**Zeal for God’s Law**

Our commitment is revealed in our passion for God and God’s people.

- In the Old Testament reading, Moses brings God’s way of life to God’s people, in the Ten Commandments.
- The commandments are addressed to adults, but we introduce children to their own heritage of a community founded on God’s own justice and holiness.
- In today’s session we explore the commandments through games, art and creative writing.

**Question of the Week**
How does today’s story tell us about what is important to people? to God?”

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**Core Session**
- Getting Started
- Old Testament Story: God’s Ten Rules
- Praying Together

**Enrichment**
- Welcome the Good News
- Singing Together
- Story-Review Game: Pass the Ball *(balls, beanbags)*
- Story-Review Game: Commandment Hopscotch *(stones, carpet squares)*
- Art: Planet X, Planet Y *(dinner plate)*
- Info: Children and the Lectionary
- Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

**Helps for Catechists**
- More about Today’s Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- Liturgy Link: Spirituality of Prayer
- The World of the Bible: Money Changers
 Getting Started (10-15 minutes)
Children listen to and recite traditional number-based folklore.

As children arrive, invite them to recall other rhymes and songs based on numbers. You will find a handout of a popular counting song and rhyme attached to this document.

Encourage children to add other counting songs or rhymes. Then say:
◆ Once God gave Ten Commandments—10 rules or laws—to God’s people.

 Old Testament Story (5-10 minutes)
God’s Ten Rules

Story Focus: Use a board or sheet of newprint to tell today’s story.

God said to God’s people, “I am your God. You are my people. I want you to love me. (Draw a vertical line dividing the board or newprint in half. On the left-hand side write the title Love God.) These rules will help you love me:
— (Write the numeral 1.) “You have only one God. Don’t call anything around you God.
— (Write the numeral 2) “Don’t use God’s name the wrong way.
— (Write the numeral 3) “Make time for God.”

Then God said to God’s people, “I want you to love your neighbors, too. (On the right-hand side of the board or newprint write the title Love Your Neighbors) These rules will help you love your neighbors:
— (Write the numeral 4.) “Be good to your father and mother.
— (Write the numeral 5.) “Don’t kill people.
— (Write the numeral 6.) “Love your own husbands and wives.
— (Write the numeral 7.) “Don’t steal.
— (Write the numeral 8.) “Don’t lie.
— (Write numeral 9.) “Love your wife and family.
— (Write numeral 10.) “Don’t be jealous of other people or of what they have.”

How many rules did God give God’s people? Ten! Ten rules for God’s people!

 After the Story
Repeat the story, writing each rule next to its appropriate numeral. Invite children to add stick-figure pictures that illustrate each of God’s Ten Commandments. Leave the list in plain sight for the Story-Review Games found on page 3. Play as many of them now as time allows.

 Praying Together (5 minutes)
Remind children that we are in Lent, a time of deeper prayer. Explain:
◆ One way we can pray is to use the Bible.
◆ When we use the Bible to pray, we can find words we like to hear.
◆ We can read these words to ourselves.
◆ We can think about these words, talk to God about these words or just listen to the words quietly.

Distribute Bibles. Help children find 1 John 4:7. Invite the children to follow along in their Bibles as you read the verse aloud.

Explain:
◆ Now we will use this verse in prayer.
◆ For 1 minute, you can use this verse the way you like. You can read the words to yourself or aloud. You can think about the words, talk to God about the words or just listen to the words quietly.

Model this biblical prayer yourself for 1 minute. Then pray:
◆ Thank you, God, for the words in your Bible. Thank you for being with us as we listen to these words, think about these words and pray these words. 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.
Welcome the Good News (10-15 minutes)
On page 1 of today’s Welcome the Good News, children will find a brief version of today’s story. Invite them to work together to tell the story in three lines instead of four.

On page 2, children will find Welcome God’s Word, a scripture skills activity they can complete together. 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:
- “God Makes Promises” (p. 28 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)
- “Friends with God” (p. 32 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)

Story-Review Game (10-25 minutes)
Pass the Ball
Children review the Ten Commandments with a circle game.

Sit with the children in a circle. Play music or clap as the children pass a ball or beanbag around the circle.

Stop the music or clapping. Ask the child holding the ball or beanbag to say the first commandment.

Continue play, asking the second child to say the second commandment, and so on.

Encourage children to help one another as necessary. Continue play until all Ten Commandments have been recalled.

Story-Review Game (10-25 minutes)
Commandment Hopscotch
Children play story-review hopscotch.

If you live in a part of the country where weather is warm, take the children outside to play. Draw a traditional hopscotch game in the dirt or in chalk on the sidewalk. (Make one game for every four to six children.)

