted in another way by understanding that parts of the body were linked to different aspects or temperaments of a person's life. Eyes were linked to the heart, for what we see feeds our hearts; if you spend time looking at things that cause your heart to sin, stop it! Hands and feet were related with purposeful activity, for obvious reasons; if your daily activities cause you to sin, stop them! Stop contamination spreading to the rest of you! (Having said all that, some countries near the Holy Land still use amputation and eye-gouging as official forms of punishment, although it seems barbaric and inhumane to the rest of the world.)

Setting the Scene

For the activity below, you will need a selection of pictures (possibly from magazines or printed from 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 Gospel Reading with Children

- At the start of today's Gospel, John was worried that someone was doing something wrong.
 - What was he concerned about? Why?

- There are 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 heard today that anyone who does even the smallest kindness to one of Jesus' friends (like giving them a cold drink) will be rewarded.
 - How many people do kind things like this to each other every day?
 - Is it possible even to 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 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 lights,' 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 laughed at).

We Believe

Relating the Creed to what you have shared with the children, ask these 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 Prayer of the Faithful to the Gospel 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 world, that it may become a more generous place. 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.