Core Session
- Getting Started
- Gospel Story: God Loves Us Just As We Are
- Blowing Bubbles (bubble solution with wands, 1 per child)
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Mural Art: Sponge-Print Lily Mural (kitchen sponges, lily pattern)
- Mural Art: Construction Paper Lily Mural (lily pattern)
- Moving to Music: Swaying Lilies
- Game: Puzzles (photo images of flowers and birds)
- 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
- Using Poetry in Faith Formation
- The World of the Bible: Mammon

Scriptures
Isaiah 49:14-15
Psalm 62:2-3, 6-9
1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Matthew 6:24-34

Jesus invites his disciples to have complete trust in God for all their needs.
- There is no need for worry, in God each of us is complete, perfect just as we are.
- Preschool and Kindergarten children use images of flowers and birds to explore their God-given completeness.
- Children hear the message, “God loves us just the way we are.”

Question of the Week
What makes it hard to put God first in my life right now?
Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

If You’re Happy and You Show It
Invite children to sing this adaptation of the popular children’s rhyme, “If You’re Happy and You Know It.”

If you’re happy and you show it (name action).
If you’re happy and you show it (name action).
If you’re happy and you show it, Then, God will surely know it.
If you’re happy and you show it (name action).

Explain that God wants each of us to be happy, then introduce today’s story about God’s love.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

God Loves Us Just As We Are
Begin today’s story by talking about God’s love.

Today we’re going to talk about God. God loves things just the way they are. Let’s pretend to be the things God loves. Can you help me think of things God loves?

If necessary prompt the group with specifics, see below.

(birds)
Say, “Birds do what birds can do!
Let’s all do what birds do!”
Each child pretends to be a bird.
Response: Yes! God Loves Us!

(flowers)
Say, “Flowers do what flowers can do!
Let’s all do what flowers can do!”
Each child pretends to be a flower.
Response: Yes! God Loves Us!

Continue, naming different living things.
(dogs, cats, horses, pigs, chickens, giraffes, frogs, etc.)
Or name familiar persons or family members
(moms, dads, brothers, sisters, etc.)
Or name each child, inviting them to demonstrate a unique behavior.

(Justin)
Say, “Justin does what Justin can do!
Let’s all do what Justin can do!”
Each child imitates the named child.
Response: Yes! God Loves Us!

Continue until all children are named and celebrated!

Blowing Bubbles (15 minutes)

While the symbolism of bubbles floating away, “carefree and content—like the lilies of the field or the birds of the air—to be simply what they are” will be lost on preschool and kindergarten children, the delightful experience of blowing bubbles won’t be.

Bring to the session bottles of bubble solution with bubble wands (one per child.) Invite children to blow bubbles and watch how they move through the air, land on other objects or the ground, and then disappear with a pop! Continue as interest is maintained.

Praying Together

Gather children together in a circle. Pause for a moment of silence while the group gets ready to pray.

Teach children today’s prayer refrain:
◆ We are what God wants us to be.

Begin a prayer litany by saying:

Dear God, we know that you know us and love us just the way we are, and so we pray:

If we are flowers in the field...
Refrain
If we are birds in the air...
Refrain
If we are dogs and cats and horses and pigs...
Refrain
If we are children and families...
Refrain
If we are brothers and sisters...
Refrain
If we are mothers and fathers...
Refrain
If we are (name each child and group member).
Refrain
Thank you, God, for making each one of us.
Amen.
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)
In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find the adapted version of “If You’re Happy and You Know It” that was used in today’s Getting Started activity. Suggest to parents that they reinforce today’s themes by teaching and singing this song at home.

You’ll also find an activity to take the image of the lily from today’s gospel and use it as a way to help parents celebrate what is unique and special about their child.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
◆ “The Light of God” (p. 26 of the songbook)
◆ “Sun and Rain” (p. 32 in the songbook)

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

Mural Art (15 minutes)
Sponge-Print Lily Mural
Before the session make copies of the Lily template, attached to this document.

Also before the session prepare a mural-sized sheet of Kraft or butcher paper. If you are making sponge print lilies with craft paint, place the mural on a flat covered surface. If you are using construction paper lilies hang the mural on a wall surface at children’s eye level.

In the session, place a small amount of craft paint in shallow pans or sturdy paper plates. The goal is to simply create a layer of paint creating the sponge prints. Using the lily template as a pattern, cut several 4” x 6” household sponges into lily shapes. Invite children to carefully dip the sponge in the layer of paint, and then print the image on the butcher paper.

Together create a “field of lilies.”

Mural Art (15 minutes)
Construction Paper Lily Mural
Before the session make copies of the Lily Pattern, attached to this document.

