

Lesson One:

Introduction, the Poor in Spirit, & Those Who Mourn

OPENING VERSE

Matthew 5:1-12, RSV: Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

DISCUSSION & DEFINITION

What are your reactions to this passage? What is Jesus talking about here? What do you think is meant by “blessed?” What does it mean to be blessed by God?

If someone is blessed, it usually means they are fortunate in some way. Blessings often have to do with being protected or rewarded. Sometimes we call a thing blessed if it is special.

To be blessed means, literally, to “enjoy God’s favor.”

Younger Campers: Draw two columns on a dry erase board. Write “The World’s Way (Happiness/Luck)” at the top of the first column and “God’s Way (Blessedness)” at the top of the second column.

Ask the campers to give examples of what it means to be happy or lucky in the world. (Examples may include: money, good health, family, friends, popularity, beauty, talent, stuff, etc.) Write their examples in the first column.

Ask them to give examples of what it means to be blessed or to enjoy God’s favor. (Examples may include: trusting God, closeness with Christ, peace, gratitude, forgiveness of sins, etc.) Write their examples in the second column.

Contrast the examples in each column, asking:

- *What is the difference between what is in the first column and what is in the second column?*

- *Is it possible to be (or have) any of these things in the first column at all times? What about the things in the second column?*
- *If you took away everything in the first column away, could you still be considered lucky? Could you still be considered blessed?*
- *Can you have any of the things in the first column after you die?*

Follow up with the following questions:

- *What does the world tell us we need to do or to be in order to achieve these things in the first column?*
- *What does Christ say (in the beatitudes) about what will make us blessed? (If necessary, reread the opening passage.)*
- *What do you think the world would say about being “poor in spirit” or “persecuted” or “meek?”*
- *If you could choose, would you rather enjoy the favor of the world during your life or the favor of God both in this life and, even more fully, for eternity?*

TALKING POINTS

1. Blessedness is something different from and greater than luck or happiness.

- Luck and happiness both depend on external conditions. When things are going our way, we feel lucky, but when things are not going our way, we feel unlucky. Blessedness, unlike luck or happiness, is a constant. To be blessed means to find sufficiency (everything we need) in Christ alone, regardless of our circumstances. It is to depend on God’s unconditional sustenance rather than that which the world offers. Because God is all knowing and all-powerful, blessedness, unlike luck or happiness, is always available to us.
- God’s way and His rewards are very different from the world’s. The world teaches us to value things that lead to physical, worldly rewards. It teaches us that selfishness, pride, and greed, for example, will lead to pleasure, comfort, and popularity. The Lord teaches us, however, that these beatitudes (i.e. meekness, persecution, mourning, etc.), things that the world does not value at all but would rather urge us to avoid, are the very things that will lead us to the ultimate reward, which is eternal union with Christ in the kingdom.
- While the reward of the beatitudes—the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven and everything that is encompassed within that reality—is available to us in some ways here on earth, it is something we will only experience in its fullness in eternity.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
(Isaiah 55:8)

2. *That which is blessed enjoys God's favor because it "belongs to God."*

- Blessed things, along with blessed people, are holy and consecrated. That means that they are set aside for God's use. They are participants in the very life of God Himself. In order to become blessed, we must set ourselves apart for God as well, offering up our whole life to Him for His use.
- The beatitudes that Christ outlines help us, step by step, to become participants in the life of God, to grow in holiness, and to become servants who are both willing and able to carry out the Lord's will in the world.

*If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. So shun sinful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.
(2 Timothy 2:21-22, RSV)*

OPENING VERSES

Today, we are going to begin by looking at the first two beatitudes.

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*

Let's take a look at the following verses about poverty of spirit and mourning.

John 15:4-5, RSV: As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [...] He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

2 Corinthians 7:9-11, RSV: As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting [...] For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

DISCUSSION & DEFINITIONS

We talked last year about this first verse about the vine and the branches. What do you remember about fruit of the Spirit? Where does it come from?

The fruits of the Spirit are gifts from God. They sustain us and give us life. We must put in some effort to cultivate them, but it is only by uniting ourselves to Christ, the true vine, that we bear the fruit of the Spirit. When we cultivate these fruits, we show who Christ is and prove to be His disciples, bringing glory to Him.

What do you think the last part of that verse, "apart from me you can do nothing?" might mean? What does it have to do with poverty of spirit?

Without Christ's help, without being united to Him, we are powerless. When we are poor in spirit, we realize that we need Christ, and we rely on Him.

And what about the second verse? Paul talks about two different types of grief here. Which is the kind that he is rejoicing over?

Paul talks about godly grief and worldly grief. He is rejoicing over the Corinthians' godly grief—the kind that has led them to see their sins and repent of them.

With these verses in mind, what do you think it means to be “poor in spirit?” And what kind of mourning is Christ referring to when He says “blessed are those who mourn?”

The poor in spirit are those who humble themselves before God, recognizing that they are nothing apart from Him.

Those who mourn are those who realize the awfulness of their sin and are genuinely sorry for it.

Now we're going to read (or act out) two stories to help us learn a little bit more about poverty of spirit and blessed mourning.

BIBLE STORIES

Younger Campers: Have campers act out stories from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson One, located in the back of this lesson.

The Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee: Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The Story of the Sinful Woman: Luke 7:36-50

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “What is it, Teacher?” “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them

with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

DISCUSSION

How did the Pharisee see himself? What about the publican? Who approached Christ with humility? What was the result?

The Pharisee felt that he was self-justified and that he did not even need the Lord’s mercy. He was too proud to see his own sin. The publican was humble. He was honest with himself and with God. He looked at his own sin and begged the Lord for mercy. Because of this, he is the one who left justified.

And what about the sinful woman? How did she express her humility? What was the result?

The sinful woman humbled herself at Jesus’ feet and was moved to tears over her sins. She recognized how desperately she needed Christ, and her humility led her to Him. She was grieved to repentance, sought out the Lord’s mercy, and was comforted by the forgiveness of Christ.

Both the publican and the sinful woman are perfect examples of what it means to be poor in spirit and to mourn—to have the “godly grief” that leads to repentance. Let’s talk a little bit more about these first two beatitudes.

