

Catechist Manual

Catechumenate

Year C

Contents



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SESSION PLAN: Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dismissal Catechesis (30 min)

Getting Started

1. Prior to the gathering, prepare the center of the circle with a collage of newspaper or magazine photos of people who have met their enemies and have extended their embrace. Some of these might include: Pope John Paul II's meeting with Ali Agca, who attempted to assassinate him; the son of Martin Luther King Jr. encountering his father's assassin; Serbs and Croats embracing after the Bosnian war; Cardinal Bernadin's meeting with the man who falsely accused him of sexual abuse, etc.

2. Invite the catechumens and candidates to gather in the circle of chairs. Ask them to look at the collage and share some of their reactions.

3. Pray in these or similar words:

Jesus of eternal love you command us, "Love your enemies." But our hearts are stalled and frozen in rage and pain. Your answer, "I will make your hearts of stone into hearts of flesh."

We pray that you soften the edges of our angry hearts.

Caught between pain and pardon, we step out to forgive, but you demand even more. You call us to love even as our heavenly Father loves us.

Help us to see the image of Divine Love in the face of our enemies.

Make of us channels of this love even among those who have done us harm.

For this grace to see and understand, we rely upon you, Lord of Love. Amen.

First Impressions

1. Call the group to remember the readings from this week's liturgy and ask them to share their responses to them. *What about these passages did you find disturbing? What caused confusion or skepticism for you?*

2. Help the group understand the circumstances and emotion of the first reading by offering this short reflection.

David, anointed to be the next King of Israel, is pursued by the jealous and raging King Saul. After several attempts on his life, David fled to the desert. Saul and his troops gave chase. While they were encamped for the night, all fell into a divinely induced sleep. David and his men crept into the tent of his enemy. Even though the men urged David to kill Saul, and God had presumably offered him the opportunity, David spared Saul's life.

3. Ask the participants to discuss the following in pairs: *Why did David refuse to kill Saul? Contrast the largeness of heart in David with the smallness of heart found in Saul. What makes it possible for David to love his enemy?*

Making Connections

1. Invite the pairs to share their discussions by preparing a two-

column poster. They can list the characteristics of the two men under these headings. LARGENESS OF HEART and SMALLNESS OF HEART.

2. Ask the large group to share their own examples of stories of 'Davids' and 'Sauls' that they may have encountered.
3. Summarize the group's discussion and invite all to write in the Participant Book (page 66) or on the blackline handout one idea they wish to remember from this morning's discussion.

Prayer

Invite the participants to name their enemies and pray for them by spontaneously creating a Litany of Love. Begin in this manner: *Let us pray for those who have hurt us. . . . Allow the group to call out several names (first names only). Let us pray for those who refuse to understand and accept us. . . . Let us pray for those who have hurt members of our families. . . . Let us pray for those who have spoken ill of us behind our backs. . . . Let us pray for those who have not allowed us to be who we are. . . . Let us pray for ourselves for all the times we, whether knowingly or unknowingly, have caused another's pain or sorrow.*

Extended Catechesis

SESSION FOCUS: Love of enemies

Gathering

A. Sunday:

1. Welcome the sponsors and team-members into the circle by greeting each one as they enter the room. Invite all to reflect upon the collage in the center of the circle and think of one person who has been hurtful in their lives. With this person in mind, proclaim the gospel (Luke 6:28-38). Allow a short period of silence for these words of Jesus to permeate the depths of everyone's heart. Then pray in this or a similar manner:

Loving God, it is only in turning to you that I will ever have the grace to 'turn the other cheek' to my enemies. It is only in reliance upon your love that I will ever be capable of loving my enemies. For you are the source of love, mercy and forgiveness. Let me love as you have loved me. Let me let go of hurt and pain and replace them with the joy of knowing that you have created all people in love and you love us in spite of our petty human faults and arguing. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, who loved us enough to die for our sins. Amen.