Also before the session prepare a mural-sized sheet of Kraft or butcher paper. If you are making sponge print lilies with craft paint, place the mural on a flat covered surface. If you are using construction paper lilies hang the mural on a wall surface at children’s eye level.

In the session, use the lily pattern as a template for lilies made from construction paper. Choose bright colors and help each child make several construction paper lilies. Invite children to decorate and personalize their lilies using crayons, markers, colored pencils or other craft supplies.

For either option, you may want to name each lily for the child who created it, or include other names in the community of lilies represented by the finished product.

Moving to Music (15 minutes)
Swaying Lilies
This season has several pieces of peaceful and serene music. “Deep Peace,” “Sanya Seiran,” and the “Secret Place” all resonate with the contemplative tone of today’s gospel message. (Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Play excerpts from these tracks for the children in your group. Invite them to close their eyes and move their bodies with the music. You may have to demonstrate how. You can suggest that the movement you are doing is like the swaying of lilies in a field under a light breeze.

It may be most helpful to start with children sitting already on the floor, and in a state of relative calm already. You might try having one of these tracks playing as you get ready for this activity, then using a different track to inspire movement.

You might also choose to use other tracks or other sources of music that are more lively as a way to highlight the contrast between calm and “not calm.”
Game (5-10 minutes)

Puzzles

Before the session find or create full-page, full-color images of flowers or birds. The image can have one or many. This may be as easily done as finding small posters at a gift or card shop, using pictures cut from folio-sized magazines, or searching for images online and making color copies for your own use.

Bring to the session a selection of two or three such images mounted on sturdy card stock or poster board.

In the session, take a moment to invite children to notice details in each picture, or to tell a brief story based on the contents of the picture.

Then, cut each image into random puzzle pieces. These don’t have to look anything like traditional jigsaw pieces. Intersecting wavy line cuts are usually all that is required. For children this age, 8½” x 11” images should be cut into no more than 6 pieces—more for older children, less for younger children.

Mix the pieces of two or three puzzle images together and spread them on the floor. Invite children to work together to first sort the images into their respective puzzles, and then to complete each image.

Young Children and the Gospel

Today’s gospel is in one sense a reminder to us to trust that God has created us exactly as God wants us to be and that we exist within God’s creation exactly as God wants us to exist. Our job is simply to reveal to the world who that is and to participate in the world accordingly.

Children this age are just at the very front end of discovering who they are and what they have to offer. Part of who God may want us to be is agents of nurture for these emerging “lilies” as they grow in the “field” of our Christian education ministry.

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 child-friendly version of the story told in today’s Core Session—God Loves Us Just as We Are.
  — A Lily Pattern template for use in today’s Art and Craft activity.
  — A helpful article for catechists on different Learning Styles.
  — A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.

◆ Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  — Information on Winter-A’s Models of the Faith.
  — A printable article further exploring the Psalms, titled The Sung Praise of Israel.
  — A printable article with more information about Paul’s Corinthian Letters.
  — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings encourage us to place our trust completely and unreservedly in God. Isaiah reminds the people of God’s continuing faithfulness and compassion. Paul urges the Corinthians to treat their leaders as trustworthy stewards of God’s mysteries. In the gospel, Jesus encourages us to put our whole trust in the God who lovingly cares for all creatures.

Isaiah 49:8-16a
In this passage, Isaiah reminds the exiles that God’s covenant fidelity continues to be extended to them as it always has been. Despite their fears that they have been forgotten and abandoned by God because of the exile, Isaiah reminds them that God’s love for them is like a mother’s love for her child.

Isaiah then argues from the lesser instance to the greater, that is, since no earthly mother could forget the child that she has given birth to, so likewise God could never forget the people of the covenant.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5
In this passage, Paul summarizes his argument about how the Corinthian community should forsake its divisions and adopt a right attitude toward their leaders like Paul, Apollos and the others around whom the Corinthian factions formed. Christian leaders are to be recognized as “servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries” (v. 1).

These two descriptions reveal the necessary dedication and orientation that the community leaders must have. Servants are “owned” by their master and only do whatever the master wants, not their own thing. Stewards work to care for their master’s interests rather than their own. Paul believes that if the community adopts this attitude toward their leaders, then they will give up the judgments that have led to divisions.

Matthew 6:24-34
In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the issues of care and anxiety, noting that they cannot be eliminated by depending on amassing material wealth. Food and clothing are necessary, but they cannot become something that we trust in (the root of the word *mammon*). Rather, we must be willing to trust ourselves and our lives to God, whom we know is as concerned for us as God is for the birds and the flowers to which God has devoted so much care.