TALKING POINTS

1. To be poor in spirit is to rely completely on the Lord.

Younger Campers: Have the campers stand up. Explain to them that you are going to list off items and that you would like some help determining which of these items are “things we give ourselves” and which are “things that God gives us.” If the campers think the item is something we give ourselves, they should walk to the left side of the room. If they think it is something God gives us, they should walk to the right side of the room. If they are unsure or think it is a combination of the two, they can stay somewhere in the middle (or closest to the side they think is more correct). Examples of items listed might include:

Air Friends Food Jobs Education Grades Clothes Cars

Health Talents Safety Money Family Character Faith Goodness

Use this activity to explain to the campers that, while it is true that we often have to participate with God in order to gain access to earthly things, we are never the source of the good things in our lives. Ultimately everything we have is a gift from God, including the cars we buy and the grades we earn, because God is the one who has provided us with the means to buy those cars and achieve those grades. None of us can say that we have earned anything on our own, not even our own character. God is the source of *all* good things, and to be poor in spirit is to recognize that we are nothing and have nothing without Him and that we must rely upon Him fully to provide us with everything we need.

- The word in Greek that Christ uses for “poor,” when He blesses the poor in spirit, is not just a word that implies either a struggle to make ends meet or a lack of surplus. The word He uses, “ptochos,” implies total and abject poverty—having absolutely nothing at all. To be like the “ptochos” is to be utterly dependent on God. It is to recognize that we are nothing and that we have nothing without God and, therefore, that we must put our whole trust in Him. To be poor in spirit is to recognize that we are desperate without Christ.

*For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,’ not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.
(Revelation 3:17, RSV)*

2. *While poverty of spirit does not require us to assume physical poverty, it does involve detaching ourselves from worldly things and material possessions.*

Emptying Oneself Relay

Directions: Divide campers into two teams for a relay race. Provide each team with a blindfold, a scoop, and two buckets, one empty and the other filled with packing peanuts. Place the empty buckets at the the starting line and the full buckets on the opposite side of the room. Have players from both teams take turns as the blindfolded player. The blindfolded player must follow the directions shouted by teammates to direct him or her across the room to the correct bucket. There the player has one chance to remove a scoop from the bucket, return to the team, and deposit the spoonful into the empty bucket. The object of the game is to be the first team to empty its bucket of packing peanuts. The team who empties the bucket first (or comes closest after teams have completed a rotation or time limit) wins the game.

Debrief: Use this game to explain to the campers that, when we are attached to earthly things—when we hold on to them as if they are our own—we can become proud, distracted, and forgetful of our need for Christ. However, when we “empty” ourselves of these attachments, like we have done in this game with the buckets and the packing peanuts, we remember our need for Christ and are free to focus our efforts on drawing near to and relying on Him. You could also ask how they felt as they emptied the buckets. Was it fun? Did they enjoy it? Why? How can we find joy in emptying ourselves?

Younger Campers: Read *The Poor Widow’s Offering* from this lesson’s reference section, or have campers act out *The Story of the Rich Young Man* and *The Parable of the Rich Fool* from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson One, located in the back of this lesson.

- Riches, though not inherently bad, can distract us from our ultimate goal and keep us from seeing ourselves as we truly are. Poverty of spirit requires us to recognize that absolutely everything, including our earthly possessions, is a gift from God and therefore belongs to Him and not to us. To be poor in spirit, we must not look to any earthly thing to bring us fulfillment or a sense of self-worth but must instead detach ourselves from earthly things, putting our hope in Christ alone.

There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with

these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.

(1 Timothy 6:6-10, RSV)

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

(Matthew 6:19-21, RSV)

3. Poverty of spirit requires us to humble ourselves before the Lord, to look at ourselves honestly, and to recognize our lowliness and sinfulness before God.

Younger Campers: Have campers act out *Jesus Calls His First Disciples* from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson One, located in the back of this lesson.

- Poverty of spirit is not simply spiritual poverty, which we all have; it is instead the *acknowledgement* of our spiritual poverty, the acknowledgement that we are sinners in need of Christ’s healing and strength.

Younger Campers: Take this opportunity to talk about the Sacrament of Confession with your campers. Some of your campers may have never been to confession before or may not be familiar with what it is all about. Ask if any of the campers have even gone before and if any would like to share with the rest of the class what the experience is like. Ensure them that the priest will never tell anyone what he hears in confession. Encourage them to participate in the sacrament while they are here at camp and let them know which days they will have to opportunity to go (typically, both Tuesday afternoons and Saturday afternoon). If they are curious, you may give them a copy of the self-examination before confession at the end of this lesson.

- Poverty of spirit, or humility, is not the same as self-deprecation, a hidden form of pride; rather, it is a proper assessment of oneself. To be humble is to recognize our great worth to God but also to recognize our lowliness before Him. When we come before God and look at ourselves honestly, we come to see just how sinful we are and how badly we are in need of Christ’s help.

As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [...] He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

(John 15:4-5, RSV)

*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,
that in due time he may exalt you.*

(1 Peter 5:6)

4. Poverty of spirit also requires us to humble ourselves before the people around us.

- When we look at ourselves honestly, we realize that we have absolutely no right to judge other people. (This is not to say that we should let go of any sense of right and wrong in the world. We are not moral relativists—we are simply fellow sinners.) When we see our own weaknesses with clarity, we grow in empathy for the weaknesses of others. And as we recognize our own worth in God’s eyes, we grow in reverence for, rather than condemnation of, the people around us.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

(Matthew 7:1-5, RSV)

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

(1 Peter 5:5, RSV)

5. For those who love Christ, mourning is the natural result of a proper self-assessment.

- When we come before God, taking an honest look at ourselves in all of our sinfulness, with humility, we cannot help but mourn over our sins. We may not always be moved to physical tears at the recognition of our sinfulness; yet, regardless of our expression, we ought to experience a real sadness in response to the way in which we have distanced ourselves from Christ as a result of our sin.

O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy wrath! For thy arrows have sunk into me, and thy hand has come down on me. [...] For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. [...] Lord, all my longing is known to thee, my sighing is not hidden from thee. [...] For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever with me. I confess my iniquity, I am sorry for my sin. [...] Do not forsake me, O Lord! O my God, be not far from me!

Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!

(Psalm 37, RSV)

Younger Campers: Read the stories of St. Thais of Egypt and St. Mary Magdalene, located in the back of this lesson.

6. Unlike shame or despair, mourning leads us to repentance.

- True mourning, or contrition of heart, leads us not to shame or to despair but to repentance. Shame, which is just another form of pride (“How could I, of all people, have done this!?”) and

despair, which keeps us stuck in a cycle of sin (“I am hopelessly sinful. I will never be able to change—this is just the way I am.”) both keep the focus on ourselves as the primary agent of change, rather than looking to Christ as the true source of our strength and our healing.

