



Catechist Background

Understanding the ancient cultural attitudes toward children and childhood give the first verses of today's Gospel reading greater impact. Childhood survival rates were poor, and until they reached the age of maturity, children had few if any rights. They were generally powerless and voiceless in society. Contrastingly, the Pharisees in Jesus' day competed to follow meticulously the 613 laws of the Torah. The 'yoke' imposed by rabbis on themselves and their followers could often disintegrate into one-upmanship, whereby individuals competed to show how holy they were by how correctly they followed the laws. Jesus warned against such egotism by reminding us that the weakest in society were able to understand God's will better than some of those very publicly learned figures who missed the point of the Law entirely.

Setting the Scene

For the activity described below, you will need something heavy to drag like a box or basket of books, attached to a rope. You may wish to cover some of the books with paper and write words like 'forgiveness' and 'generosity' on them (see below in the 'Response' section for an explanation).

We Say Sorry

Leader: You came to teach us how to live, Lord have mercy.

All: **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader: You show us how to be generous, Christ have mercy.

All: **Christ, have mercy.**

Leader: You are always ready to show forgiveness, Lord have mercy.

All: **Lord, have mercy.**

Gloria

We Pray (1)

Jesus, you offer us happiness. Help us to follow you in what we say and do. Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30

Reflecting on the Gospel Reading with Children

Have you ever tried to play a game without following any rules? If yes, what was it like? Was it easy?

- What would happen if you tried playing a game of football without agreeing first where the goals were or the edge of the field, and with no referees.
- Would that be easy? Would it be fun?

Why does God give us rules to follow? (i.e., because we need to have some boundaries, to keep us focused on God, to remind us of others, to help us think differently about things...)

- How many Commandments were given to Moses on Mount Sinai? (Traditionally we say 10)
- How many rules were given to the Jews in the Old Testament altogether? (613!)

Some of those rules were easier to follow than others, i.e., 'Don't boil a kid goat in its mother's milk'. But others were trickier: "Do not work on the Sabbath" (the Jewish weekly holy day of rest)

- Lots of Jews argue(d) about what counted as doing 'work' on the Sabbath:
 - Is helping to grow vegetables 'work?'
 - What if I really LIKE gardening?
 - Is it work if I bake a cake or cook dinner?
 - What if I help my friend or my pet climb out of a ditch?

Response

People still argue about this today, but we can agree that it can be hard to live like God wants us to.

- As it is hard to follow God, so should we help each other, or should we make it harder for them, or point out and laugh at them when they get it wrong? (help each other!)
- Jesus didn't say that it would be easy to follow him. In fact, he said it would be hard.
- We don't always want to be forgiving or generous, but will it make us happier to do that than to be angry and greedy all the time. (Yes)

Activity:

- Choose one child to come and try to pull the heavy box
- Explain that the heavy box represents [is like] the burdens we carry in life
- Ask another child to help the first child pull it.
- Ask the first child: Was it easier to pull the box when someone helped you?

Say:

- Jesus helps us carry our burdens, and when we help other people, we are being like Jesus.
- Invite other children to demonstrate pulling the burden if you have time.

We Believe

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

- Do you believe in God the Father who created the world as a paradise?
- Do you believe in Jesus who came to earth to bring us back to God?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who guides us today?

We Pray (2)

Again, relate the Prayer of the Faithful to the Gospel reading by saying: 'As Jesus lightens our burdens, we want to help others, and so we now pray...'

Leader: We pray for Christians around the world, that we may all make each other's lives easier.

Lord in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray that everyone may know the happiness that comes from you. Lord in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray for people who are in prison or far away from people they love. Lord in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray for anybody we know who is ill. Lord in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Lord, help us brighten the days of those we meet. We make our prayers through Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**