

Today's Readings

Sirach 15:15–20
 Psalm 119:1–2, 4–5, 33–34
 1 Corinthians 2:6–10
 Matthew 5:23–24

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a green cloth, place:

- a Lectionary
- a battery-operated candle
- a festive houseplant or bouquet of fresh flowers

On a separate table positioned so children can gather around it, place the following items (or similar ones):

- a small piece of candy and an onion (*tasting*)
- an alarm clock and a music player (*hearing*)
- a lit candle and a bowl of water (*touching*)
- a bottle of perfume and a box of mothballs (*smelling*)
- a scenic picture and a picture of a dump (*seeing*)

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING: "God's Family"
 (*Seeds VOL.-2, Track #16*)
 or **"The Great Commandment"**
 (*Promise & Good News VOL.-2, Track #18*)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:
"Alleluia" (*Promise & Good News VOL.-2, Track #24*)

Jesus Said, "Make Peace"

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

I praise you, LORD! With my own mouth, I tell others the laws that you have spoken. Your word is a lamp that gives light wherever I walk. Your laws are fair, and I have given my word to respect them all. (PSALM 119:12A-13, 105-106)

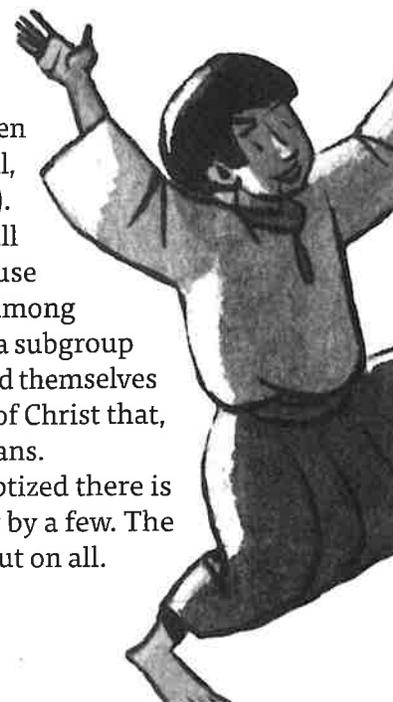
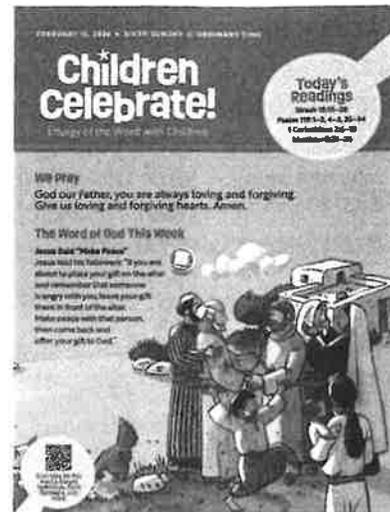
Scripture Background

Today's reading from the Book of Sirach addresses an old question: If God has foreknowledge of someone's sin, does that mean God causes the sin? Answering with an emphatic "no," Sirach speaks of the mystery of free will, God's irrevocable gift to all human beings.

Less than two centuries later, the author of the Letter of James will repeat Sirach's assertion when he writes, "Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't use evil to tempt others" (1:13).

To understand the Second Reading, recall that Paul is writing to the Corinthians because of a disturbing divisiveness that has arisen among them. Some scholars speculate that perhaps a subgroup identifying itself as disciples of Apollo believed themselves to be in possession of a superior knowledge of Christ that, in turn, made them superior to other Christians.

Paul insists, however, that among the baptized there is no secret or special knowledge shared only by a few. The wisdom of the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all.



The excerpt from Matthew's Gospel is part of a larger discourse about every Christian's duty to prevent anger from escalating into words and deeds of hate. While Jesus' insistence on the highest of standards in the practice of neighborly love has startled audiences from his day to ours, his teaching nonetheless remains well in line with traditional Jewish thought.

Many of the prophets who preceded him had written that there can be no true worship of God without ethical treatment of one's fellow human beings. By Jesus' day, however, disillusionment with temple worship in general had begun to creep into the thinking of some Jews, especially those who lived a separate, secluded life at Qumran.

After the Resurrection, any Jewish Christians who felt unwelcome at the Temple in Jerusalem probably shared the same disillusionment.

CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

Children are hardwired to explore the world with their own five senses, and they love learning through hands-on experiences. Today's Gathering activity teaches a spiritual lesson through the use of a few simple material objects. The lesson is that there are good and bad choices in the spiritual world just as there are good and bad choices in the natural world. Rules matter.

Usually starting at about age four, children are able to understand rules and feel compunction when they break them. From the ages of four to six they are eager to please the adults in their world and can understand simple explanations for the rules given them: "Don't tell lies because then people won't believe you even when you tell the truth. Remember the story of the boy who cried 'Wolf!'"

Beginning at age six, children become more aware of social groups, and develop the desire to fit in and belong to them. They begin to understand that others have rights, and they can grasp explanations such as, "Make sure you take only your fair share; otherwise the last person in line might not get any."