- Mourning, however, gives us a sense of urgency, causing us to draw near to Christ, to seek out His mercy, and to rely upon His strength in order to resist temptation and reorient our way of life. When we are stirred up by the sorrow of our sins and moved to repentance, our hearts become softened, opening us up to whatever the Lord wills in our lives.

For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter.

(2 Corinthians 7:10-11, RSV)

7. *When we mourn over our sins and repent of them, we will be comforted by the forgiveness and healing of Christ.*

Heavy Luggage Activity

Directions: Have a volunteer stand and put on an empty backpack. Throughout the lesson, continue filling the backpack with large rocks (or cans of soup, etc.) until the volunteer notices that the bag is getting uncomfortably heavy. Ask the volunteer if they would like you to remove the weight, and begin to take out each item until the bag is empty again. Ask the following discussion questions.

- *How did it feel to carry all of that extra baggage?*
- *What would it be like to carry that weight around all day, wherever you went?*
- *How can sin make us feel heavy?*
- *What can you do to remove extra weight?*
- *What can you do to remove the heaviness of sin?*
- *How do we feel after God has forgiven our sins?*

Debrief: Explain that, just as setting down luggage is a huge relief, the same is true when we go to confession. Not only do we get to lay aside all of the sins that have been weighing us down, but we also experience the great joy and comfort of God’s forgiveness. At the end of **Psalm 32** David says, “Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart” (**Psalm 32:11**). When we confess our sins and choose to do right instead of wrong, we feel so much happier than when we hold on to sin. Here, you may want to give the campers a little time to reflect on what luggage they may be carrying, either things they need to confess or just things that are weighing on them, and encourage them to go to a trusted source (like a priest, a counselor, a parent, etc) to talk about it.

- True mourning, when coupled with repentance, will always lead to comfort. This is the Lord’s gift to us. He is a merciful God who heals our infirmities and cleanses us of our sins. When we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. When we mourn over our lost relationship with Him, He will embrace us with His love and forgiveness. The result of mourning is comfort, because the result of repentance is reunion with Christ, who is Himself our Comfort and our Joy.

*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
(1 John 1:8-9, RSV)*

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.
(2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, RSV)*

APPLICATION

Now that we have talked a little more about poverty of spirit and mourning, what do you think we, as Christians today, can do to cultivate these virtues?

- **Practicing gratitude**—thanking God for all that he has given us—helps to remind us that everything is a gift from God and that we are nothing without Him.
- **Making sacrifices**—through fasting, almsgiving, etc.—helps us to detach ourselves from earthly things and material possessions.
- **Surrounding ourselves with godly people**, just like surrounding ourselves with icons, reminds us of just how far we have to go on the path to salvation.
- **Self-examination and confession** of our sins, when done regularly, help us to see ourselves as we really are and to seek out the Lord's strength and mercy.
- **Reading Scripture** is another way that we can examine ourselves. Through Scripture, the Lord speaks to us and convicts us, bringing to light our true spiritual poverty and need for repentance.

Younger Campers: Have campers write a list of all of the good gifts God has given (and continues to give) them in their life.

REVIEW

Let's review what we learned today. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? And what did we learn about poverty of spirit?

The poor in spirit are those who humble themselves before God, recognizing that they are nothing apart from Him. To be poor in spirit is to rely completely on the Lord. Poverty of spirit involves detaching ourselves from worldly things and material possessions. Poverty of spirit requires us to look at ourselves honestly and to recognize our lowliness and sinfulness before God. Poverty of spirit also requires us to humble ourselves before the people around us.

And what kind of mourning is Christ talking about in the beatitudes? What did we learn about mourning, and what is the result of mourning?

Those who mourn are those who realize the awfulness of their sin and are genuinely sorry for it. Mourning is the natural result of a proper self-assessment. Unlike shame or despair, mourning leads us to repentance. When we mourn over our sins and repent of them, we will be comforted by the forgiveness and healing of Christ.

FOR REFERENCE

Blessedness

Blessedness is the totality and plenitude of everything that is good and that is desired as good, without a single deficiency, deprivation or impediment... The followers of Christ not only await blessedness, as something belonging to the future, but it is characteristic of their soul, as something present, insofar as Christ Himself is present in them.

+ *St. Gregory of Nyssa*

The tranquility of soul and sweetness that we feel at times in God's church are an advance on that endless sweetness which they will experience eternally who contemplate the goodness of God's countenance.

+ *St. John of Kronstadt*

Detachment from Earthly Things

Riches, both material and spiritual, can choke you if you do not use them fairly. For not even God can put anything in a heart that is already full. [...] Let us remain as empty as possible so that God can fill us up.

—*Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

James 2:5, RSV: Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

The Poor Widow's Offering (Mark 12:41-44): And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole livelihood."

Matthew 16:24-26, NKJV: Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Luke 14:33, RSV: So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 6:28, RSV: No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [money or riches].

The Story of the Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-22): And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the

commandments: ‘Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth.” And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

1 John 2:15-17, RSV: Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21): And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Mark 10:23-27, RSV: And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” [...] It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.”

1 Timothy 6:17-19, RSV: As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed.

Honest Self-Assessment

When you are generous to another person, you are not bestowing a gift but repaying a debt. Everything you possess materially comes from God, who created all things. And every spiritual and moral virtue you possess is through divine grace. Thus you owe everything to God.

+ *St. John Chrysostom*

1 Corinthians 4:7, RSV: What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

To be poor in spirit means to regard nothing as your own and everything you have as a temporary loan.

+ *St. John Chrysostom*

A person is humble when he knows that his very being is on loan to him.

+ *St. Maximus the Confessor*

The soul should realize how powerless it is alone; therefore, expecting nothing of itself, let it fall down in humility before God, and in its own heart, recognize itself to be nothing. [...] He who in total humility puts himself in the hand of the merciful God attracts the Lord to himself and becomes strong in His strength.

+ *St. Theophan the Recluse*

Even if I had performed the deeds of Saint Paul, I would still consider myself an unprofitable servant; I would find that my hands are empty. I reflect that He will be very much embarrassed in regards to me. I have no works... In the evening of this life I shall appear before You empty-handed, for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works. All our justices have stains in your sight. So I want to be clad in Your own Justice and receive from Your Love the possession of Yourself. I want no other throne or crown than You, my beloved!

