Jesus reaches out to people in healing, and inward to God in prayer.

- In today's gospel Jesus generously pours out his healing power, but also takes time away from the crowds to be with God in prayer.
- Children deepen their friendship with Jesus by learning from his teaching, seeking his healing and drawing closer to him in prayer.
- In today's session we offer stories and activities that explore Jesus' roles as a teacher, healer and person of prayer.

Question of the Week
What is my favorite way to pray? Why?

Core Session
- Getting Started (optional: pictures of people praying)
- Gospel Story: Jesus and God's People
- All about Jesus Skits (optional: simple costumes)
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Welcome the Good News
- Singing Together
- Art
- Jesus Among Us: Stories
- Portraits of Jesus (self-hardening clay, aprons or smocks; optional: popsicle sticks, rolling pins, chopsticks or dowels, plastic cutlery)
- Bible Skills for Third Graders
- Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
- More about Today's Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- Our Catholic Heritage: What Response Does Jesus Require? and What Are the Commandments Taught by Christ?
- The World of the Bible: Jesus' Signs and Wonders
**Getting Started** (5-10 minutes)

Invite children to talk about prayer. Show pictures of people praying—including the communal prayer of our shared worship—or invite volunteers to use their bodies to make “statues” of people praying. Ask:
- What’s this person (or what are these people) doing?
- Do we ever do this? When?

Encourage children to create stories about the pictures. Some may supply words they use during prayer. If you don’t have pictures, invite them to act out different ways of praying together as a group, for example:
- saying “thank you” before sharing a snack
- asking “God bless” for our family at bedtime
- praying together in a church worship service

Close by saying:
- Many people pray, including moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas and children.
- Listen to find out who prays in today’s story.

**Gospel Story** (5-10 minutes)

**Jesus and God’s People**

For a more comprehensive version, read aloud Mark 1:29-39 from the Bible as children follow along.

Jesus teaches God’s people. He walks from town to town saying, “Good news! God loves you!”

The people say, “Oh, Jesus, please tell us that good news all day long!”

“I will,” says Jesus. “I love to talk, but that’s not all I’m going to do…”

Jesus heals God’s people—all the sick, sad, broken, lonely, hurting people. Jesus makes them well.

The people say, “Oh, Jesus, please heal us all day long!”

“I will,” says Jesus.

And then Jesus climbs a mountain, very early in the morning, all by himself, to pray.

The people wonder, “Jesus, why’re you praying? We want you to teach us. We want you to heal us.”

“I need time to be alone with God,” says Jesus.

“I need time to pray.”

After the story, discuss:
- How important to Jesus was teaching? How do we know?
- How important to Jesus was healing? How do we know?
- How important to Jesus was being alone with God to pray? How do we know?

**All about Jesus Skits** (10-20 minutes)

Divide children into pairs or trios. Each group invents a skit showing Jesus doing one of these things:
- teaching
- healing
- praying

Allow plenty of time to experiment with stories and roles. At this age, children benefit more from creating skits than from reenacting them. Unless they want to perform their skits for one another, let them simply enjoy the act of creating them together.

Move from group to group as they work. Watch with attention and appreciation, dialoging, for example:
- You’ve given me something to think about. I wonder if Jesus got tired of teaching and healing?
- Watching you act is like watching Jesus alive today.

If desired, use the Pageant Costumes poster attached to this document, to create simple costumes for the skits.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Gather in a circle. Explain:
- Sometimes we pray with words we’ve heard from others.
- Sometimes we pray as if we’re talking to a friend.
- Sometimes we pray by sitting quietly and listening.
- Let’s pray together silently, sitting still for a minute or two. (*Set an example of comfortable stillness.*)

Close your eyes and pray to Jesus. You can use any words you like. You can talk to Jesus as to a friend or just say the name Jesus to yourself. (*Pray quietly for about 1-2 minutes.*)

You might end the silence by beginning the Lord’s Prayer or a song that the children know well.

**Note:** If you use *At Home with the Good News*, distribute this week’s paper to the 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 an illustrated discussion-starter about prayer.