B. Weekday:

1. Prepare a liturgy of the Word in pattern similar to that described below.
 - Song: Ubi Caritas
 - First Reading: 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
 - Psalm 103: Pray all verses antiphonally, that is, alternates from left to right

- Gospel: Luke 6:27-38
- Silence

The Word (30 min)

1. After a time of silence to absorb the implications of these scriptures invite some initial reactions to this teaching of Jesus. Ask these questions of the whole group, and invite just a short, first impression: *What effect do these words of Jesus cause within your heart? What are some ways you might be tempted to dismiss the depth of love called for by this gospel?*
2. Explore this Word further by summarizing the Word in Liturgy, found in Understanding this Sunday.
Jesus challenges his followers, even today, to counter the norms of our culture and go beyond the acceptable mode of behavior. He calls us to love even our enemies; he challenges us to the core. We can no longer keep an account of wrongdoing in our relationships, only loving those who are worthy of our love. We can no longer be content with forgiving those who have hurt us. Instead we are challenged to love all people, especially our enemies, freely and without measuring the deservedness of the other. God has loved the world unconditionally, and we are called to do the same. Christians are to break the cycle of maliciousness and violence by a choice to love.
3. Invite all to spend time reflecting on this challenge of the gospel with the help of the exercise in the Participant Book (page 66) or on the blackline handout.
4. Have the group share in pairs (sponsor/catechumen, sponsor/candidate) whatever they wish from their responses.

Catholic Teaching (30 min)

1. Refocus the attention of all back to the large group. Ask them to quickly name those ideas that come to mind when you say the word 'love.' Explain the different kinds of love, using the Catholic Doctrine section of Understanding this Sunday to as a help. Emphasize that "agape" love is without condition or limits. This is the love called for by the gospel. This is the love required of those who wish to follow Jesus.
2. Further summarize the teaching of the church on love in these or your own words:
Both David and Jesus are examples of how we are challenged to love our enemies. In the center of the circle we have modern day examples of people who go beyond the measure of our society to love.
3. Ask the participants to think of other examples of people who have loved their enemies.
Continue with the Church's teaching.
The love Jesus commands has no boundaries. Pope John Paul II explains that this practice of preserving love is both a unifying force and a powerful means of transformation in our lives. To love one's enemies requires the deepest acceptance of the liberating grace of God who delivers us from sin and evil. Catholic teaching emphasizes that God's actions throughout history, but most especially the passion of Jesus, achieve this deliverance. Thus, we are capable of loving our enemies when we abandon

our pain to God's mercy and rely upon God's grace to infuse us with divine love.

4. Allow some time for questions and further discussion of this topic as needed by the group.

Putting Faith Into Practice

1. It would be fitting to take this opportunity to describe the practice of Healing of Memories as a way of letting go of anger and hurt in relationships and moving toward love. Begin this meditative prayer by explaining this prayer form. The book, *Healing Life's Hurts*, by Dennis and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press) will be helpful.

Christ heals our memories from the hurts and pain of broken relationships and walks with us through these shadows into the bright light of surrender to God's love. In this prayer, we invite Christ to show us the source of pain, as we recall the circumstances and feelings of a particular moment of injustice or hurt. We ask for the grace to see God working even during this painful encounter. We invite God to heal us and love us into forgiveness. In the presence of Christ we pray to be relieved of our negative feelings, fears and hurts; to look for goodness present in the situation; and to see our enemies as God sees them.

2. Invite all into a prayerful meditation with instrumental music playing in the background as you begin. During this prayer, pause often to allow the religious imagination to take each individual to that space where God is calling.
3. Continue with this meditation:
Recall a person who has unjustly hurt you. Who is your enemy? Remember when this relationship began to be painful for you. What happened? What did you feel at the time? What words were spoken? What actions did you find most painful?

Now invite Jesus to enter this same scene as you recall it once again. Tell Jesus exactly how hurt you feel. Tell him other times you felt this way with this same person. Tell him all that has happened since and how you feel right now. Jesus takes your hand and consoles you. He helps you to see your enemy in a different way . . . through Jesus' eyes. You discover and understand the pain of your enemy . . . his or her feelings. You see the weaknesses and the strengths of this person who has been your enemy. You see a warm light bathe this person. The light extends out to you. Jesus enfolds you both in the warmth of his love. Allow yourself to rest there for a while.

As you re-enter this room, remain silent and write some of your feelings toward this person now. Use your Participant Book (page 67) or the blackline handout to note your insights. Know you can return to the scene of pain, in the presence of Christ any time that you feel the need.

Allow quiet time for the participants to write their thoughts.

Prayer

Close with a prayer of gratitude repeating Psalm 103, this time inviting all to respond: "Bless the Lord all my soul," as you pray a few verses at a time.