A Celebration of Saints

We acknowledge the life and witness of the saints of God.

◆ We affirm to children that as saints, we, too, are the close friends of Jesus. God’s love in Jesus makes us saints.
◆ In today’s session we invite children to celebrate the saints of God.

Question of the Week
How can I choose “love over law”?

Core Session
◆ Getting Started
◆ Gospel Story: Happy Are the Saints
◆ Happy, Happy Saints
◆ Praying Together

Enrichment
◆ Discover the Good News
◆ Singing Together
◆ Art: Swanson’s Psalm 85
◆ Hide and Seek a Saint
◆ Saints’ Tour
◆ Info: Young Children and the Gospel
◆ Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
◆ More about Today’s Scriptures
◆ Reflection
◆ The Scriptures and the Catechism
◆ The Feast of All Saints
◆ The World of the Bible: 144,000 Saved
Getting Started (5-10 minutes)
Invite children to talk about people who love them. Ask:
◆ Who loves you?
◆ How does that person show love to you?

Explain:
◆ People who love God and love other people are saints.
◆ There are saints everywhere: people who love God and who love others.
◆ Draw a picture of the people who love you. If you like, you can tell us about the saints who love you.

Provide drawing paper and markers or crayons. Encourage children who want to talk about their pictures to do so.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)
Happy Are the Saints
Jesus said to his friends, “Happy are you, my friends. You are God’s saints.

“Happy are you if you know how to give up everything to follow God.

“Happy are you if you want most of all to do what God wants. God will help you!

“Happy are you if you forgive people who hurt you.

“Happy are you when you make up your fights. People who make peace are God’s own children.

“Happy are you even if people call you names—even if people hurt you. Yes, even then you can be happy, because God loves you. God will always be with you. You will be with God forever.”

Happy, Happy Saints (5-15 minutes)
This game is a variation of Duck, Duck, Goose.

Ask the children to sit in a circle on the floor. Be sure there is enough clear space around the outside of the circle so that children can run safely.

Ask a volunteer to be It. It walks around the circle, touching each child lightly on the head and saying “Happy, happy, happy...” until It chooses a runner by touching one child and saying “saint.”

The runner chosen chases It around the circle. Whether or not It reaches and sits down in the runner’s place before being tagged, the runner becomes the next It.

Praying Together (5 minutes)
Gather children in a circle. Say:
◆ We are Jesus’ friends.
◆ We are Jesus’ saints.
◆ Let’s thank God for each saint in this group.

Encourage each child to name a neighboring child with such prayers as:
◆ Thank you for (child’s name).
◆ Bless (child’s name).

Close by praying:
◆ Jesus, thank you for all the friends and saints right here today. Thank you for being with us always.
  Amen.

Note: Distribute this week’s At Home with the Good News to children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)
In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a story that celebrates the saints. An activity for children and parents—paper-doll prayer chains—can be adapted for use in the group.

Cut a long strip of paper dolls. (You can find a Paper-Doll Pattern attached to this document.) Ask children to name their friends and families. Write each person named on a separate paper doll. Tape the chain in the prayer corner, and use it during closing prayer.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Season of Harvest” (songbook p. 4, also available as an MP3)
◆ “Saints Rejoice” (songbook p. 16)
◆ “Bring All You Have” (songbook p. 9, also available as an MP3)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Fall-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

You can also sing and move to the tune of the traditional song, “Oh, When the Saints Come Marching In.”:

Oh, when the saints come marching in,
Oh, when the saints come marching in,
Lord, I want to be in that number,
When the saints come marching in.

You can lead children in a parade as you sing, encouraging children to move in hops, runs and twirls. Use up some of that post-Halloween energy! Ask each child to take a turn leading the parade. For each leader, vary the words this way:

Oh, when Saint (leader’s name) comes marching in,
Oh, when Saint (leader’s name) comes marching in,
Lord, I want to be in that number,
When Saint (leader’s name) comes marching in.

Art (10-15 minutes)
Swanson’s Psalm 85
Use the attached painting by the artist John August Swanson to inspire a children’s storytelling.

Explain to the children that there are many saints of God. Name yourself and each child as a saint:
◆ In this group, we have Saint Maddy and Saint Kim and...

Gather children around the poster. Ask them to show you the people they see in the poster.

For each answer, affirm that the person they see can be a saint of God, too. “You see people working. You see people loving others. God’s saints can work together. God’s saints can love others.”

Hide and Seek a Saint (5-15 minutes)
This game is a variation of Hide and Seek.