In Welcome God’s Word on page 2, children consider the relationship between place and prayer. They’ll also find a With Your Family activity they can lead at home or practice in the group.

Singing Together (10-15 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Listen for the Voice of the Lord” (songbook p. 24, also available as an MP3)
◆ “Teacher and Healer” (songbook p. 27, also available as an MP3)

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

Art (15-25 minutes)
Daniele’s Handimals
Activity Soundtrack: Play healing music, such as O’Reilly’s “Lay Them Down” or Blue Feather’s “Heal the Earth.” (Open your Winter-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Use your computer and online access to display a sampling of artist Guido Daniele’s astonishing hand paintings, available at http://www.guidodaniele.com/hand-painting/art. Explain that this Italian artist transforms human hands into animals in this amazing body painting. Make sure everyone realizes that these images are painted on actual hands! Invite them to discuss the animals they see. Explain that today, they’ll use their hands to make art, too.

Encourage children to brainstorm the wonderful things that Jesus did with his hands, for example:
◆ heal the sick
◆ pray to God
◆ feed the poor
◆ comfort sad people

Explain that Jesus does something special with our hands, too. Jesus still helps people today, using each of us to do God’s work on earth.

Choose one of the following response options:

Hand Poem:
Invite children to make their hands into poems. On the board or newsprint write Prayer is...
Ask:
◆ How could we finish this sentence? (List answers.)
◆ We’re going to use our own hands to show what prayer means to us.

Distribute paper and felt pens or crayons. Each child traces around one or both hands. On each finger, children write a prayer-related word or description, for example hope or help, names of people for whom they’re praying, something from the list on the board or something of their own choosing. You or a primary friend may need to help nonwriters with this task.

Group Poem:
Children contribute phrases that finish the sentence “Prayer is...” in a new way. You or a volunteer can write their responses, line-by-line, on a sheet of poster board headed with that title.

Sense Poem:
Distribute paper and pencils. Invite children, working individually, in pairs or small groups, to finish this series of sentences:
Prayer...  
◆ looks like...
◆ sounds like...
◆ feels like...
◆ smells like...
◆ tastes like...

Volunteers may share their sense-poem creations.

Jesus Among Us: Stories
(15-25 minutes)
Children hear stories from people who teach, heal and pray, as Jesus did in everyday life.

Before the session invite up to three parishioners to visit the group, prepared to share a brief story (3-5 minutes) about how they teach, heal, pray or do any of the other things Jesus might have done while on earth. Parishioners might include, for example:
◆ a teacher, leader or parent (teach)
◆ a doctor, nurse, or mother (heal)
◆ a pastor, deacon or anyone else (pray)
After parishioners share their stories, encourage children to ask any questions they might have.

**Portraits of Jesus** (10-15 minutes)
Children create clay or painted portraits of Jesus. We provide two art options. Offer the option suited to your needs or set up both, at separate work areas, and invite each child to choose a medium. Or, simply ask them to use crayons to draw pictures of Jesus.

Explain:
- No one knows exactly what Jesus looked like.
- Use your imagination to create a picture of Jesus. You might think of him teaching, healing or praying, as he did in today’s story.

**Clay:**
Provide each child with a lump of clay. Help them knead the clay first to work out air bubbles. They can shape the clay with their hands only, or roll, shape and poke the clay using simple tools such as rolling pins, plastic cutlery, chopsticks and popsicle sticks. Keep water available, if directions recommend; too-dry clay cracks easily and is hard to shape.

**Light-on-Dark:**
Children usually paint on white or light-colored sheets of paper. Invite them to try light- and bright-colored tempera paints on dark paper. Cover the work surface with newspapers and provide aprons or smocks.

Invite volunteers to share their creations. Children can take the portraits home or display them in the room.

