

Children Celebrate!

Liturgy of the Word with Children

Today's Readings

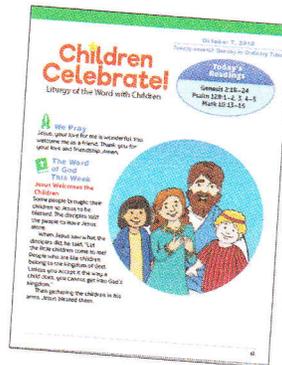
Genesis 2:18–24
Psalm 128:1–2, 3, 4–5
Mark 10:13–16

Jesus Welcomes the Children

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 wait for the LORD, my soul waits and I hope for his word.
My soul looks for the Lord more than sentinels for daybreak.
More than sentinels for daybreak, let Israel hope in the LORD, For with the LORD is mercy, with him is plenteous redemption. (Psalm 130:5–7)

Scripture Background

If the Psalms and the Gospels have anything to say about it, loneliness is part of the human condition. Jesus prayed words from the loneliest-sounding psalm of them all while nailed to the cross: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Psalm 22). Well before his crucifixion, though, he sometimes felt lonely. Family and friends didn’t always understand him the way he wished to be understood.

Yet if God’s Word in today’s liturgy is to be trusted, God’s will for people is not that they simply resign themselves to living in loneliness. In the excerpt from Genesis, God is not satisfied until Adam is satisfied with God’s creation of someone uniquely suited to be Adam’s friend, helpmate, and companion. Eve is like Adam in a way no other creature is, and together they set the precedent for all future marital pairings. Verse 24 says a man and a woman “become like one person” together—something that is said of no other human relationship.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus takes a clear stand against marginalizing the children who come to him for attention, even

Prepare the Meeting Space

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

- ▶ a Lectionary
- ▶ a battery-operated candle
- ▶ a plant or flowers

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

Gathering: “Follow Me” (Seeds CD-1, Track #10) or “The Great Commandment” (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #18)

Gospel Acclamation: “Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia” (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)

if they are “only” children. In this, he sets a new, counter-cultural example for his contemporaries. Among first-century Jews, few distinctions existed among women, children, and slaves, for together they occupied the bottom rung of the social ladder. Those ranking above them were privileged in ways that today would be considered elitist and discriminatory. Yet time and again throughout the Gospels, Jesus demonstrates in word and deed that women, children, and slaves are to be given the same respect ordinarily accorded only to free Jewish male adults.

Children’s Connections

Psychologist Robert S. Weiss probably reflected a common assumption when, in 1973, he wrote that young children do not experience loneliness. He thought the attention they receive from their parents shields them from this emotion. However, even children who feel comfortable and happy when among family members can and do experience loneliness in other settings.

Some 20 years later, two researchers at the University of Illinois found markers of loneliness among at least 10 percent of 440 kindergartners and first-graders they interviewed (Cassidy and Asher, 1993). Such children are excluded from playground games, sit alone at lunch, and often become the objects of bullying.

A study published in 2004 in *The Qualitative Report* specifically discusses the loneliness found among bullied children. The authors assert that adults need to be vigilant about bullying among children in their charge and stop it once it starts. First, an adult needs to know that bullying exists in four main forms: verbal ridicule, hurtful gossip, physical aggression, and property damage or theft. Second, the adult should intervene swiftly. Simply punishing the bully is counterproductive, however. It only displaces the offender’s thoughtlessness with anger, which likely will result in further bullying. It is better to have a quiet, private talk with the offender. Describe the behavior you have noticed, explain why it is wrong, and suggest something concrete the child can do to repair the damage done: apologize to the bullied child, invite the child to join in on a playground game, speak well of the child to others, etc. The more quietly this is done, the better for all involved.

More About ...

Saint Rita of Cascia (1381-1457)

Saint Rita of Cascia is the patron saint of loneliness, among other causes dedicated to her intercession. Her feast day is May 22.

She was born in Italy to elderly parents. She wanted to become a nun but instead her parents arranged for her to marry at the age of 12. Her husband was ill-tempered and violent. After 18 years of marriage and being a model wife and mother, her husband was killed. St. Rita forgave those who did the heinous act and prayed that her twin sons, who wanted revenge, might also forgive. Her sons died at a young age reconciled to God.

Saint Rita attempted to join an Augustinian convent at Cascia but was denied. She persisted and was finally accepted. Her time was filled with good works, penances, prayer, and fasting. Rita was devoted to Christ’s Passion and received a stigmata-like thorn wound that lasted for years. When she died from tuberculosis, the wound became like a beautiful jewel.

Many miracles were attributed to her. Pope Leo XIII canonized her in 1900. Her incorrupt body lies at the Basilica of Saint Rita in Cascia, Italy. The National Shrine of Saint Rita of Cascia is in Philadelphia.