Reflection

Today’s readings hit us where it hurts. In our rich, consumer-driven culture we are encouraged to make commodity, “stuff” (perhaps a modern translation of *mammon*) into our God. We are bombarded by ads that try to convince us that the things we buy, the things we use and depend on will eliminate our fear and anxiety, make us feel better, and make us younger and happier. Our lives and well-being depend on our giving ourselves completely to the God of consumerism.

For persons of faith, however, this is another instance of the age old challenge of the first commandment. Perhaps this is why it is first. If we cannot trust, if we cannot put God into the first place in our lives and the lives of our communities, then keeping the rest of the commandments is worthless.

Jesus’ advice about trusting in God, however, does not make it any easier. We do worry about food and clothing, about how we are going to have enough to make it through our family’s tough times. It is one thing to look at the birds who don’t work and the flowers that are colorfully outfitted, and another to face the hunger and homelessness, the fear and anxiety that we confront daily.

Perhaps the real nub is trusting that God does love us at least as much as the creatures we often consider less significant than ourselves. Maybe what stands in our way is “knowing our place,” a genuine humility that recognizes that the loving hand of God is indeed guiding us through times when we don’t think we get enough of God’s blessings.

And just maybe too, if we expended as much effort on caring for others as God does instead of always looking out for ourselves first, then we would recognize and experience God’s blessings in a much richer way.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Faith means not only affirming doctrines as true, but more importantly trusting in God (*CCC*, #2115, 2547, 2830) and entrusting ourselves to God’s loving providence and care (*CCC*, #302–314). This fundamental trust is not always easy, and requires a constant reorientation of our selves to serve and worship God rather than anything else (*CCC*, #2729).
Using Poetry in Faith Formation

One word recurs throughout the Bible: Remember. Memory is central to the core of our faith, because it reminds us of the saving deeds God has done for God’s people throughout history, and does now for us, in the present.

The Jews told and retold the story of their exodus from Egypt because it reminded them they were a graced and saved people, freed from slavery. So too Christians draw their identity from the “dangerous memories” of Jesus.

We are the people we are because of the person he was. The template of his life is placed over ours. The worst kind of amnesia is forgetting how God first loved us (1 John 4:10).

Often in the immediacy of an experience, we fail to understand its full meaning. But when we reflect back on it later, we notice things we’d missed, and appreciate a fuller depth. So too, poets look back on an experience to better understand what it originally contained. Their fresh seeing of created beauty or human nature helps us see again, and stirs us to praise or prayer. The gift of poetry, writes Murray Bodo in Poetry as Prayer, is to “connect us with nature and art, with one another, with God.”

Furthermore, poetry offers a fresh vision of our world, without which we might lose hope. Its images of harmony replacing violence inspire us to change. Like a wise prophet, a poet never forces improvement; rather, he or she makes it too enticing to resist.

For instance, in her poem “Agnus Dei,” Denise Levertov paints such an appealing portrait of God as weak, damp and shivering, we long to hold the poor lamb to our hearts for warmth and protection. If we want to do that for the God we cannot see, poetry must then inspire us to tenderness for the persons we can see.

We who live in a world super-saturated with media hype must be re-sensitized to the small beauties and poignancies poetry expresses. David Whyte writes:

without poetry
it’s so easy to lie
day after day
about unbelievable
and unspoken truths.
Without poetry, we might miss our intimate connections to the rest of humanity.

Czeslaw Milosz writes in “Ars Poetica”:

The purpose of poetry is to remind us how difficult it is to remain just one person, for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors, and invisible guests come in and out at will.

If we think we’re simply one individual, bravely forging a lonely path through life, poetry reminds us how we are connected to each other.

Poetry makes us part of a grand, creative adventure. The novelist Erin McGraw writes in The Baby Tree: “People were all connected, lifting one another up or tearing down. Everybody doing one or the other. The whole universe was being created and destroyed at the same time, every minute. Once I started to see that, I wanted to be one who lifted.”

The World of the Bible

Mammon

Mammon (Greek, mammonas) is a term that was used to describe earthly good, especially excessive materialism, greed, avarice and unjust worldly gain. Etymologically, the word is assumed to derive from an Aramaic noun that means something like “that in which one trusts” and is also translated in Jewish writings as “resources, gain, compensation” and even “bribe.”

Thus Jesus stresses that when people put their trust in mammon (Luke 12:15) or give their hearts to it (Matthew 6:21), it is impossible to dedicate themselves to God, to whom according to the first commandment, they owe their complete loyalty, obedience and worship.

To make the challenge of this tension of loyalties clearer, Matthew personifies Mammon in today’s gospel as a false God that commands our loyalty, worship and service. Thus Jesus drives home his point of the sixth beatitude that his disciples must be characterized by an “undivided (pure) heart” in order to be blessed and see God (Matthew 5:8).