—*Therese of Lisieux, Western Saint*

If you do something good, remember the words, “Without Me you can do nothing.”

+ *St. Mark the Ascetic*

John 5:44, RSV: How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

2 Corinthians 4:5-7, RSV: For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.

Nothing is more opposed to God than pride, for self-deification is concealed in it, its own nothingness or sin. Thus, more than anything, humility is acceptable to God, which considers itself nothing and attributes all goodness, honor, and glory to God alone. Pride does not accept grace, because it is full of itself, while humility easily accepts grace, because it is free from itself and from all that is created. God creates out of nothing. As long as we think that we can offer something of ourselves, He does not begin His work in us.

+ *St. Philaret of Moscow* □

The Parable of the Unprofitable Servants (Luke 17:7-10): Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’

A sense of our own righteousness does us great harm. Keep firmly in mind the point that the moment this feeling arises, however feebly, it is a sure sign that our efforts have gone wrong. The greater your conviction that you are a sinner, the more certain it is that you are traveling on the right path. But this feeling of sinfulness should spring from the depths of the soul in a natural way, instead of being suggested from without by our own reflections, or by some remark from another person.

+ *St. Theophan the Recluse*

Jesus Calls the First Disciples (Luke 5:1-11) : While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying,

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10, RSV: And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Understand two thoughts, and fear them. One says, "You are a saint," the other, "You won't be saved." Both of these thoughts are from the enemy, and there is no truth in them. But think this way: I am a great sinner, but the Lord is merciful. He loves people very much, and He will forgive my sins.

+ *St. Silouan the Athonite* □

2 Corinthians 8:9, RSV: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

If you see your neighbor in sin, don't look only at this, but also think about what he has done or does that is good, and [...] you will find that he is better than you.

+ *St. Basil the Great*

To judge sins is the business of one who is sinless, but who is sinless except God? Who ever thinks about the multitude of his own sins in his heart never wants to make the sins of others a topic of conversation. To judge a man who has gone astray is a sign of pride, and God resists the proud. On the other hand, one who every hour prepares himself to give answer for his own sins will not quickly lift up his head to examine the mistakes of others.

+ *St. Gennadius of Constantinople* □

Mourning & Joy

James 4:8-10, RSV: Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.

Mourning, according to God, is sadness of soul and the disposition of a sorrowing heart which ever madly seeks for that which it thirsts. [...] Mourning is a golden spur in a soul which is stripped of all attachment and all ties [...] Keep a firm hold of the blessed joy-grief of holy mourning and do not stop working at it until it raises you high above the things of this world and presents you pure to Christ. The fruit of morbid mourning is vainglory and self-esteem, but the fruit of blessed mourning is comfort. He who is clothed in blessed and grace-given mourning [...] knows the spiritual laughter of the soul.

+ *St. John Climacus*

For if those who grieve for children, or wife, or any other relation gone from them, have no fondness for gain or pleasure during that period of their sorrow; if they aim not at glory, are not provoked by insults, nor led captive by envy, nor beset by any other passion, their grief alone wholly possessing them, much more will they who mourn for their own sins, as they ought to mourn, show forth a self-denial greater than this.

+ *St. John Chrysostom*

The blessed of whom [Christ] speaks are not those grieving the death of a spouse or the loss of cherished servants. Rather, he is speaking of those blessed persons who do not cease to mourn over the iniquity of the world or the offenses of sinners with a pious, duty-bound sentiment. To those who mourn righteously, therefore, they will receive, and not undeservedly, the consolation of eternal rejoicing promised by the Lord.

+ *St. Chromatius*

Psalm 50, KJV: Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy great mercy: according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out mine iniquity. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge mine iniquity: and my sin is ever before me. [...] Sacrifices to God are a contrite spirit: a contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

My brother/sister, inasmuch as thou hast come to God, and to me, be not ashamed; for thou speakest not unto me, but unto God, before whom thou stands. [...] God it was who forgave David through Nathan the Prophet, when he confessed his sins, and Peter weeping bitterly for his denial, and the sinful woman in tears at his feet, and the Publican, and the Prodigal Son: May that same God forgive thee all things, through me a sinner, both in this present world, and in that which is to come, and set thee uncondemned before his dread Judgment Seat. And now having no further care for the sins which thou hast declared, depart in peace. May Christ our true God, through the prayers of his most holy Mother and of all the Saints, have mercy upon us and save us, forasmuch as he is good and lovest mankind. Amen.

– *The Sacrament of Confession*

Have confidence in the compassion of our Creator. Reflect well on what you are now doing, and keep before you the things you have done. Lift up your eyes to the overflowing compassion of heaven, and while He waits for you, draw near in tears to our merciful Judge. Having before your mind that He is a Just Judge, do not take your sins lightly; and having also in mind that He is compassionate, do not despair. The God-Man gives man confidence before God.

+ *St. Gregory the Great*

Do not say: "I have sinned much, and therefore I am not bold enough to fall down before God." Do not despair. Simply do not increase your sins in despair, and with the help of the All-merciful One you will not be put to shame. For He said, "he who comes to Me I will not cast out." And so, be bold and believe that He is pure and cleanses those who draw near to Him. If you want to accomplish true repentance, show it with your deeds. If you have fallen into pride, show humility; if into drunkenness, show sobriety; if into defilement, show purity of life. For it is said, "Turn away from evil and do good."

+ *St. Gennadius of Constantinople*

John 16:16-24, RSV: Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. [...] Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. [...] ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Bible Story Scripts: Lesson One

The Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee: Luke 18:9-14

Characters: Narrator, Jesus, Pharisee, Publican

Narrator: Jesus told another parable—this one addressed to people who were confident in their self-righteousness and looked down on other people with disgust.

Jesus: Imagine two men walking up a road, going to the temple to pray. One of them is a Pharisee and the other is a despised tax collector. Once inside the temple, the Pharisee stands up and prays this prayer in honor of himself:

Pharisee: “God, how I thank You that I am not on the same level as other people—crooks, cheaters, and sinners—like this tax collector over here. Just look at me! I fast not once but *twice* a week, and I faithfully pay my tithes on every penny of my income.”

