

Liturgy of the Word with Children

Lent, Year C

General Information

Catechist Background

'Lent' comes from an Old English word meaning 'spring,' and it is from this word that we also get 'lengthen,' as the days grow longer. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Holy Thursday, Lent is a joyful journey of forty days towards Easter. Lent itself is slightly longer than forty days, as the Sundays of Lent are not included in the count of days of penance. In Lent we are encouraged to focus on re-conversion and re-commitment to our baptismal promises in following Christ. Three main activities of Lent have traditionally been prayer, fasting and almsgiving to help us grow closer to God in preparation for the Easter mysteries.

Setting the Scene

Purple is the colour for Lent. It is used because it has the dual meaning of majesty and suffering. Purple was the most expensive dye to produce in the ancient world and so that colour was only worn by leaders (even if only a thin hem as for Roman senators). It was therefore the colour that anyone divine was depicted as wearing, and this was inherited in Christian art where it is still the colour usually worn by God in general or specifically God the Father. Therefore, when the soldiers were mocking Jesus and calling him "the King of the Jews" during his Passion, they dressed Jesus in a purple robe and put a crown of thorns on his head. Thus, for Christians, majesty is linked with suffering, and reminds us of our need for penitence and to prepare for Christ's return. If your Children's Liturgy space allows, you may choose to incorporate purple into a centrepiece.

In keeping with the penitential tone, we do not proclaim either the 'Gloria' or the 'Alleluia' in Lent.

We Say Sorry

In some parishes, Children's Liturgy of the Word begins before the Introductory Rite has finished. If you have been in the main body of the church for the Penitential Rite, there is no need to repeat it in Children's Liturgy.

We Pray (1)

The Opening Prayer expresses the theme of the readings that day. If you have been in the main body of the church for the Opening Prayer, there is no need to repeat it in Children's Liturgy. Where the language is accessible to children, some of the prayers used on the Sundays have been taken from *The Sunday Missal*.

Gospel Acclamation

'Alleluia,' the normal Gospel Acclamation, is not sung during Lent. For the Gospel Acclamation you might like to have a look at:

- *Music for Children's Liturgy of the Word* by Christopher Walker (Oregon Catholic Press)
- Some of the Gospel Acclamations used at your parish mass if suitable
- Try writing your own words using tunes familiar to children (see suggestions in *The Complete Children's Liturgy* by Katie Thompson (Kevin Mayhew publishers), and words suitable to the season, such as the following:
 - Glory and praise to you / Lord Jesus Christ!
 - Glory to you O Christ / You are the Word of God!
 - Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ / King of endless glory!

Gospel

This year is year 'A,' and most of the Gospel readings for Sunday Mass this year will come mainly from the Gospel of Matthew throughout the year. However, during Lent in Year A only the first two Gospel readings are from Matthew, the remaining three are from John. On Passion (Palm Sunday) in Year A the description of Jesus' joyful entry into Jerusalem will be read from Matthew's Gospel, as will the Passion.

Matthew is the first of the four Gospels as they appear in the New Testament, although scholars do not think it was the first to be written (they think Mark's Gospel was written first). It is thought that Matthew's Gospel was written for the Judeo-Christian community who were trying to break away from Judaism while preserving the continuity of the Old Testament.

It is suggested that Matthew's Gospel was written to show that Jesus fulfilled the history of Israel. This would explain why Matthew constantly refers to quotations from the Old Testament which showed how Jesus acted as if he were the Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting.

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

Questions are provided to help draw out a greater understanding of the Gospel reading for the children, as well as to help focus on aspects which may be relevant for them.

Response

An activity is provided to cement visually and actively the understanding the children may have gained from listening to and reflecting upon the Gospel and help them to own it in their hearts.

We Believe

A very simple form of the Creed is included to which the children are invited to respond.

We Pray (2)

'All liturgy is prayer and it is right that a liturgy of the word with children should end with a time of intercession. The prayer may arise from the children's reflection but it is always concerned with the needs of the whole Church and the world. It is important to remember that the petitions are invitations to pray not the prayers themselves, so a short phrase that invites the children to pray is better than a long or detailed list of concerns. This model of intercession is easily learned by children.' (*Liturgy of the Word with Children – Guidelines – Commentary ¶7*)

