Abide and Obey

In and through Jesus we have life.

- Jesus calls himself the true vine and the bread of life.
- The emphasis of both of today’s gospels is on the presence of Jesus with his friends.
- In today’s session, children explore this central gospel image through sensory explorations, discussion and making their own “matching” game.

Question of the Week
When do you feel close to Jesus? to God?

Core Session
- Getting Started (raisins)
- Gospel Story: Vine and Branches (optional: vining plant)
- Friendship Talk: Vines and Branches (optional: pictures of friends in books or magazines)
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Welcome the Good News
- Singing Together
- Make-a-Game: Person Link (box or paper bag, roll of butcher or shelf paper, scraps of paper and fabric)
- Info: Multiple Intelligences
- Info: 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
- Praying with Music
- The World of the Bible: Hellenists

Scripture
John 15:1-8
Getting Started (10-15 minutes)

Children eat fruit that grows from a vine.

Share raisins with the children. Ask:
◆ What do we call this fruit?
◆ What do we know about how this fruit grows?

As necessary, explain that grapes grow on a thick, green vine. The vine puts out many branches; the branches can bear fruit in bunches. Raisins are made by drying the grapes until they are shriveled and sweet.

Close by saying:
◆ Listen for the grapes and vine in today’s story.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Vine and Branches

Story Focus: A real vine would make an ideal visual focus for today’s story.

A vine grows from the ground in spring. The sun shines on the vine. Rain waters the ground around the vine. A gardener takes care of the vine.

The vine grows tall and green. Branches grow from the vine, thick and sturdy. Flowers grow on the branches, and then sweet fruit.

The gardener is glad to see the sweet fruit grow on the branches of the vine.

Jesus says, “I am like the vine. I have many friends who stay as close to me as branches are to a vine.”

Jesus says, “You are like branches, my friends. You need to stay close to one another and to me so you can have good things in your life, like the good fruit that grows on a branch.”

Jesus says, “God is like a gardener. God takes care of me and of all the friends who stay close to me.”

Jesus says, “I love you just as God loves me. Stay close to one another. Stay close to me. Stay close to God.”

Friendship Talk (5-15 minutes)

Vines and Branches

Then show children Malcah Zeldis’ painting A Peaceable Kingdom with Anna Pavlova, attached to this document. This vibrant poster shows diverse figures gathered in a parklike setting. Ask:
◆ Do you think the people in these pictures are friends? Why or why not?

Say:
◆ In today’s story, Jesus calls us friends. Who are some of the friends we have?
◆ What do we like about our friends?
◆ What do we like to do with our friends?
◆ How can we have good times with our friends?
◆ What do we like about Jesus?
◆ What do we like to do with Jesus?
◆ How can we have good times with Jesus?

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Sit with the children in a circle. Say:
◆ Jesus promises he is with us, even though we cannot see him.
◆ Jesus asks us to stay close to him and to one another.
◆ Praying is one way we can stay close to Jesus and to one another.
◆ Let’s pray together to Jesus.
  — You can pray to Jesus by listening quietly for Jesus’ voice.
  — You can pray to Jesus by saying his name aloud or silently.
  — You can pray to Jesus by saying whatever you want to Jesus, aloud or silently.
  — You don’t have to pray unless you want to.

Pray in one of the ways listed; allow 1 minute for the children’s prayers. Then invite children to conclude today’s prayer with the Easter greeting:

Greeter: Alleluia! Jesus is risen!
Children: Jesus is risen! Alleluia!

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.
Welcome the Good News (10-15 minutes)
On page 1 of today's Welcome the Good News, you'll find a discussion starter about the people we love.

We extend the gospel theme on page 2 by inviting children to imagine love letters to and from God. Children will also find a With Your Family activity they can lead at home or practice in the group.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
- “Just Imagine” (p. 38 in the songbook)
- “God’s Alive” (p. 40 in the songbook; also available as an MP3)
- “Jesus Says to Us” (p. 46 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)

(Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News to access both the songbook and the MP3s.)

Make-a-Game (15-40 minutes)
Person Link
Activity Soundtrack: Play “I Am the True Vine.” (Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.) Arvo Pärt developed his modern sacred music after long study of medieval chant styles. The result is a purity of tone and rhythm that has been likened to the ringing of bells. Here the music embodies the gospel text from John in which Jesus calls himself the true vine.

Children make game pieces and then play together a friendship game. If time grows short you can make the pieces this week and play the game next week.