Ask a volunteer to be It. This child covers his or her eyes and counts to ten while the other children scatter and hide as best they can. (Feel free to count with the child. Not all young children can recite the numbers one to ten yet!)

When It finishes counting, say:
◆ Find Saint (child’s name).

When It finds the right saint, It holds up that child’s hand while all the other children cheer: “Yay!” “Hooray for Saint (child’s name)!”

Ask for a new volunteer to be It. Continue until all the children have been found and named saints.
Saints’ Tour
Help children tour their church building, enjoying the works of liturgical art found there. If possible, tour your church before the session and look for stained glass windows or other pictures of saints. Choose which ones you will show to the children.

Of course, it’s helpful if you know the name of each saint whose picture you choose, as well as a bit of that saint’s story. If you don’t know and can’t find a helpful guide in your parish, invite children to wonder along with you:
◆ I wonder what this saint’s name was?
◆ I wonder why he (or she) was remembered?

In the session, explain to the children that there are many saints of God. Name yourself and each child as a saint:
◆ In this group, we have Saint Maddy and Saint Kim and...

Invite children to take a walk with you to see pictures of other saints, right in this building. Walk to your first picture. Tell children the saint’s name and invite them to look carefully at the picture as you ask:
◆ Is this saint old or young?
◆ Is this saint big or little?
◆ Does this saint look like anyone you know?
◆ How does this saint look like the saints in our group?
◆ How does this saint look different from the saints in our group?
◆ What do you think this saint might have done to be a friend of Jesus (or to be happy)?

Young Children and the Gospel
On All Saints Sunday, we celebrate our fellowship with all the saints, living and dead. We who follow Jesus today are saints, too.

The word happy is the closest translation we have to the word in the Beatitudes often translated as blessed. Jesus promises not a future reward but present happiness to his followers.

However, this happiness does not resemble the happiness promised by a consumer culture—a happiness that comes from drinking the right brand of soft drink or wearing the right pair of designer jeans. Jesus’ understanding of happiness includes the possibility of mourning, poverty and endurance under painful prosecution.

With this in mind, exercise caution as you meet and work with children. Remember that some children may not be having a happy day, even if we have a session planned around “happiness.” Opportunities for these children to choose other activities is essential.

Some may want to paint an angry picture, to play alone or to talk quietly with a friend. As always, we recommend that you invite children into activities without insisting that they participate.

Where You’ll Find Everything Else
◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
   — Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
   — A copy of today’s Gospel Story which can be distributed or e-mailed to children and their families.
   — A Paper-Doll Pattern to use in today’s Discover the Good News activity.
   — Swanson’s Psalm 85, used in today’s Art activity.
◆ Open your Fall-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
   — Information on Fall-B’s Models of the Faith.
   — A printable article titled Learning through the Visual Arts.
   — A printable article titled The Feast of all Saints.
   — Printable articles for catechists and/or group members on Apocalyptic Literature and the Book of Revelation.
   — An article exploring Discipleship in Mark’s Gospel.
   — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings acknowledge the life and witness of the saints or holy ones of God, including you and your group members. In Revelation, John depicts the jubilant end of suffering and oppression, replaced with victory and feasting. In the gospel, the Beatitudes describe the blessed state of the saints.

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-17

The book of Revelation was most probably written near the end of the Roman Emperor Domitian’s reign (AD 81–96). At that time the cultic worship of the emperor was being vigorously enforced, while Jewish Christians were more systematically excluded from the synagogues and thus denied the privilege of non-compliance allowed to Jews. The book’s message was an encouragement to those likely to undergo persecution in the near future.

Today’s reading comes from two visions of the anticipated victory of God and God’s people. The sealing of the servants protects them from the destruction to be let loose at the breaking of the seventh seal. The discovery of the great multitude indicates the universal or catholic character of the Church. Their white robes signify purity and righteousness. The palm branches are a sign of victory.

1 John 3:1-3

Today’s reading again takes up the theme of Christians and sin, this time in the context of their adoption as “children of God”. This special relationship to God was formerly extended to Israel as a people, and especially to the king as Israel’s representative. Here this intimate relationship is proclaimed as a present reality.

In Hebrew idiom, to “be the child of” meant to exhibit the characteristics of one’s father. Christians are truly God’s children now, yet they are also still in the process of growing in resemblance to God as manifested in Christ. Our resemblance to God is evidenced in the realm of behavior (Matthew 5:8-9). John asserts that it is the aspiration of Christians to live without sin, as in love they attempt to “be like God,” but it is not their present attainment (1:8).

