

'Dying To Live!' - Home Mission Sunday 2006

Ideas For Celebrating The Liturgy of the Word With Children



It is anticipated that the people who regularly lead these sessions will have a good idea as to what is likely to work with their particular group of children. The following suggestions are offered as supplementary resources to enrich what is probably an already well planned programme exploring the Word of God with young people. We don't imagine you will do everything suggested, but rather that you might adapt a few things according to your own situation.

If the space where you gather does not already have a crucifix, it would be a good idea to have one today.

Key Ideas

- It is 'Good News' that God loves us.
- Jesus is God but as His special role is recognised by Peter, instead of it being a moment of glory for Jesus, He teaches His followers that He will suffer and die before rising again, and that they should be ready to do the same.
- Jesus loves us so much He dies for us and He lets us choose whether we respond to His love. If we do decide to follow Him, we are called to share His love by 'losing our lives for the sake of the Gospel'. We can 'die to self'(ishness) in different ways. All of these ways of following Jesus are opportunities to share the Good News that God loves us.

Gather the Children

Greet the children enthusiastically and remind them that we come together to hear God speaking to us through His holy Word. Ask the children what the adults will be doing in Church now. Introduce the Liturgy with a few words explaining that today we are thinking about the fact that Jesus loves us, and expects us to tell other people that He loves them too. See if the children have an idea of some terms they will hear:

Christ = the Greek word for Messiah (Hebrew term), the Anointed One that the Jews were waiting for. The Jews had begun to think this Promised One would be a kind of warrior-king who would get rid of the Romans. Jesus *is* the Messiah, the Christ, the One they have been waiting for, but He will get rid of *anything* bad, not just the Romans. Jesus will get rid of the ultimate bad, sin that separates us from God and His love. He will do this by suffering and dying, not by being a warrior-king. Peter does not make this connection at first so he doesn't understand when Jesus talks about the fact He will die. Peter was right when he recognised Who Jesus is, but he was wrong when he thought that glory came without suffering.

Elijah = an Old Testament prophet who was expected to return before the Messiah (Christ) to announce that the Promised One was on the way. There are lots of similarities between John the Baptist and Elijah (appearance, diet and lifestyle).

Mention that they will hear Jesus ask the disciples a question: '**Who do you say I am?**' Who do the children say Jesus is? If He asked them that question, how would they answer? What do they do about living out that answer? How do they follow Jesus?

Talk to children about the theme: '**Dying to live!**' When have they heard the phrase 'Dying to...[do something]' before? What do they think it means? Are they dying to do something? What does it feel like? Do we have that same passion to share the Gospel, the Good News that God loves us? If you are going to use the sheets with the Cross outlines later, you might want to suggest to the children that they record their ideas now (just single words or short phrases) around the outside of the Cross. How did Peter know Jesus was the Special One everyone was waiting for? What are some of the things Jesus did that showed He was the Christ? Record the children's ideas on brightly coloured shapes, then after the Gospel has been proclaimed, place a big Crucifix over the top of these to demonstrate that Jesus's greatest act of love for us is His sacrificial death on the Cross.

Proclaim the Word

Light candles as a sign of God's presence. Maybe sing with the children to rejoice in God's Word; if you are not confident the children will know one, a very simple Gospel Acclamation can be sung to the tune of London Bridge: *Alleluia, hear the Word, hear the Word, hear the Word, Alleluia, hear the Word, stand and praise Him.*

Ask a child to hold the Lectionary high during the singing, then place the book where it can be seen by all.

Take a moment of silence before and after the readings are proclaimed to allow the children time to ask God's help to listen well to His Word. It could also be good to pray together a simple prayer that younger children might like to repeat line by line after the leader.

It would be good if the readings themselves were proclaimed according to whatever ritual you have established as this helps the children to make links and see the unity of God's Word. It is important they see this as a time of prayer rather than as simply something to do in case they got bored in Church.

God our Father, Thank You for Your Word. Your Word teaches us Your truth. Your Word helps us grow. Your Word fills us with Your love. Help us to listen well to Your Word today and always, and make us strong in acting on Your Word. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord, Who is the Word made flesh AMEN
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Breaking Open the Word

Obviously the discussion you have will vary greatly according to the age of the children in your group. One approach could be to look at the Cross collage made of photographs of different ways people can follow God and share the Gospel, the Good News that God loves us. Hopefully, the poster this image comes from will be displayed, maybe in the Church porch, so you could ask the children if they have noticed it and talk to them about what they think it is about. How are these people 'dying to live'? How does living like this spread the Good News of God's love? What could we do to be more enthusiastic about following Jesus? How would they respond to Jesus's question 'Who do you say I am?' How could somebody tell what their answer is - is it obvious in the way they live their lives? What do they think of the idea that following Jesus means being ready to die like He did? Talk about the idea of 'dying to self'. Help the children think of practical ways we can follow Jesus, even / especially when it is hard. Suggest that one way is to put other people and their happiness first. Doing this is not easy, we definitely need God's help to be like Him. Jesus is at the heart of our good actions; we need to be open to receive His love so we can share it, especially with people who do not know Him.