Directions to the children:
- Cut four to six people shapes from construction paper. The people should have extended hands. (Children can do this freestyle or with the pattern attached to this document.)
- Use scraps of paper, fabric and trim to make features, hair and clothing for each person. You can also use felt pens or crayons to add detail to the paper people.
- Decorate each person in a distinctive way. Try making people of different ages or cultures.

Explain that each paper person will “hold” two game symbols, one symbol in each hand. The symbols should be of distinct shapes and colors; for example:
- a green leaf
- a purple grape
- an orange flower
- a yellow sun

Continue:
- Draw and cut these symbols from more construction paper.
- Glue one symbol to each hand of a paper person.
- Make sure each paper person has two different symbols.

Children play the game by matching symbols to make a row of paper people with hands linked together. Tape or tack a length of butcher paper, newsprint or shelf paper to a wall or other playing surface. The paper should be long enough to hold all the paper dolls in a row. (Allow approximately 1’ for every four paper people.)

Game directions:
- Put all the paper people into a box or bag.
- Each player draws three paper people.
- The first player tacks one paper person to the shelf paper.
- The next player tacks a paper person to the shelf paper so that the two hands of the paper people touch. Only hands with the same symbol can touch.
- If a player has no paper person with the right matching symbol, he or she can draw one more paper person from the box or bag.
- If a player has run out of paper people, he or she can draw one more paper person from the box or bag.
- Continue play until all the paper people are standing in a row.

Because the children chose symbols at random, you may end up with several paper people that cannot be tacked up because the symbols do not match. If so, issue this challenge to the children:
- What other paper people could we make so that all the paper people can be tacked up?
Let children test their ideas by making these extra paper people. Continue until all the paper people are tacked in a single chain on the paper.

As their Bible Skills Activity, third graders can letter a verse from today’s gospel onto the finished game board. Help children find John 15:4-5. Ask children to follow along as you read the verses aloud. Invite children to choose words from these verses to letter onto the sheet of paper people.

Multiple Intelligences

One of the best ways to create and present engaging and meaningful sessions—for children of all ages—is to pay attention to what Howard Gardner calls the “multiple intelligences” each child and each group brings with them into your session room.

We suggest the following books as references to Gardner’s ideas and how they apply specifically to religious education:


Children and the Gospel

In today’s gospel, Jesus uses the metaphor of a gardener and vine to assert the unity of God, Jesus and the Church.

In today’s session, we teach that Jesus invites us to stay close to God, close to Jesus and close to one another.

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 shareable story script of today’s Gospel Story: Vine and Branches.
  - A Paper Doll Pattern for use in today’s Make-a-Game activity.
  - An optional, on-going activity exploring the Eucharist.
  - An optional activity titled Catholic Basics.
  - Zeldis’s A Peaceable Kingdom with Anna Pavlova, to be used in today’s Friendship Talk.
  - This week’s At Home with the Good News, to distribute or email to group members after the session.

- Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  - Information on Spring-B’s Models of the Faith.
  - For catechists and/or families, an article titled The Gospel According to John.
  - For catechists and/or families, an article titled The Passover: Old and New.
More about Today Scriptures

Today’s readings reveal what it means to live in and through Jesus. Paul boldly witnesses to his new-found faith in Christ, while the Church experiences peaceful growth. The author of 1 John reveals that true faith becomes visible through the obedience of active love. Jesus explains that, like branches connected to a vine, we abide with him and experience great fruitfulness.

Acts 9:26-31

Luke tells of Saul’s experiences in the months following his conversion. Because of Saul’s earlier zealous and cruel persecution of the disciples, the believers suspected him of deception and entrapment. Barnabas, a member of the Christian community, trusted Saul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus and introduced Saul to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

In verse 31, Luke briefly reports on the steady growth of the Church, which enjoyed a respite from persecution since Saul had become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:18-24

This passage discusses the marks of the life of God’s children, the life of love. This love is the sign that Christians have passed from death to life because they embody what is God’s essential quality.

True love for one another is manifested in action, modeled upon the experience of Jesus’ love for us. It is shown forth as self-sacrifice, both at the heroic level and in the daily exercise of generosity. Deeds, not devout protestations or guilty feelings, reveal our true standing before God, who knows us better than we know ourselves.

Through Jesus we have “boldness before God” (v. 21). When our hearts are aligned with Jesus’ heart and we keep his commandments, God gives us what we need. The word translated boldness (Greek, parrásia) is related to the right of a Greek citizen to speak freely before the assembly. In God’s presence we can be bold and confident because we are assured of God’s love for us. Thus John joins together both faith and works, belief and obedience, union with God and love of others.