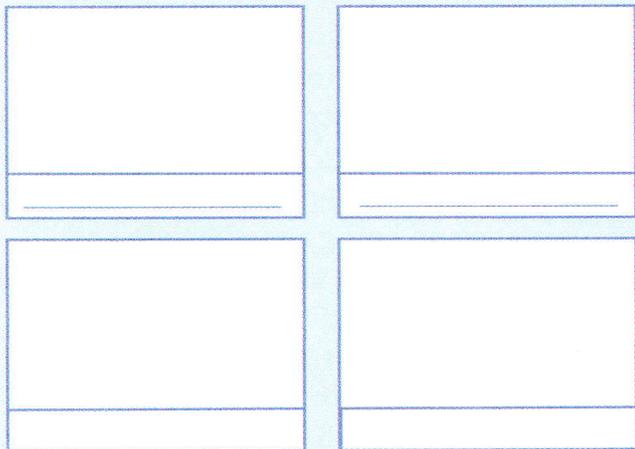
The Children’s Leaflet

The leaflet for this week helps children learn about Jesus welcoming the children through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, 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.

Leaflet Activity

This week, children will consider activities that they can participate in with other children. Children will discuss ways that they can include others as Jesus did.



The Liturgy of the Word

Gathering

After the children are seated in the worship space, ask them to listen carefully to the opening song. When it is finished, point out that Jesus taught us to treat everyone with the same love that is shared in a happy family. Then ask if any of these things ever happens in a family where everyone is loved and cared for. (Expect children to laugh at one or two of these examples.)

- ▶ While watching TV together, everyone sits in a nice chair except mom. She has to sit on the floor.
- ▶ While on a family bike ride, everybody has a bike except little brother. He has to run behind everyone else.
- ▶ While eating dinner together, everyone is seated around the table except little sister. She has to sit in a corner and eat by herself.
- ▶ While watching a baseball game together, everyone gets a hot dog except big brother. He has to beg the others for a bite of theirs.
- ▶ While riding in a car together, everyone is safely seated inside except Dad. He is strapped to the roof.

Conclude by pointing out that nobody in a loving family is ever left alone or left out. If we ever see another child all alone somewhere, God wants us to show them some love.

Collect

Invite the children to bow their heads. Then pray:

Leader: Loving God, you called us to live together on earth like a happy family. That means never letting anyone else feel left alone or left out. Forgive us for the times we have not noticed when someone else needed a smile or a few kind words from us. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

Children: Amen.

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

First Reading

Leader: In today's First Reading, we see what God did for Adam after seeing that Adam was feeling lonely in the Garden of Eden.

Read Genesis 2:18–24. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

Children: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

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

Leader: May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.

Children: May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.

Leader: *Read Psalm 128:1–2, 3, 4–5.*

Gospel Acclamation

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

Proclaim the Gospel

Leader: In today's Gospel, we see how Jesus reacted when some men in his group tried to keep a few children like you away from him.

The Lord be with you.

Children: And with your Spirit.

Leader: A reading from the Gospel of Mark.

Children: † Glory to you, O Lord.

Leader: Read Mark 10:13–16. Then say, “The Gospel of the Lord.”

Children: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Build a homily on the following ideas and questions:

1. When Adam was feeling sad and alone, what did God do for him?
 - ▶ Make some animals for him to care for and name.
 - ▶ Make Eve to be his wife.
2. This story teaches us to be thankful for all the animals and people that God gave us to make our lives better.
3. When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, what did he do?
 - ▶ He ordered the disciples to let the children come to him.
 - ▶ He took the children into his arms.
 - ▶ Then he reminded everyone of how important children are to God.

These stories remind us that we should never leave anyone else feeling alone or left out.

4. What can we do, for example, when we see any of these things happening around us?
 - ▶ A new family with children your age moves into the neighborhood.
 - ▶ At school, a boy is sitting alone at lunch.
 - ▶ Some kids make fun of a boy for the clothes he’s wearing.
 - ▶ Some kids make fun of a girl at the swimming pool for being afraid of the water.

Always remember that whenever you are kind to children who are feeling left out, you are doing what Jesus would do.

Profession of Faith

Leader: Please stand for our Profession of Faith. Today’s response will be, “I believe.” Do you believe in God the Father, almighty and all-loving, who knew it was not good for Adam to be alone?

Children: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, who let the little children come to him?

Children: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life, whose presence with us makes us all children of God?

Children: I believe.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leader: Now, as God’s own children called to care for everyone in the family of God, let us pray for the good of all people around the world. Our response to each petition will be, “Hear us, O Lord.”

Children: Hear us, O Lord.

Leader: For our Church, that it will be a welcoming place for the sad and the lonely, let us pray to the Lord.

Children: Hear us, O Lord.

Leader: For our country, that it will be a welcoming place to all strangers and newcomers, let us pray to the Lord.

Children: Hear us, O Lord.

Leader: For ourselves and our families, that we will notice and take action whenever we see someone feeling sad or lonely, let us pray to the Lord.

Children: Hear us, O Lord.

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

Let us pray. Loving God, your Son, Jesus, welcomed the little children even when his disciples thought he shouldn’t use any of his time or energy on them. May we always show a welcoming attitude toward others, especially those who are considered unimportant. This we ask through 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 complete the Family Corner activities as a family.