If the weather is cold, set up a hopscotch game indoors. The best way to do this is to lay one out with carpet squares. Use masking tape to make a number on each square.

If no carpet squares are available, use masking tape to make both squares and numbers. Again, make one game for every four to six children.

Give each child a stone or beanbag for his or her marker. Directions:
- A child throws a marker into one of the numbered squares.
- The child says the commandment that goes with the number in the square. For example, number three would be: Keep one day holy. (Give plenty of help, especially to younger children. Encourage children to help one another, too.)
- The child hops to the end of the game and back, being careful to hop on one foot in the single squares, land on both feet in the double squares and hop over the square that holds his or her marker.
- Each child can continue play until he or she has named all 10 commandments. (Children can also work together as a team to achieve this goal.)
Art (10-20 minutes)

Planet X, Planet Y

Activity Soundtrack: Play John L. Bell’s “The Summons.” (Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.) This contemporary hymn asks us, as God asked Moses and God’s people:

Will you come and follow me,  
If I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don’t know  
And never be the same?

Children draw pictures comparing two imaginary planets. On one planet, people never follow rules. On the other planet, people always obey God’s rules.

Trace around the dinner plate twice to make two large circles on the poster board. Label one circle Planet X and the other circle Planet Y. Set the poster board on a work surface.

Say:
◆ Greetings, crew. You have been chosen to fly into outer space to explore two planets.
◆ On Planet X, people never follow rules.
◆ On Planet Y, people always obey God’s rules.
◆ Your job is to record what life is like on each planet.

Invite children to fill in the circles with words or pictures describing life on each planet. Children can complete the poster by surrounding the two planets with stars, moons, comets, etc.

Discuss:
◆ What do you think life would be like on this planet if people never followed rules?
◆ What do you think life would be like on this planet if people always followed God’s rules?

Children and the Lectionary

In Lent, we explore several Old Testament stories especially appropriate, both to the season and to the interests of children.

Today’s session for the 3rd Sunday of Lent introduces children to the story of the Ten Commandments.

These commandments were adult commandments given to adult listeners. For example, the admonition to honor parents was not aimed at small children, to encourage obedience, but at adult children, to encourage their taking responsibility for the economic support of their aging parents. This is a crucial distinction for some children, who do not live in healthy family situations. We cannot always know who these children are, but we compound their difficulties if we give an easy misinterpretation to scripture by insisting that children must always obey their parents.

The study of the Ten Commandments is an appropriate one for primaries, who generally understand that laws help insure fairness. Primary children also enjoy playing with lists and numbers.


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.
  — This week’s Bible Skills for Third Graders activity.
  — An alternative activity titled Craft: Read to Write.
  — The words to a traditional counting rhyme and a traditional counting song for use in today’s session titled Song and Rhyme.
  — An optional activity titled Catholic Basics.
  — 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 Season of Lent.
  — For catechists and/or families, an article titled Covenants.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings invite renewed commitment to our covenant relationship with God. In Exodus, the Ten Commandments become the standard of life for God’s people. Paul assures the Corinthians that their commitment to Christ, though foolish to the world, is the powerful core of Christian faith. In today’s gospel, Jesus’ passionate love for God ignites his anger against those who treat God’s house with disrespect.

Exodus 20:1-17

The Ten Commandments set forth the duties of the Israelites to God and to those within the community. The commandments formalize the covenant demands based on their special relationship to God.

“One is eaten up with zeal for God’s house who desires to correct all that he or she sees wrong there. And if it cannot be corrected, one endures and mourns. Let the zeal for God’s house consume every Christian wherever he or she is a member.” —St. Augustine of Hippo

physical representations of Yahweh, confirmed by the absence of such artifacts in excavations of Israelite sites even when idols of other gods are found.

Verse 7 is not a prohibition against God’s name in oaths, but against swearing falsely or misusing God’s name for spells and incantations. This led eventually to a refusal among pious Jews to pronounce the sacred name of Yahweh at all.

Verse 12 is directed more toward the responsibilities of grown children for the support of and respect for aged parents than toward the behavior of young children.

Verse 13 prohibits murder, not capital punishment or warfare. “Covet” (v. 17) probably implies an attempt to acquire unlawfully (“defraud,” Mark 10:19).

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Paul sets forth the general principle that the wisdom of God appears to be folly to those wise in worldly terms, while to those in the process of salvation, it reveals the power of God. So human-centered wisdom, which is itself closely related to our efforts, will be overturned by God.

Knowledge of God is possible through natural revelation, but the certainty sought for by submitting God to the world’s criteria of proof, either pragmatically in “signs” (v. 22) of power or intellectually in “wisdom” (v. 22) is not possible. God’s act of “foolishness” and “weakness” (v. 25) confounds both what the Jews expected of the Messiah and what Greeks believed about the immortal and impassible nature of divinity.

