

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 10, 2023



REFLECTION

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Everything you need to know about life you learned in kindergarten”? In today’s world educators are in tune with the benefits of teaching children how to work out differences. In fact, many schools have set up “peace tables” in classrooms where children go after a dispute to listen to each other’s perspective and to apologize. In Matthew’s Gospel we hear Jesus going back to the basics. He tells us that we must first try to work out our anger or disagreements with the other person. If we cannot reach an agreement we must ask the people in our community, such as church members, parents, or teachers, to help support us. If in the end we still can’t come to terms with those who have wronged us, it is best to separate ourselves from them. This is practical, but it also might help the other person realize that his or her actions have broken the relationship.



ACTION

As teens you generally do not have peace tables set up at school or at home where you and another person can go to work things out, but it isn’t a bad idea to keep the peace table method in mind. The next time you are feeling a fierce anger toward someone, instead of burying your feelings or ignoring the other person, do as Jesus did and invite that person to share a meal. Be brave and share your feelings in a calm and reasonable way.



Check out this article
about forgiveness: <http://www.aish.com/ci/teen/QA-for-Teens-You-Can-Forgive.html>

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today’s readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Why do you think forgiveness is so difficult sometimes?
- ❖ What are three ways you can practice forgiveness in your daily activities this week?



September 10, 2023

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #127A

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Psalms 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus talking to the disciples about a few different scenarios. The first is a scenario where someone sins against someone else. Jesus gives a process on how to find reconciliation with that person. Jesus' message here is to call us to be in right relationship with others. Jesus knows that there will be times when we don't agree or when we hurt each other. Jesus' teachings in the Gospel give us a roadmap to help us live faithfully as his followers. Our actions, in all situations, should reflect the faith that we have and our identity as followers of Christ.

Q FOCUS: We are called to be part of a faith community.

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On September 14, the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, honoring the cross on which Jesus died. On this day, the liturgical color for Mass is red. In Jesus' time, the cross was used to torture and kill people. Today, we see the cross everywhere. It is in our homes, on pieces of jewelry, atop churches, and on our rosaries. On this feast day, we celebrate Jesus' triumph over death. The cross is not the end of life anymore. Rather, it is the beginning of eternal life.

Church Teaching Connection

"Some non-Christian person might ask: why 'exalt' the Cross? We can respond that we do not exalt *any* cross whatsoever or *all* crosses: we exalt *the Cross of Jesus*, because in it God's love for humanity was fully revealed. . . . The Father 'gave' the Son to save us, and this resulted in the death of Jesus, and his death on the Cross. Why? Why was the Cross necessary? Because of the gravity of the evil which enslaved us. The Cross of Jesus expresses both things: all the negative forces of evil, and all of the gentle omnipotence of God's mercy. The Cross would seem to decree Christ's failure, but in reality it signals His victory" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, September 14, 2014).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 18:15-20

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the

church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

The way we behave and act has more to do with who we are and less to do with the situation we are in. When someone sins against you, how do you react? When you hear that someone lied to or about you, what is your response? When you are playing a sport and someone cheats, what is your response? Or worse, what if it was you who cheated?

► **Why do you think it is challenging to react in a Christian way in these types of situations?**

Let's consider this again: the way we behave and act has more to do with who we are and less to do with the situation we are in. Jesus knew that the disciples would have times in their lives when things would be difficult. He knew that because of their human nature, they would sin against each other. (He knows that about us, too.) He also knew that they would need each other in good times and in bad. In today's Gospel, we see Jesus giving the disciples a roadmap of how to live in relationship with each other.

► **What are the steps in the process of reconciliation that Jesus proposes?**

► **What stands out to you about that process? Do you think it would be easy to follow it?**

Our faith is not something we live alone. Jesus wants us to live in community with each other and when we do that, there will be times that sin trips us up and we hurt each other. Our faith calls us to reconciliation so our relationships can continue past the hurt. Because of Jesus, we are called to love one another through the sinful times. Remember, how we act is more about us and less about the situation. If we claim our Christianity, how we respond will be different than someone who does not believe in Jesus. We have the responsibility to act justly, love without condition and forgive those who hurt us.

The cross is the ultimate sign we have in our faith that shows us this love and reconciliation. Although the cross was an instrument of death, Christians adopted it as a sign of victory over death because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The cross did not have the final word. Was the cross painful and torturous? Absolutely. But Jesus overcame the pain, torture, and death with his resurrection, and through his rising from the dead, he gave us new life. He knows we will have those painful times and he wants us to overcome them to live in peace, joy, and love. This is the instruction in the Gospel today. Overcome your painful circumstance with a Christian response and know that you are loved. The way you behave and act has more to do with who you are than with the circumstance you are in. Don't just let the cross be a decoration in your home, in your car, around your neck, or in your church. Look at it. Know that Jesus overcame it for you and you can overcome any suffering you are experiencing because of his sacrifice.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 26.

How you act is more about who you are rather than the circumstance you are in.

What do you see when you look at the cross?

To live in a faith community means you will have to learn how to forgive one another.

Act on the Word

What Action Will You Take?

For this activity, you will need a copy of the Prayer of St. Francis for everyone or access to a musical version/song of the prayer.

Ask the teens to get into small groups, no more than four to five people per group. In their groups, ask them to come up with two scenarios that they will act out for the larger group. Each scenario must include a moment that requires a response. The teens will show the first response as that of someone who does not know Jesus and the second response as that of someone trying to be a disciple. For example, one scenario may be that they have a friend who has the answers to an upcoming test. The first response, the one from someone who is not trying to be a disciple, would be to get the answers and cheat on the test. The second response, from someone trying to be a disciple, would be to resist seeing the answers and, instead, take the test without cheating.

Give the teens some time to come up with the two scenarios they can act out. When they are finished, have each small group act out their scenarios. The adult leaders can recap the scenes and note the differences in the responses. Some examples of scenarios could include getting the answers to a test (to cheat or not), seeing someone drop money on the ground (to return it or keep it), lying to avoid getting

into trouble, or seeing someone get teased (to stand up for them or to not say anything). When the groups are finished presenting, close the activity by having everyone pray the Prayer of St. Francis together or listen to a song version of the prayer.

Closing Prayer

*Ever-loving and merciful God,
you have brought forgiveness of sins to
your faithful*

through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

*Help us to be bearers of that same compassion
to those we have sinned against*

and to rejoice in your forgiveness

for our own transgressions.

*Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you,*

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.