Matthew 5:1-12

Matthew gathers the teaching of Jesus into five great discourses and balances them with narratives of Jesus’ deeds. The Beatitudes introduce the first teaching discourse, which is called the Sermon on the Mount, and reveal the essential characteristics of those who belong to Jesus’ new kingdom.

The “blessed” in the Old Testament are those who receive an earthly fulfillment—of prosperity, offspring and long life. In later Jewish writing, the blessings belong to those who will enter the final age of salvation. Jesus offers these future blessings now, for the kingdom is present in him.

The first four beatitudes reflect attitudes that climax with an unceasing hunger for a right relationship with God—both personally and communally. They are directed to those who by their real deprivation are dependent upon God and through their faith rely upon God.

The second four beatitudes concern those who act, as in the kingdom, to set things right. The pure in heart are those whose thoughts and wills are centered on God. The identification of the peacemakers as children of God recalls the same honor bestowed on the people of Israel. In verse 10, Jesus teaches that those who live the Beatitudes will face persecution, for this way is contrary to all that the world espouses.

Reflection

The opening prayer of today’s liturgy invites us to “rejoice in the holy men and women of every time and place.” If we ever wonder whether this “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” is with us still, we only need to think back on Hurricane Katrina. We look not to institutional bungling or government mismanagement, but at the sanctity of ordinary people facing sudden crisis together.

Stories of heroic rescue efforts inspired us all. Many evacuees who had lost everything and endured hellish experiences would have been justified in complaining. Yet most news coverage reported only gratitude that they had survived.
The outpouring of generosity across the South was phenomenal. Thousands of hosts gave an estimated 15,000-30,000 evacuees shelter, cars, jobs, clothes, health care and the hope of the community. One young couple, hesitant about offering the little space they had, described the couple they hosted: “We have nothing but good things to say about them. They are resilient. Everyday, they are out the door trying to make things happen for them here in Dallas. They show us that life really is about facing challenges head on. Despite their misfortune, they still have time to smile, spend time with us and our neighbors, and even cook us special New Orleans meals.” So a Cajun jambalaya celebrates the Feast of All Saints.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today we rejoice with that great “cloud of witnesses” who have gone before us into the kingdom, especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints (CCC, #2683-84). Though separated from us by death, their faith and example offer a model for us to imitate (CCC, #946-52). We believe that God is our Sanctifier (CCC, #14) who invites us all to enter God’s kingdom (CCC, #543). Our call or vocation is to be holy, transformed into the image of Jesus (CCC, #1877–78) by living out Christ’s beatitudes (CCC, #1716–28).

The Feast of All Saints

“Saints are those who by their life and work make it clear and plain that God lives.”

—Nathan Söderblom

From its very beginning, the Church understood the Body of Christ to encompass all baptized persons, both the living and the dead. Christ’s kingdom transcends time and space; and not even death can sever the relationship that the faithful have in Christ. All are united in a mystical communion with Christ by virtue of baptism (1 Corinthians 6:11). The term saint was used by Paul to designate all baptized Christians (Romans 1:7; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1), even the unruly ones (1 Corinthians 1:2)!

The early Church especially honored martyrs, those who had died for their faith. Local churches kept a record of their own martyrs and each year celebrated their “birthdays,” the dates of death when they were “born” into eternal life. By the fourth century many parts of the Church had set a day of observance for their martyrs, their confessors (those who had been punished for their faith but did not die), and their virgins, all of those known by name and unknown. In the East this feast was, and still is, celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost. In the West it was celebrated during Eastertide, connecting the witness of the saints with the victory of Christ over death.

As the Western Church spread into northern Europe, it encountered pagan festivals held in late autumn to appease the evil spirits associated with the first killing frosts and the coming of winter, darkness and death. Echoes of such feasts survive in Halloween customs. The word Halloween is a contracted form for All Hallows’ (holy persons or saints) Evening.

To make a Christian response to the pagan festivals, the Church transferred the celebration of the saints to November 1 and called it the Feast of All Saints.

The World of the Bible

144,000 Saved

Although some Christian groups have taken this number as the actual count of those saved, it is evident both from the general way large numbers are used in the Bible and from what follows in the passage that this is a symbolic number.

For biblical persons who lacked our computers and sophisticated knowledge of mathematics, large numbers are almost always symbolic, the way we say a “million” or “zillion” for emphasis. In everyday life, counting to 144,000 of anything would have been a major chore for people then. The number merely means that an incredibly large number of Jews are saved.

But we must note that these 144,000 Jews are not all the saved because there is an additional “great multitude” of non-Jews “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,” so many in fact that they cannot even be counted!