This principle of reversal is illustrated by the Corinthian community itself. Most of its members were not from the intellectual, political or social elite. (Indeed, the gospel appealed to slaves, women and children!) God chooses what the world counts worthless to overturn the world’s expectations.

John 2:13-25

Today’s reading recounts Jesus’ disruption of the daily business of the temple and the questioning of his authority. Jesus gives an enacted parable similar to the prophetic deeds of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Merchants had set up shop in the temple’s outer courts, the only area open to Gentiles who came to pray and seek Israel’s God. In the temple courtyard, unblemished animals were sold for sacrifice and pagan coins were exchanged for Jewish coinage to pay the temple tax. Jesus attacks not only the dishonesty of the temple trade but its very existence.

Jesus’ death and resurrection are the ultimate sign of his authority. As the water of the old covenant has been replaced with the wine of the new (2:1-11), so Jesus replaces the temple as the primary focus of worship.

Reflection

Those who like their Jesus sweet and pious better skip today’s gospel. Those who want to explore his complex depths should read on.

The scene in the temple can’t be camouflaged by platitudes: it is violent and chaotic. What prompted Jesus to act so dramatically? We have a clue in the way “my Father’s house” is used throughout John’s gospel. “In my Father’s house are many rooms” we read in 14:2. That sounds spacious, but there is no room for greed, betrayal or sacrilege. The money changers and merchants have desecrated what is most precious to God; they must be expelled quickly and efficiently.
In Jesus’ ensuing discussion with the Jews, their pride is attacked. Any of us who spent decades on a project might react the same way. As is often the case, they remain on a literal level, seeing the temple as a building. Jesus, however, sees it as an image of the self: beloved of God and incorruptible, transcending the most glorious edifice. As he protected sacred ground, so he fights to preserve God’s children from any who oppress, exploit or harm them. Do we respect each other or ourselves as much as he does?

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today we are reminded that our covenant relationship with God entails obligations for us and for God. Our obligations are the Ten Commandments that God directly spoke to Moses on Sinai (CCC, #2052–82), which still serve as our fundamental guide to moral behavior. When our human practices deviate from these norms, we must be willing to reexamine our lives and change them (CCC, #1430–39) to be more in keeping with these guidelines (CCC, #1145–62, 2655).

Liturgy Link

Spirituality of Prayer

Western culture tends to undercut the Jewish understanding of human nature, which advocates the wholeness of human beings. Enduring remnants of Gnostic beliefs divide human nature into separate spiritual and physical aspects. The body, being physical and tied to the material world, has no value in itself and may be inextricably linked to evil. The spirit thus needs to be set free from the body through knowledge.

Though the Christian faith repudiated these early Gnostic teachings, western Christians still struggle with the idea that the body, with all its desires and needs, is a burden to our spiritual life instead of an asset to it. We still succumb to attitudes that suggest that prayer is a matter of the mind, or at least the heart, and that the body has no role in prayer. We still think of spirituality as excluding the body instead of seeing spirituality as the whole life of the person—body, mind, spirit; relationships, exercise, nutrition, education—in relationship to God.

When the four gospels portray Jesus at prayer, they emphasize that prayer defines his relationship with his heavenly Father. While we can identify set times for prayer—early mornings, late nights, synagogue worship—Jesus tells us something of his life and devotion and prayer saying, “I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak… I speak just as the Father has told me… The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 12:49-50, 14:10).

Jesus prays continuously. His private, personal prayers are built on his experiences of Jewish corporate prayers, which issue from scripture, and lead into a lifetime of intimate connectedness with God. For us, too, prayer must become a foundation for our lives. We incorporate our experiences into our prayer, and we incorporate prayer into every part of life.

As our relationship with God deepens, we find we can pray when we are making beds, driving to the office, sitting through an important business meeting or shopping for groceries. As Blessed Pope John XXIII reminded us, “Prayer is the raising of the mind to God. We must always remember this. The actual words matter less.” And St. Elizabeth Seton recommended that “We must pray without ceasing, in every occurrence and employment of our lives—that prayer which is rather a habit of lifting up the heart to God as in a constant communication.”

The World of the Bible

Money Changers

The Jerusalem Temple was not merely a place of worship but also a market where sacrificial animals were sold and a bank where the state treasury was kept (recall the widow who is contributing to the treasury in Mark 12:41-44).

Jews throughout the world were obligated to pay a special tax each year to provide for the upkeep of the Temple. But since Roman and Greek coins were stamped with images of their gods and emperors, these coins could not be used to pay the temple tax. Thus money changers congregated in the outer court of the Temple and exchanged these pagan coins for Jewish coins that could be used for Temple business.