



a Kendall Hunt Company

Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year B, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

Jeremiah spoke God's Word in the tumultuous period that was to end in the destruction of the kingdom of Judah. The political strength of Judah faltered, and the Babylonian invasion that followed was interpreted by the prophet as a judgment against the people for infidelity to their covenant with God. Jeremiah saw the breakdown of the covenant, with its disastrous consequences for the nation, arising because of unresponsive hearts (5:23, 13:10, 23:17). (The heart was understood as the seat of intellect and will, rather than the locus of emotions and feelings.) The covenant of Sinai had been engraved on tablets of stone, and taught by one generation to another. But Jeremiah envisioned a new covenant that would be taught directly by God to each person. This covenant would be written on the human heart, so that outward observance would spring from inner conviction, born of "knowing" the LORD. To "know" in the biblical view is to share deeply, personally, and intimately.

Today's gospel presents us with a dramatic moment in John's gospel immediately following the raising of Lazarus, when Jesus announces that his "hour" has come. This announcement is precipitated by the arrival of some "Greeks"—Gentiles who have come over to Judaism and are in Jerusalem for the Passover—who say they wish to see Jesus. As is often the case in John's gospel, the scene operates on two levels: a simple request by strangers portends the gathering of all the world to witness the glorification of the Son of Man. The Johannine Jesus is well aware of his mission and that death awaits him. The "hour" of Jesus is a time of both suffering and glory as he returns to the Father through his death, resurrection, and ascension. A superb commentary on life and death (v. 24-26), probably made up of sayings



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original to Jesus, is then inserted. Although the image of seeds and fruit are used elsewhere—in the gospels, the parable in verse 24 points to the death of Jesus as the seed of new life for those who are converted to him. The seed that does not die, literally, “remains alone.” In verse 25, the motif of death producing life is applied to the believer in nonparable form. This life is experienced in communion with Jesus and in honor from the Father (verse 26). The passage then returns to the theme of Jesus’ glorious hour. His obedience, expressed in a prayer cried out directly to God, provokes an affirmation from heaven. A bold promise of salvation is held out to all people through Christ’s death on the cross (being “lifted up”), thus returning to the universalism suggested by the appearance of the Greeks.

Catholic Doctrine

Christian Prayer

The practice of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of God whom we acknowledge as Father, Son, and Spirit. Our Catholic tradition understands prayer as one’s whole self being directed to or in communion with the divine Trinity who loves us. This communion is always possible for the believer, because we have been united with Christ in the sacrament of baptism. Prayer can be vocal and it can also be unspoken, as in contemplation. But whether it is spoken or unspoken, our prayer is always Christian because it links us through Christ to the Father and the Spirit, and because the dimensions of prayer are those of Christ’s boundless love, it is extended throughout the Church, which is his Body.

We believe, therefore, that the place from which prayer issues is not the mouth, but the very center of the human person. Scripture sometimes refers to this center as the soul or the spirit of a person, and most often as the heart. In other words, a person’s heart can be far from God, in which case the words that come forth from that person’s lips in “prayer” are meaningless. But when the heart is turned toward God, the words of prayer find their true meaning.

The first characteristic of prayer, therefore, is that it is a gift. The activity of prayer is not necessarily vocal or rationally thought out—it can be utterly contemplative and even ecstatic, where one is “swept up” into an experience of God. Because it issues forth from our very center, the place of encounter between creature and Creator, we Catholics believe that prayer is the gift of God. We are able to seek God in prayer because God first desires a relationship with us.

Another characteristic of prayer is that the Holy Spirit is the interior Master of authentic prayer. The Spirit is understood by Catholics to be the artisan of the living tradition of prayer—no matter what form that prayer takes (blessing and adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, or praise)—and of the way it is expressed (vocally, meditatively, or contemplatively).