Jesus: Over in the corner, the tax collector begins to pray, but he won’t even lift his eyes to heaven. He pounds on his chest in sorrow and says,

Publican: (*kneeling with hands on chest*): ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’

Jesus: Now imagine these two men walking back down the road to their homes. It’s the tax collector who walks home clean before God, and not the Pharisee, because whoever lifts himself up will be put down and whoever takes a humble place will be lifted up.

The Story of the Sinful Woman: Luke 7:36-50

Characters: *Narrator, Jesus, Sinful Woman, Simon, Simon's Friends (2)*

Narrator: Once a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to be a guest for a meal. Jesus enters the man's home and takes His place at the table, a woman from the city—notorious as a woman of ill repute—follows Him in. She has heard that Jesus will be at the Pharisee's home, so she comes in and approaches Him, carrying an alabaster flask of perfumed oil. Then she begins to cry, she kneels down so her tears fall on Jesus' feet, and she starts wiping His feet with her own hair. Then she actually kisses His feet, and she pours the perfumed oil on them.

Simon (to himself): Now I *know* this guy is a fraud. If He were a real prophet, He would have known this woman is a sinner and He would never let her get near Him, much less touch Him . . . or kiss Him!

Jesus: Simon, I want to tell you a story.

Simon: Tell me, Teacher.

Jesus: Two men owed a certain lender a lot of money. One owed 100 weeks' wages, and the other owed 10 weeks' wages. Both men defaulted on their loans, but the lender forgave them both. Here's a question for you: which man will love the lender more?

Simon: Well, I guess it would be the one who was forgiven more.

Jesus: Good answer.

Jesus: Do you see this woman here? It's kind of funny. I entered your home, and you didn't provide a basin of water so I could wash the road dust from My feet. You didn't give Me a customary kiss of greeting and welcome. You didn't offer Me the common courtesy of providing oil to brighten My face. But this woman has wet My feet with her own tears and washed them with her own hair. She hasn't stopped kissing My feet since I came in. And she has applied perfumed oil to My feet. This woman has been forgiven much, and she is showing much love. But the person who has shown little love shows how little forgiveness he has received.

Jesus: *(to the woman):* Your sins are forgiven.

Simon and Friends *(muttering among themselves):* Who does this guy think He is? He has the audacity to claim the authority to forgive sins?

Jesus *(to the woman):* Your faith has liberated you. Go in peace.

The Story of the Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-22)

Characters: *Narrator, Young Man, Jesus, Peter, Other Disciples (2)*

Narrator: When Jesus had traveled on, a young man came and knelt in the dust of the road in front of Him.

Young Man: Good Teacher! What must I do to gain life in the world to come?

Jesus: You are calling Me good? Don't you know that God and God alone is good? Anyway, why ask Me that question? You know the Commandments of Moses: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not slander, do not defraud, and honor your father and mother."

Young Man: Yes, Teacher, I have done all these since I was a child.

Narrator: Then Jesus, looking at the young *man*, *loved him*. *And He and said to him:*

Jesus: Son, there is still one thing you have not done. Go now. Sell everything you have and give the proceeds to the poor so that you will have treasure in heaven. After that, come, follow Me.

Narrator: The young man went away sick at heart at these words because he was very wealthy, and Jesus looked around to see if His disciples were understanding His teaching.

Jesus (to His disciples): Oh, it is hard for people with wealth to find their way into God's kingdom!

Disciples (amazed): What? Why?

Jesus: You heard Me. How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God for those who trust in their wealth! I think you'll see camels squeezing through the eye of a needle before you'll see the rich celebrating and dancing as they enter into the joy of God's kingdom!

Narrator: The disciples looked around at each other, whispering.

Disciples (aloud to Jesus): Then who can be liberated?

Jesus (smiling and shaking His head): For human beings it is impossible, but not for God: God makes everything possible.

Peter: Master, we have left behind everything we had to follow You!

Jesus: That is true. And those who have left their houses, their lands, their parents, or their families for My sake, and for the sake of this good news will receive all of this 100 times greater than they have in this time—houses and farms and brothers, sisters, mothers, and children, along with persecutions—and in the world to come, they will receive eternal life. But many of those who are first in this world shall be last in the world to come, and the last, first.

The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)

Characters: *Person in the Crowd, Jesus, Narrator, Wealthy Man, God, Disciples (2-3)*

Person in the Crowd: Teacher, intervene and tell my brother to share the family inheritance with me.

Jesus: Since when am I your judge or arbitrator?

Narrator: Jesus used this opportunity to speak to the crowd.

Jesus: You'd better be on your guard against any type of greed, for a person's life is not about having a lot of possessions.

Narrator: Then, Jesus began another parable.

Jesus: A wealthy man owned some land that produced a huge harvest. He often thought to himself:

Wealthy Man: "I have a problem here. I don't have anywhere to store all my crops. What should I do? I know! I'll tear down my small barns and build even bigger ones, and then I'll have plenty of storage space for my grain and all my other goods. Then I'll be able to say to myself, 'I have it made! I can relax and take it easy for years! So I'll just sit back, eat, drink, and have a good time!'"

Jesus: Then God interrupted the man's conversation with himself.

God (*hiding so that only your voice is heard*): "Your time has come. Tonight you will die. Now who will enjoy everything you've earned and saved?"

Jesus: This is how it will be for people who accumulate huge amounts of wealth for themselves but have no wealth in relation to God.

Jesus (*then, to His disciples*): This is why I keep telling you not to worry about anything in life—about what you'll eat, about how you'll clothe your body. Life is more than food, and the body is more than fancy clothes. Think about those crows flying over there: do they plant and harvest crops? Do they own silos or barns? Look at them fly. It looks like God is taking pretty good care of them, doesn't it? Remember that you are more precious to God than birds! Which one of you can add a single hour to your life or 18 inches to your height by worrying really hard? If worry can't change anything, why do you do it so much?

Think about those beautiful wild lilies growing over there. They don't work up a sweat toiling for needs or wants—they don't worry about clothing. Yet the great King Solomon never had an outfit that was half as glorious as theirs!

Look at the grass growing over there. One day it's thriving in the fields. The next day it's being used as fuel. If God takes such good care of such transient things, how much more you can depend on God to care for you, weak in faith as you are.

Don't reduce your life to the pursuit of food and drink; don't let your mind be filled with anxiety. People of the world who don't know God pursue these things, but you have a Father caring for you, a Father who knows all your needs.

Since you don't need to worry—about security and safety, about food and clothing—then pursue God's kingdom first and foremost, and these other things will come to you as well.

