

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, ABC, Junior High

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Thu, 08/21/2014 - 20:00

Junior High Session

Numbers 21:4-9

John 3:13-17

Opening Prayer

Let us Pray,

Eternal God and Father,

You gave your Son for us. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that we could be free of sin. Because you love us so much, we will be lifted up with Christ. Until that day help us live in obedience as Jesus did. When suffering comes, let us carry our cross without complaining and confident of your love. Help us grow in courage, character, and faith from the difficulties we sometimes face. With the help of your Son, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Opening Life Activity

Set up role play scenario where you are showing someone the importance of the cross. Create characters who may never have heard of Jesus before, or perhaps they have lost faith because of some event in their lives. What will you say to them? Choose one person to be the believer and another person to be the non-believer or doubter. Create a variety of situations and allow different people to take the role of "actor."

Even though two people are the "speakers," share ideas of what you might say. This way one person will not "be on the spot." It is true that several heads together come up with good ideas. From this experience, share your thoughts about the questions below:

- What do we value most about the cross?
- Why is the cross significant to our beliefs?
- When have we been lifted because of our faith?

Listening to the Word of God

Much to God's frustration, the Israelites sometimes forgot that God loved them. Listen to their complaining words and God's response in this reading from Numbers.

Read Numbers 21:4-9

Allow for silence

Scripture Discussion Starters

- What do you suppose frustrated God about the Israelites?
- What point did God make by having Moses lift up the serpent?
- How is lifting up the serpent similar to Jesus being lifted up to heaven?

John makes perfectly clear in this Gospel the depth of God's love for us. God loved the whole world so much that he gave his only Son to die for us. By dying on the cross and being raised up to rejoin God, Jesus insured that we, too, would return to God.

Read John 3:13-17

Allow for Silence

- Why was it important that Jesus obey God? What do you think would have happened if Jesus had refused to go to the cross?
- Why is it important for us that we believe in God's Son?
- Why do you think John made such a point telling his listeners that God did not send Jesus to condemn us?

Scripture Background

Provide 2-3 minutes of background information on the readings using the Catechist Background section.

Hungry and thirsty, the irritable Israelites complained to Moses in the desert. They complained about the taste of the little food God sent them to eat. They were certain that Moses led them out of Egypt just so they could die in the barren wasteland. God grew tired of their complaining and sent venomous snakes among them. The snakes had a fiery bite that often killed people. After hardships and deaths, the Israelites admitted to Moses that they had been wrong to complain and doubt God. Their remorse was genuine and God recognized that. God took the snakes away but not before he had Moses lift one up. The people were healed. It was not the serpent that did the healing, but God wanted the people to remember his love for them when they looked on the symbol of the serpent.

Using this story from Numbers, John makes a connection between the serpent being lifted and Jesus being lifted up on the cross and then into heaven. Jesus was triumphant over death when God gave us Jesus, his only son, to save the world from sin. God wants all of us to rise up and return to heaven, to share eternity with God, just as Jesus does. We can turn away from God's love and not accept it, but those who accept it will have eternal life. We could not have eternal life, however, if Jesus had not died on the cross and then returned to God in heaven. The triumph of Jesus on the cross, or his following through with what God commanded, is the reason we can share in the eternal triumph of Jesus.

Questions for Deeper Reflection

- What does it mean to love or be loved by someone more than anything or anyone else in the world? Can we even imagine such a love?
- Are there people you know or have heard of who come close to loving others like God loved Jesus? Maybe someone took a great risk to his or her own life to help others.
- What can we learn from the example of these people?

[If you are not going to continue with the doctrinal discussion, proceed to the Gospel in Life.]

Doctrinal Discussion Starters

Redemption

At the time of Jesus' crucifixion, the cross was the most degrading method of execution. So terrible was its torture that it was used only for the worst sort of criminal. It is striking that something so savage could become a symbol of triumph. But it is true. For Christians the cross is a treasured symbol of triumph. We call Jesus our redeemer. To redeem something means to "buy back." Through his earthly mission, his death on the cross, and his rising to rejoin God in heaven, Jesus bought us back from our sinfulness so that we could return to God triumphantly in glory. Jesus freed us from the slavery of our sins to the fullness of eternal life. In love and obedience to God, Jesus accepted his mission, his suffering and dying. We are called to love and obey as well. When

we look on the cross, we are reminded of what Jesus did for us and assured of God's love.

- What dramatic changes in meaning does the cross hold since Jesus' death?
- God entered human history before Jesus. Where else do we see signs of God's saving acts?
- Why do you think the words "John 3:16" make popular bumper stickers?

Sacrament Connection

Reconciliation

While it is true that Jesus bought us back from sinfulness into a right relationship with God, it is still our responsibility to continue in that relationship. The Sacrament of Reconciliation helps us do that. Even though we try, we don't always make the right decisions. Sometimes we think only of ourselves and what we want. We don't stop to help others. We act in ways that separate us from God. Once we realize how thoughtless and selfish we have been, our hearts yearn to get right with God again. We want to get back on the right path. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we tell God we are sorry and we promise to try not to make the same mistake again. Through the priest, God forgives us and welcomes us back in his embrace.

The Gospel in Life

Look around your home, your parish, and your community. Where do you see crosses? What do they mean in the locations where you find them? Make the sign of the cross whenever you pass one and promise God that you will try to not only obey his commands, but in your own small way will carry on the mission Jesus began.

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