**Bible Skills for Third Graders** (15-25 minutes)
Third graders continue to expand their scripture skills.

Divide children into pairs. Assign each pair one of these references, which contain prayers:
- Psalm 16:102
- Psalm 71:17-18
- Psalm 108:1-2
- 1 Samuel 3:10
- Matthew 6:9-13
- Matthew 15:25 *(shortest prayer in the Bible)*
- John 17:21
- Ephesians 1:2
- Revelations 5:13

As necessary, review how to use the Bible table of contents, chapter numbers (the larger-size number printed at the beginning of a chapter), and verse numbers (the smaller numbers within the chapter) to find a reference.

Ask each pair to look up its reference and be ready to do these two things:
- If possible, tell who’s praying.
- Read the prayer aloud to the group.

For each prayer the children read aloud, ask:
- When might we want to say a prayer like this?

If time allows, children may wish to make up and write down prayers of their own. They could pick a theme, for example, prayers to pray when someone is sick, prayers for when someone is sad, etc.

**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 printable version of today’s *Gospel Story: Jesus and God’s People,* which can be distributed or e-mailed to children and their families.
  - An optional enrichment activity titled *Prayer Posture,* which examines the relationship between posture and prayer.
  - An optional information piece titled *To Parents,* which helps families broaden their prayer parameters.
  - A *Pageant Costumes* poster, to be used in the activity of the same name.
- Open your Winter-B’s *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Winter-B’s *Models of the Faith.*
  - A printable article titled *First Impressions,* which offers practical helps for the use of fine art in the classroom.
  - An article for catechists and/or families further exploring *The Gospel of Mark.*
  - An article for catechists and/or families on *Prophets and Prophecy.*
  - For catechists and/or families, an *Epiphany Overview.*
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings highlight the demands of committed Christian ministry. In Job we witness the intense, honest, anguished prayer of one in intimate relationships with God. Paul explains how he willingly lays down his privileges as a Christian to reach people with God’s message of good news. Jesus’ ministry revolves around healing and preaching, solitude and prayer.

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

The story of Job issues from the Jewish tradition of wisdom literature that treats the complexities of living in relationship with God and with others. This dramatic account focuses on the dilemma of an innocent man who is apparently being punished by God for sins he did not commit.

“When our worries are led to the heart of God and there become prayer, then ministry and prayer become two manifestations of the same all-embracing love of God.”

—Henri Nouwen
The Way of the Heart

Job addresses both the horizontal aspects of suffering—how do I cope? —and the vertical aspects of undeserved pain—why is God doing this? The author’s solution provides no explanation of suffering but only highlights the mystery of faith in the complete absence of personal gain. At this time in Judaism, Job’s dilemma could not be solved by appealing to later Christian beliefs in an afterlife where things would be resolved or in a God who did not directly cause evil but only permitted it.

In today’s reading, Job laments the misery of his condition, likening it to the hopelessness of a slave who has no prospect of betterment. Even his allotted time of rest at night has become a source of unending distress. His pain has removed all perspective on past pleasures or former hopes.

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

In chapter 9, Paul defends his status as an apostle. His authority had apparently been called into question because he had waived two apostolic rights: being married and receiving support for preaching. Opponents may have used Paul’s restraint as evidence of his unworthiness. Paul retorts that he did not choose preaching as a career in order to earn a living. Instead, like the prophets, he received a commission from God and so has no choice but to preach.

The absolute claim of the gospel relativizes all cultural, ethnic, national or legal values. The freedom that his decision gives him puts him in a position of servitude under “Christ’s law”—the obligation of love. Paul’s flexibility is neither cowardice nor compromise; rather, his freedom allows him to speak to and from the experience of others. Paul’s freedom is for service, and his ministry is its own reward.

Mark 1:29-39

Today’s reading continues the account of a day in Jesus’ ministry. The healing of Peter’s mother-in-law is presented without direct interpretation or theological comment. Then at sundown, when the sabbath was over, people are brought to Jesus for healing and the casting out of spirits. Enjoining silence upon the spirits (v. 34) was apparently part of the regular technique of exorcism as reported by contemporary writers. But Mark implies, as Luke makes explicit (Luke 4:41), that Jesus does not wish his identity made known by evil spirits who have no credibility as witnesses.

