

Liturgy of the Word with Children
Exaltation of the Holy Cross
14 September, 2025
John 3:13-17

Catechist Background

This feast, which is fixed to the 14th September, only falls occasionally on a Sunday, and so you might not be very familiar with it. It is also known as 'The Triumph of the Cross' – a title which is perhaps easier for children to understand. This feast has its origins in the finding of the True Cross (the Cross on which Jesus died) in Jerusalem by St Helena in the 320s AD. The feast usually occurs on a weekday but when on a Sunday, like this year, it takes precedence over the Sunday liturgy. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the central mystery of our faith: that Jesus, who was lifted up on the Cross in crucifixion triumphed over the power of sin and death. It may help catechists to read today's First and Second Readings (Numbers 21:4b-9 and St Paul's Letter to the Philippians 2:6-11).

This Gospel reading is part of a conversation with Nicodemus who wanted to understand who Jesus was. In it, Jesus spoke about God's Chosen One being 'lifted up' as he would be lifted up on the Cross. His words make clear God's love in sending us his Son. Today we celebrate God's victory over sin and death, and that victory is won by Jesus' total love and self-giving. (John 3:16 is the reference you might see held up on banners by Christians at public events like football matches!)

Setting the Scene

For today, you will need a large carry-able cross or crucifix, and some small paper or card crosses, one for each child to decorate and take home.

We Say Sorry

Leader: Lord Jesus, you carried the Cross to share our pain and free us from sin, Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: You died on the Cross, to bring all people closer to you, Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: You rose again to lead us from death into life, Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: John 3:13-17

Reflecting on the Gospel reading with the children:

Invite a child to carry a large cross or crucifix in the procession today when the children assemble to come to the Children's Liturgy, and then display it prominently when you arrive.

- Tell the children that today we think about the way that Jesus died:
- Ask them what this thing is which one of the children carried today? A 'cross' (or 'crucifix').
 - If you have a crucifix, explain that 'crucifix' refers to a cross which has Jesus on it, whereas a "cross" tends to be empty.
- When we are talking about the cross on which Jesus died, we call it "The Cross", or even the "Holy Cross". Today is the feast day of the "Holy Cross".
- Remind the children: we believe that Jesus is God and that we believe Jesus chose to die in this way on a cross even though that was very horrible.

- In this Gospel reading today we hear about someone who is called the "Son of Man": who is the "Son of Man"? (Jesus)
- Do you remember what was said in the Gospel about what would happen to the "Son of Man"? (He was "lifted up").
- What do you think that "Jesus being lifted up" means? (If they don't understand, you may need to explain that when Jesus was on the Cross he would have been quite high up.)

This feast day is known as The Victory of the Cross. Why is it a victory?

- Did Jesus stay dead? (No, he came back to life, and then went to heaven forty days later).
- For Christians, The Cross reminds us that Jesus beat death and came back to life.
- So by dying for us, we believe Jesus made it possible for us to go to heaven after we die.
- Jesus did all of this because he loves us so much. How much does Jesus love you and me?
- (In answer, open your arms as if on a cross and say "**Jesus loves me this much and more!**"
 - Encourage the kids to do the same action and say the same words.

Response:

We remind ourselves of this every time we make the *Sign of the Cross*. We make the shape of the Cross on our bodies with our hand, and we say pray a short prayer giving ourselves to God.

Let's do it together now:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen."

Have you made that Sign today? (Yes, at the start of Mass).

- We also did it on our foreheads, lips and heart just before we heard the Gospel today.

Did you make The Sign of the Cross with water when you came into the Church today?

- When we do this, we do what our parents did when we were baptised: they made the Sign of the Cross on our heads, and the priest poured water over our heads and said the same words.

The Cross is a very special image for us: we put it up on the wall, on the top of church towers, on flags, and in many places. Some people also wear crosses and crucifixes:

- Sometimes on a chain around their necks - do any of you wear one?
- Sometimes we have a cross or crucifix on our clothes. Is there one on your school uniform?
- Many countries have a cross on their flag too, and often on the football kit.

So, every time we see the Cross, we are celebrating that God beat death through Jesus.

Give out a plain card or paper cross to each child, saying:

- Here is a Cross for you each to decorate and put up at home, to remind you how much God loves you.
- How much does Jesus love me? "**This much and more!**"

Ask the children to look for the cross or crucifix when we return to the church, and see how many times they see one this week.

We Believe:

Relate the Creed to what you have shared with the children by asking these questions and inviting the children to reply: 'I do'.

- Do you believe that God loved us so much that he gave us his Son?
- Do you believe that Jesus died on the Cross and rose again for us?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who helps us to know and love God?
- Do you believe in our holy, Catholic Church, which teaches us how to be a family?

We Pray (2):

Again, relate the Prayer of the Faithful to the Gospel reading by saying: 'Jesus told us to ask God for what we need, and so, as God's children...'

Leader: We pray for the Church: so that we may continue Jesus' work. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for the spirit of love in our hearts, so that we become more loving to our families and friends, Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray that we can see and understand that God is with us. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for those who are sick, that they may be healed. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for those who have died; and for the people who miss them. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Loving Father, we ask you to hear these prayers in the name of Jesus, our Lord. **Amen**