You could draw a link to how we are stamped with God's character at Baptism (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1304), how we receive the power of the Holy Spirit so we can witness to Christ. Evangelising, sharing the good news that God loves us, is not an optional extra that just some Christians do, but everybody who has been baptised has been given the light of Christ so that they can share it with others. Remind the children about the candle they were given at Baptism and how they are called to show and share that light with their friends and family, with all those they meet. You could ask the children for suggestions of practical ways they can let the light God gave them shine brightly.

Today is **Home Mission Sunday**. It is when we think about how 'mission' isn't just to do with foreign countries, but that with so many people who have no idea of God's love for them in this country, right here at home is mission territory. Jesus calls us to tell other people about His love for them, but He leaves it up to us whether we respond or not, and lets us choose how we use the time, talents and treasure He has given us to give Him glory. Children could respond to what they have heard and thought about by reflecting on how they could spread the Good News of God's love to others. They could use copies of the Cross outline sheet exploring concrete ways of 'dying to live'. In each box they could record a picture or a prayer of how they could 'take up their Cross' and be 'dying to live for the sake of the Gospel' ~what are little ways they could die to selfishness and, by doing so, share the news that God loves them with their friends and family? The idea is not necessarily to complete all the boxes in the brief session they have with you, they may choose to focus just on one, but to get the children thinking about how God has trusted us to spread His Word, the Good News that Jesus loved us enough to die for us, and that His love was stronger even than death. We have both the privilege and the responsibility of letting others know about Jesus and what he has done for us.

Drawing Together in Prayer

Again, it would be good if you did this in your 'usual' way. Allow the children time to respond quietly to the Gospel in their hearts, asking God that we, like Peter, will accept Jesus as the One sent by God, that we will proclaim Him and be ready to follow Him however hard it becomes. Encourage the children to pray for those who suffer because of trying to follow Jesus. Pray for ourselves that we will be brave enough to 'take up our Cross' and put our faith into action by putting other people first and dying to selfish desires. Together ask God for the wisdom, courage, enthusiasm and gentleness we need to tell others about our faith and the difference Jesus makes in our lives.

Alternative ideas:



What are ways that new life can come from 'death'? Seeds, butterflies, etc. Relate this to the hope of Resurrection we have because of Jesus's death on the Cross. On cut out flower shapes, children could draw simple pictures or write short phrases about how they are going to follow Jesus this week, especially by being unselfish and putting other people first, and stick these onto a big Cross shape topped and tailed by the phrases 'Dying to live... for the sake of the Gospel' (like the poster provided). If you would prefer younger children to do a colouring-in exercise, there are outline pictures available online. Searching for images on *Google* or similar sites using the terms 'Cross' + 'flowers' returns results like these that you could print off and reproduce as appropriate.



You might want to explore some of the ideas from the first reading about obedience, being ready to trust in God and do His will, whatever the personal cost. You could show the children a picture of an ear, discuss the importance of listening and ask them to think about what 'to open your ears' means (the opening line). Tell them that the word obedient actually comes from a Latin phrase meaning to 'bend the ear to'. How could we listen better to God? How could we be more obedient? How could we follow His example better, to love as unconditionally as He loves and to be ready to die for the sake of the Gospel?

Psalm 114 speaks about how God's love for us does not mean we will avoid suffering, but that He is with us even in the most difficult of times. He will protect us when we call on His help and we can respond by 'walking in His presence' and doing His Will. If you choose to focus on the Psalm as well as the Gospel, you could produce posters which illustrate each of the four verses.

Themes from the second reading that are particularly relevant to Home Mission Sunday include the idea that sharing faith has to be about what we do as well as what we say. You could spend some time discussing the famous saying of St Francis of Assisi, 'Preach the Gospel at all times, use words if necessary.' This does not mean that we should avoid talking about Jesus, but that our actions should match our talk. We are called to witness to and to proclaim Jesus in our everyday lives by putting our faith into action AND into words. This is how other people will come to know about God and His great love for them.