The following morning Jesus withdraws from Capernaum and, in part, from his disciples. He seeks communion with God and perhaps also wishes to avoid the superficial popularity indicated by the report that “everyone is searching for you” (v. 37). Jesus responds by going to the next towns, for that is why he came from Capernaum. Jesus acts as the envoy of God. His mission of “preaching” includes the whole of his ministry: teaching, healing, casting out spirits and finally his death and resurrection.

Reflection

In 10 short verses of Mark’s gospel, Jesus gives us a pattern to model in our lives. He moves first from the synagogue to the home, the place of need. He doesn’t stay stuck in the safe environment of church, that clubby place where the in-group can reassure each other how holy they are.

Instead, he goes to meet illness, fever, pain. Drawing many other sick people after curing Peter’s mother-in-law, he heals them and returns to the source of his energy: prayer. It might be a good movement for all of us: from worship to work, alleviating need, then back to the relationship with God which motivates, drives and blesses our efforts.

It’s also important to note how Jesus attracts people. They are desperate for his cure and crowd the doorway. People haven’t changed that much: they still hope for
genuine cures. They recognize that physical and mental sickness stains our world. But many have not found what they seek in church. For various reasons, they turn away, disappointed. Institutions focus on internal squabbles; churchgoers speak in jargon. Have we failed to offer seekers the Christ? Individually, we need to see if our lives follow the pattern of his.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today’s readings help us understand our human suffering (CCC, #164, 272–74, 309–14, 599–618, 521). Mark describes Jesus’ ministry as a continuation of God’s response to our human suffering. But Jesus not only ministers to people, he takes time to pray. Prayer is needed to put our lives into the right context—to see things as God does so that we might act as God does in responding to the needs of others (CCC, #2558–65, 2697–2719).

Our Catholic Heritage

What Response Does Christ Require?

Jesus commands only two things, which are really only one. He requires us to believe in him. “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29). Such belief means an attitude of absolute trust and confidence in Jesus, in the work of God through him and in us. Believing in Jesus means utterly abandoning our own efforts to justify ourselves and relying completely on God’s goodness and compassion.

John’s gospel often mentions this belief, especially in the early chapters, as the first step in a relationship. In the later chapters of the gospel, when Jesus explains his deepest teachings to his disciples, he indicates the evidence of such belief in their lives: obedience. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (John 14:15, 21).

What Are the Commandments Taught by Christ?

Early in his teaching, Jesus summarizes the law, pointing out that all the sacrifices and rules and regulations of Jewish society could best be kept if people put their hearts and minds into loving God first and loving one another second.

At the end of his life, Jesus gives a new commandment, a final way to fulfill the law: to let his model of life and death become the pattern of their relationships. As Paul notes, “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). “The only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).

The World of the Bible

Jesus’ Signs and Wonders

Although we use the word miracles to describe these events, biblical writers used the terms “deeds of power,” “signs” and “wonders.” These describe God’s actions to reorder our world from Satan’s domination that frustrates God’s plan for a covenant community.

The word miracle (Latin, minari, to wonder at) refers to that which causes wonder. The extraordinary is one essential element in a miracle, as the observers of Jesus’ wonders so often illustrate through their awe and astonishment. The other is that the extraordinary event cannot be explained in terms of familiar, everyday causation and so is attributed to a more-than-human force or agency. Everyone would readily conclude that a more-than-human power would be necessary for a human being to perform the miracle.

In reading the miracle stories, we notice that the usual concern of Jesus’ audience focuses on the source of such awesome power. They see the event, they experience the wonder. The deed of power is not something beyond the natural world, but part of the natural world with extraordinary implications. They recognize that only through the influence of a supernatural power could the natural world be reordered. The question is whether this more-than-human agent is good (God) or evil (Satan), a benefactor or a tyrant?

Even for believers, miracles did not create faith but presupposed it. Miracles were not proofs but wonderful signs for those who had “eyes to see.” For those who could not accept the miracles, they remained simply “astonished.”