My little flock, don't be afraid. God is your Father, and your Father's great joy is to give you His kingdom.

That means you can sell your possessions and give generously to the poor. You can have a different kind of savings plan: one that never depreciates, one that never defaults, one that can't be plundered by crooks or destroyed by natural calamities. Your treasure will be stored in the heavens, and since your treasure is there, your heart will be lodged there as well.

Jesus Calls His First Disciples (Luke 5:1-10)

Characters: Narrator, Jesus, Simon Peter, James, John, Other Fishermen (2)

Narrator: Jesus sits down and teaches a crowd of people standing on the beach. Off to the side, fishermen (Simon (Peter), James, and John) are washing their nets, leaving their boats unattended on the shore. After speaking for a while, Jesus speaks to Simon.

Jesus: Move out into deeper water, and drop your nets to see what you'll catch.

Simon (*perplexed*): Master, we've been fishing all night, and we haven't caught even a minnow. But . . . all right, I'll do it if You say so.

Narrator: Simon then gets James and John to help him let down their nets, and to their surprise, the water is bubbling with thrashing fish—tons of them, a huge school! The strands of their nets start snapping under the weight of the catch, so the crew shouts to the other boat to come out and give them a hand. They start scooping fish out of the nets and into their boats, and before long, their boats are so full of fish they almost sink! Simon's fishing partners, James and John (two of Zebedee's sons), along with the rest of the fishermen, see this incredible haul of fish. They're all stunned, especially Simon. He comes close to Jesus and kneels in front of His knees.

Simon (*kneeling before Jesus*): I can't take this, Lord. I'm a sinful man. You shouldn't be around someone like me.

Jesus: Don't be afraid, Simon. From now on, I'll make you a fisher of men. I'll be asking you to bring *people* to me instead of fish.

Narrator: And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Saint Stories: Lesson One

St. Thais of Egypt

Saint Thais of Egypt, raised by her mother in a spirit far removed from Christian piety, led a depraved and dissolute life. She was famed for her beauty, leading many on the path to perdition.

The account about the prodigal Thais spread throughout all Egypt and reached even Saint Paphnutius, a strict ascetic who had converted many to salvation. Paphnutius dressed himself in worldly attire and went to Thais, giving her money as though he wished to pay for her favors. He pretended to be afraid that someone would see them, so he asked her if there were a place they would not be discovered. Thais said that they could lock the door and enjoy complete privacy. "But if you fear God," she said, "there is no place where you can hide from Him." Seeing that she knew about God and the punishment of the wicked, the Elder asked why she led a sinful life and enticed others to ruin their souls. He told her about the eternal punishment she would have to face for her own sins, and for the people who had been corrupted and destroyed by her.

The words of Saint Paphnutius so affected the sinner that she gathered up all her riches acquired through her shameful life, then set them afire in the city square. Then Saint Paphnutius shut her up in a small cell, where for three years she dwelt in seclusion. Turning toward the East, Thais constantly repeated the short prayer, "My Creator, have mercy on me!"

"From the moment I entered into the cell," said Thais to the Elder before her death, "all my sins constantly were before my eyes, and I wept when I remembered them."

Saint Paphnutius replied "It is for your tears, and not for the austerity of your seclusion, that the Lord has granted you mercy."

Saint Thais was ill for three days, then fell asleep in the Lord. So this woman, who had been a harlot and a sinner, has entered the Kingdom of God before us (Mt. 21:31). Saint Paul the Simple (October 4) saw in a vision the place prepared for the penitent Thais in Paradise.

St. Mary Magdalene, The Holy Myrrh-Bearer Equal of the Apostles

On the banks of Lake Genesareth (Galilee), between the cities of Capharnum and Tiberias, was the small city of Magdala, the remains of which have survived to our day. Now only the small village of Mejhdel stands on the site.

A woman whose name has entered forever into the Gospel account was born and grew up in Magdala. The Gospel tells us nothing of Mary's younger years, but Tradition informs us that Mary of Magdala was young and pretty, and led a sinful life. It says in the Gospels that the Lord expelled seven devils from Mary (Luke. 8:2). From the moment of her healing Mary led a new life, and became a true disciple of the Savior.

The Gospel relates that Mary followed after the Lord, when He went with the Apostles through the cities and villages of Judea and Galilee preaching about the Kingdom of God. Together with the pious women Joanna, wife of Choza (steward of Herod), Susanna and others, she served Him from her own possessions (Luke 8:1-3) and undoubtedly shared with the Apostles the evangelic tasks in common with the other women. The Evangelist Luke, evidently, has her in view together with the other women, stating that at the moment of the Procession of Christ onto Golgotha, when after the Scourging He took on Himself the heavy Cross, collapsing under its weight, the women followed after Him weeping and wailing, but He consoled them. The Gospel relates that Mary Magdalene was present on Golgotha at the moment of the Lord's Crucifixion. While all the disciples of the Savior ran away, she remained fearlessly at the Cross together with the Mother of God and the Apostle John.

The Evangelists also list among those standing at the Cross the mother of the Apostle James, and Salome, and other women followers of the Lord from Galilee, but all mention Mary Magdalene first. Saint John, in addition to the Mother of God, names only her and Mary Cleopas. This indicates how much she stood out from all the women who gathered around the Lord.

She was faithful to Him not only in the days of His Glory, but also at the moment of His extreme humiliation and insult. As the Evangelist Matthew relates, she was present at the Burial of the Lord. Before her eyes Joseph and Nicodemus went out to the tomb with His lifeless Body. She watched as they covered over the entrance to the cave with a large stone, entombing the Source of Life.

Faithful to the Law in which she was raised, Mary together with the other women spent following day at rest, because it was the great day of the Sabbath, coinciding with the Feast of Passover. But all the rest of the peaceful day the women gathered spices to go to the Grave of the Lord at dawn on Sunday and anoint His Body according to the custom of the Jews.

It is necessary to mention that, having agreed to go on the first day of the week to the Tomb early in the morning, the holy women had no possibility of meeting with one another on Saturday. They went separately on Friday evening to their own homes. They went out only at dawn the following day to go to the Sepulchre, not all together, but each from her own house.

The Evangelist Matthew writes that the women came to the grave at dawn, or as the Evangelist Mark expresses, extremely early before the rising of the sun. The Evangelist John, elaborating upon these, says that Mary came to the grave so early that it was still dark. Obviously, she waited impatiently for the end of night, but it was not yet daybreak. She ran to the place where the Lord's Body lay.