John 15:1-8

Chapter 15, the discourse on the vine and the branches, contains the last of the great “I am” discourses in the Gospel of John. These discourses parallel in function the synoptic gospels’ parables of the kingdom.

For John, Christian life is an active and committed life. There cannot be a living, unproductive branch. Those who do not remain, or abide, are taken away. Those who do abide through prayer bear fruit and show themselves as Jesus’ disciples.

Reflection

To stroll through a peach orchard in August reveals what Jesus describes in today’s gospel. The fragrance, the colors of sunset on the round globes, the sense of abundance, finally the taste: sweet juices oozing from mouth to elbows. It’s so sensual it’s not seemly in church—let alone the Bible!

Jesus has no delusions about our worth, even our best efforts: “apart from me you can do nothing” (15:5). Deep down, we suspect we need help; Jesus confirms that intuition. But he can make us as fruitful as Anne Porter describes in “Another Sarah”:

A wave of living sweetness
A nation of white petals
A dynasty of apples.

Or peaches. Hidden in the wonderful, organic vine-and-branches metaphor is a caution: don’t get detached from the vine. We can be so caught up in our charitable works, our marvelous endeavors or our efforts to save the world, we overlook the source of our energy. Since we are speaking metaphorically anyway, another poet (Denise Levertov) reminds us—the branches—how to stay connected with the vine:

“John teaches how we live in Christ and Christ lives in us. Just as the trunk of the vine gives its natural properties to each of the branches, so, by bestowing the Holy Spirit, Christ gives Christians a certain kinship with himself.”

—St. Cyril of Alexandria

—St. Cyril of Alexandria
so would I learn to attain freefall, and float into Creator Spirit’s deep embrace, knowing no effort earns that all-surrounding grace.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today we recall that our discipleship is characterized by love. Love describes our attempt to respond fully to God with our life (CCC, #1812–13, 1822–29, 2093–94). Through being joined by baptism into the Christian community, we are bonded in love with Jesus and his life courses through us. Jesus is the vine; we are the branches that share his life. To share this life is what holiness is all about. As Christians we are called to holiness, which means living out our loving relationship with God (CCC, #825, 2012–16, 2028–29).

Praying with Music

Music is the connecting point to a thousand memories and emotions. We associate music with the places we have been, the times we have experienced and the people in our lives.

Music is all around us. There is no denying the effectiveness of music, so why not use it to affect our emotions and enhance our personal environment when we pray? Do we ever think about how music can help us to grow closer to God, or even if music can be a form of prayer?

Resonances in Our Soul

Music affects our whole person—mind and body, spirit and emotion. It moves us by going straight to our heart. When music and song come through our ears into our hearts, they set up a kind of vibration or resonance that can give us pleasure, set us on edge, calm our aching and anxious hearts, or set our toes to tapping. Music can touch people profoundly on levels that words alone cannot. So why not use music to shape our spirituality?

Let us make music the basis of our prayer by listening to it, singing along with it, using it as starting point for praise, thanks, lament, etc. as the ancient biblical authors did in the psalms. There is no question that it can help us to shape our environment effectively and can be changed to suit or influence the moods of our lives—sadness, joy, consolation, gratitude, celebration, etc.—through its beauty, harmony, shared community with others when we join our voices to theirs in song.

Instrumental Music

We need different types of music for various times and styles of prayer. Sometimes we need peaceful music just to sit and relax in the stillness of God’s presence and to help focus on Jesus and wait on him without getting distracted by all the things of this world. Worship music can help, but often there are so many words or catchy melodies that distract us when we are trying to be in God’s presence.

Hymns or Songs

Most sacred songs and hymns were not written to be background music but to be sung aloud with others. Sacred music is not just an addition that frames the liturgy and makes it more pleasing, but an important means of active participation in worship whether at home or at church.

The community dimension of singing is important because it connects the group into a unified, worshipping assembly—one voice lifted in song to the Lord. As you use music for your personal, household or small group prayer, let the music take you to the One to whom you are singing. Remember the words of St. Augustine, “One who sings, prays twice.”

The World of the Bible

Hellenists

Hellenists (derived from the Greek word for Greece, Hellas) were those persons from other nations who spoke Greek and were more receptive to the influence of Greek customs and culture.

Though the Romans ruled the Mediterranean nations, Greek literature and ideas formed the basis for education, and the Greek language was used for international communication and business. Thus to be educated often meant to be able to speak and read Greek (like St. Paul and the other New Testament authors who all wrote in Greek).

For Jews, Hellenism posed a threat because its education was rooted in religious beliefs and social values that were not compatible with the Jewish belief that Yahweh was the one and only God (monotheism).