Six- and seven-year-olds also respond well to praise from grown-ups, so their sense of right and wrong grows when noticed and praised for their good moral choices. By age eight or nine,

though, children start testing their limits and sometimes challenge the authority of adults. This could happen during today's Gathering activity.

If an older child deliberately gives an unlikely answer as a joke, don't make anything of it. Simply say, "I can see that you're joking," and repeat the question to another child likely to give a serious answer. Remain firm with older children and stay on task with the matter at hand to keep control of the group's discussion.

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps children learn about Jesus' teaching about love, through a prayer, a summary of the Gospel, and a creative activity.

You may distribute the leaflet now, for use during the session, or before the children return to the assembly. If you distribute the leaflet now and time permits, you may wish to read with the children the summary of the Gospel in "The Word of God This Week" after you have read the Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

More About ...

Helpful Websites

There are many Catholic parenting websites that publish information as valuable for teachers and youth leaders as they are for parents.

- **Catholicmom.com**—provides information, activities, and daily reflections on an array of relevant topics.
- **catholicfamilyfaith.org**—equips Catholic leaders to accompany and form faith-filled Catholic families.
- **catholicparents.org**—assists parents in their sacred right and duty to direct and participate in the Catholic education of their children.



P E A C E

Leaflet Activity

Peace within the family is the emphasis of this week's family activity. Children learn five good rules to follow when in conflict with another.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

Gather the children around the table with the paired objects, and tell them not to touch anything. Ask a different volunteer to answer each of the following sets of questions:

- (*Point to water and candle flame.*) If you had to spend the whole day with your hand in one of these, which would you choose? Why?
- (*Point to alarm clock and music player.*) If you had to sit listening to one of these two sounds for an hour straight, which one would you choose? Why? (Play the two sounds.)
- (*Point to perfume and mothballs.*) If you had to wear clothes scented with one of these, which would you choose? Why? (Let children smell the items.)
- (*Point to onion and candy.*) If you could eat one of these right now, which would you choose? Why?
- (*Point to two pictures.*) If you had to choose one of these to hang on your bedroom wall, which one would you choose? Why?

After the Q-and-A session, note that it was quite easy to tell which was the better choice in each instance. Our five senses give us valuable information every day. They tell us which experiences to go for and which ones to avoid. Today's Scripture readings are going to tell us that choosing between right and wrong is easy, too.

Collect

LEADER: *Invite the children to bow their heads. At the end of each prayer, repeat, "Lord, have mercy." Lord Jesus, you always did the will of your Father. Lord, have mercy.*

CHILDREN: Lord, have mercy.

LEADER: Lord Jesus, nothing could change your loyalty to your Father. Lord, have mercy.

CHILDREN: Lord, have mercy.

LEADER: Lord Jesus, how immense is your wisdom! Lord, have mercy.

CHILDREN: Lord, have mercy.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: In today's First Reading, Sirach talks about right and wrong and the freedom we have to choose between them.

Read Sirach 15:15-20. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord.

CHILDREN: Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 33-34.*

Second Reading

LEADER: In today's Second Reading, Saint Paul explains that the Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom we need to make good decisions.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-10. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Gospel Acclamation, proceed to the proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us something a little surprising. He says that God doesn't want our worship on Sundays if we aren't trying to keep peace with our neighbors on all the other days of the week. The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: *Read Matthew 5:23-24. Then say, "The Gospel of the Lord."*

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

- Ask the children about some good choices they have already made today. Here are some possibilities:
 - waking up and dressing for Mass without protesting or poking around
 - doing any assigned chores, like feeding the dog or clearing dirty breakfast dishes
 - avoiding fights with siblings on the way to church
 - behaving well during Mass instead of talking or fidgeting
- Point out ways the children's good choices in small things already have made the day better, both for themselves and for others. Remind them that God is proud of them for their good choices.
- Acknowledge that sometimes good choices are hard to make. Illustrate this with a story from your own childhood, and tell how the choice you made helped or hurt others and yourself.
- Advise the children to pray to the Holy Spirit for wisdom whenever they need to make a hard choice.

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Respond to each question with the words, "I do." Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, whose plans for you are more than eyes have seen or ears have heard?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who teaches us to choose life over death and goodness over evil?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God's Holy Spirit, who shows you everything, even what is deep in the mind of God?

CHILDREN: I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: As Spirit-filled members of the Church founded by Christ, let us pray. Our response to each petition will be, "Hear us, O Lord."

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: That the Holy Spirit will enlighten and guide the pope and all bishops, priests, and Church leaders around the world, we pray.

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: That leaders of all the world's nations will choose goodness and life for their people, we pray.

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: That we will grow in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and make good choices in our everyday lives, we pray.

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: *Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:*

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending us Jesus to be our light. Today and always, may his light shine in all that we say and do, so that the world will become a brighter place just because we are in it. This we ask through that same Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.