Mary went to the tomb alone. Seeing the stone pushed away from the cave, she ran away in fear to tell the close Apostles of Christ, Peter and John. Hearing the strange message that the Lord was gone from the tomb, both Apostles ran to the tomb and, seeing the shroud and winding cloths, they were amazed. The Apostles went and said nothing to anyone, but Mary stood about the entrance to the tomb and wept. Here in this dark tomb so recently lay her lifeless Lord.

Wanting proof that the tomb really was empty, she went down to it and saw a strange sight. She saw two angels in white garments, one sitting at the head, the other at the foot, where the Body of Jesus had been placed. They asked her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" She answered them with the words which she had said to the Apostles, "They have taken my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." At that moment, she turned around and saw the Risen Jesus standing near the grave, but she did not recognize Him.

He asked Mary, “Woman, why weepest thou? Whom dost thou seek?” She answered thinking that she was seeing the gardener, “Sir, if thou hast taken him, tell where thou hast put Him, and I will take Him away.”

Then she recognized the Lord’s voice. This was the voice she heard in those days and years, when she followed the Lord through all the cities and places where He preached. He spoke her name, and she gave a joyful shout, “Rabbi” (Teacher).

Respect and love, fondness and deep veneration, a feeling of thankfulness and recognition at His Splendor as great Teacher, all came together in this single outcry. She was able to say nothing more and she threw herself down at the feet of her Teacher to wash them with tears of joy. But the Lord said to her: “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and tell them: “I ascend to My Father, and your Father; to My God and to your God.”

She came to herself and again ran to the Apostles, to do the will of Him sending her to preach. Again she ran into the house, where the Apostles still remained in dismay, and proclaimed to them the joyous message, “I have seen the Lord!” This was the first preaching in the world about the Resurrection.

The Apostles proclaimed the Glad Tidings to the world, but she proclaimed it to the Apostles themselves. Holy Scripture does not tell us about the life of Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection of Christ, but it is impossible to doubt, that if in the terrifying minutes of Christ’s Crucifixion she was at the foot of His Cross with His All-Pure Mother and Saint John, she must have stayed with them during the happier time after the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. Thus in the Acts of the Apostles Saint Luke writes that all the Apostles with one mind stayed in prayer and supplication, with certain women and Mary the Mother of Jesus and His brethren.

Holy Tradition testifies that when the Apostles departed from Jerusalem to preach to all the ends of the earth, then Mary Magdalene also went with them. A daring woman, whose heart was full of reminiscence of the Resurrection, she went beyond her native borders and went to preach in pagan Rome. Everywhere she proclaimed to people about Christ and His teaching. When many did not believe that Christ is risen, she repeated to them what she had said to the Apostles on the radiant morning of the Resurrection: “I have seen the Lord!” With this message she went all over Italy.

Tradition relates that in Italy Mary Magdalene visited Emperor Tiberias (14-37 A.D.) and proclaimed to him Christ’s Resurrection. According to Tradition, she brought him a red egg as a symbol of the Resurrection, a symbol of new life with the words: “Christ is Risen!” Then she told the emperor that in his Province of Judea the unjustly condemned Jesus the Galilean, a holy man, a miracleworker, powerful before God and all mankind, had been executed at the instigation of the Jewish High Priests, and the sentence confirmed by the procurator appointed by Tiberias, Pontius Pilate.

Mary repeated the words of the Apostles, that we are redeemed from the vanity of life not with perishable silver or gold, but rather by the precious Blood of Christ.

Thanks to Mary Magdalene the custom to give each other paschal eggs on the day of the Radiant Resurrection of Christ spread among Christians over all the world. In one ancient Greek manuscript, written on parchment, kept in the monastery library of Saint Athanasius near Thessalonica, is a prayer read on the day of Holy Pascha for the blessing of eggs and cheese. In it is indicated that the igumen in passing out the blessed eggs says to the brethren: “Thus have we received from the holy Fathers, who preserved this custom from the very time of the holy Apostles, therefore the holy Equal of the Apostles Mary Magdalene first showed believers the example of this joyful offering.”

Mary Magdalene continued her preaching in Italy and in the city of Rome itself. Evidently, the Apostle Paul has her in mind in his Epistle to the Romans (16: 6), where together with other ascetics of evangelic preaching he mentions Mary (Mariam), who as he expresses “has bestowed much labor on us.” Evidently, she extensively served the Church in its means of subsistence and its difficulties, being exposed to dangers, and sharing with the Apostles the labors of preaching.

According to Church Tradition, she remained in Rome until the arrival of the Apostle Paul, and for two more years following his departure from Rome after the first court judgment upon him. From Rome, Saint Mary Magdalene, already bent with age, moved to Ephesus where the holy Apostle John unceasingly labored. There the saint finished her earthly life and was buried.

Her holy relics were transferred in the ninth century to Constantinople, and placed in the monastery Church of Saint Lazarus. In the era of the Crusader campaigns they were transferred to Italy and placed at Rome under the altar of the Lateran Cathedral. Part of the relics of Mary Magdalene are said to be in Provage, France near Marseilles, where over them at the foot of a steep mountain a splendid church is built in her honor.

The Orthodox Church honors the holy memory of Saint Mary Magdalene, the woman called by the Lord Himself from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.

Formerly immersed in sin and having received healing, she sincerely and irrevocably began a new life and never wavered from that path. Mary loved the Lord Who called her to a new life. She was faithful to Him not only when He was surrounded by enthusiastic crowds and winning recognition as a miracle-worker, but also when all the disciples deserted Him in fear and He, humiliated and crucified, hung in torment upon the Cross. This is why the Lord, knowing her faithfulness, appeared to her first, and esteemed her worthy to be first to proclaim His Resurrection.

<u>Self-Examination Before Confession</u>
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| ● Have I prayed every day? |
| ● Have I resisted praying or going to church with my family? |
| ● Have I payed attention during church? |
| ● Have I asked God to help me whenever I have been tempted to sin? |
| ● Have I asked God to help me do what is right? |
| ● Have I used bad language? |
| ● Have I been obedient and respectful to my parents? |
| ● Have I talked back to parents, teachers or other adults? |
| ● Have I pouted and been moody? |
| ● Have I been arrogant, stubborn or rebellious? |
| ● Have I lied or been deceitful to anyone? |
| ● Have I been selfish toward my parents, siblings, teachers, friends, or schoolmates? |
| ● Have I gotten angry with anyone? Have I hit anyone? |
| ● Have I held grudges or not forgiven others? |
| ● Have I performed my responsibilities, such as homework and household chores? |
| ● Have I been helpful and affectionate toward my family? |
| ● Have I been kind and generous with my friends? |
| ● Have I gossiped about others? Have I slandered anyone? Have I told lies about others? Have I mocked or made fun of others? |
| ● Have I lied or cheated? |
| ● Have I stolen anything? |
| ● Have I gotten drunk or used any recreational drugs? |
| ● Have I been jealous of anyone? |
| ● Have I willfully looked at impure images, thought impure thoughts, or participated in impure conversations or actions? |
| ● When my conscience told me to do something good, did I do it or did I ignore it? |
| ● Have I done anything else that I am feeling guilty about? |

Lesson Two: The Meek

REVIEW

Yesterday we talked about the poor in spirit and those who mourn. What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

The poor in spirit are those who humble themselves before God, recognizing that they are nothing apart from Him. To be poor in spirit is to rely completely on the Lord. Poverty of spirit involves detaching ourselves from worldly things and material possessions. It requires us to look at ourselves honestly and to recognize our lowliness and sinfulness before God. Poverty of spirit also requires us to humble ourselves before the people around us.

And what did we learn about mourning?

Those who mourn are those who realize the awfulness of their sin and are genuinely sorry for it. Mourning is the natural result of a proper self-assessment. Unlike shame or despair, mourning leads us to repentance. When we mourn over our sins and repent of them, we will be comforted by the forgiveness and healing of Christ.

And what are some ways that we can cultivate poverty of spirit and blessed mourning?

We can grow in these areas by practicing gratitude for the gifts God has given us and making sacrifices (through fasting, almsgiving, etc.) to detach ourselves from worldly things. We can practice self-examination often and go to confession regularly to seek God's mercy and help.

Today we are going to be talking about the third beatitude, meekness.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Let's take a look at the following verse about meekness.

OPENING VERSE

James 3:13, 17-18: Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. [...] The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

DISCUSSION & DEFINITION

What is James talking about here? What does he say makes a person wise? By what is wisdom characterized?

A wise person shows others what kind of person he or she is by living a righteous life and living it with meekness. In order to do this, a person must be pure, peaceful, sincere, certain (or confident) in his or her faith, and open to reason.

Last year, we talked about gentleness, a fruit of the spirit. The word for “gentleness” in Greek is actually the same exact word for “meekness.” What do you remember about gentleness? A lot of times we think of meekness as being a lot like weakness, but do the words “sincere” and “certain” and “pure” sound very weak? How else might we describe meekness or gentleness?

A gentle person isn't weak at all. A gentle person is actually very strong and confident, but he is careful about how he goes about exerting that strength. A gentle person makes sure not to get angry and not to be harsh but to show confidence in a way that attracts others instead of repelling them.

The meek are those who express their strength through gentleness. They are those who are secure in Christ and self-controlled—or, rather, “Christ-controlled.”

BIBLE STORY

Younger Campers: Have campers act out stories from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson Two, located in the back of this lesson. **note, this story is a bit graphic, so use your discretion about whether or not to have them act it out, and only choose the most mature volunteers if you do.*

The Trial of Jesus: Luke 22, Matthew 26-27

And [Jesus] withdrew from [his disciples] about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, [...] there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. [...] Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the [chief] priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. [...] Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.’” And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. [...]” Then the high priest tore his robes, and [...] they spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him, ⁶⁸ saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” [...] Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly. [...] Pilate said to them, “What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified.” And he said, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified.” [...] So then Pilate [...] having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

DISCUSSION

What happened in the garden? How does Jesus pray? What is he feeling?

Jesus asks the Father if there is any way that he may avoid the death that is before him. Yet He says, “Not my will but yours be done.” Even though he is in “agony,” as Luke writes, he is completely surrendered to the will of God. He is willing to face anything that the Father sets before Him.

How does Jesus respond to the chief priest and to Pilate during his trial? What is strange about this? What could Jesus have done instead? What does this say about him?

Jesus is, for the most part, silent during His trial. He does not get defensive. He does not get angry. He does not preach. He does not do anything to prove himself unworthy of the death he is about to undergo. This is especially strange because he is God! He could have done anything—loosed himself from his chains, performed a miracle in front of everyone watching, rightly defended himself, rightly condemned those who were demanding his crucifixion—and yet He chose to be silent, enduring, and unmoved.

Last year, we described gentleness, which is the same as meekness, as “strength under control.” This is exactly what Christ shows himself to be during his trial. He is the all-powerful God choosing to withhold his power so that the Father’s will for the world might be done!

Christ is a perfect examples of what it means to be meek—to be submitted to the Father and secure in Him. Now let’s talk a little bit more about meekness.

TALKING POINTS

1. Meekness, like poverty of spirit, requires humility. To be meek is be completely given over to the will of God and guided by the Holy Spirit.

- The meek, like the poor in spirit, know that they are nothing without Christ. They realize that they have no strength or wisdom of their own and that they must, therefore, rely instead upon the strength and wisdom of Christ to guide them and give them strength.
- When we look to Christ as our source of wisdom and guidance, we submit to Him out of obedience. We realize that whatever He commands of us is for our good and that His plans for us are better than our own. To be meek is to allow ourselves to be led only by the Holy Spirit and not by our own desires or ambitions or by the temptations of the world.
- When we submit to Christ, we not only rely upon His guidance, but we are also emboldened by His power and strength. Christ calls us to “take [His] yoke upon [us] and learn from [Him].” Like oxen yoked together to bear a heavy load—oxen are sometimes “yoked,” or fastened together with wooden boards, so that they can carry more by working together and in unison—we yoke ourselves to Christ, becoming united to Him. This union with Christ allows us to become stronger and more capable, to channel our strength and abilities to good purposes, to bear our burdens with ease, and to ultimately become more like Christ.

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart.
(Matthew 11:29, RSV)*

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:5-13, RSV)*

2. Meekness also requires boldness and confidence. Those who are meek are confident and secure in Christ, unaffected by the opinions, words, actions of others.

Younger Campers: Have campers play a game of Red Rover. Explain that the meek person is the one whose hands never break. They are strong, confident, and unaffected by anything that comes their way. Explain that, if we try to face the world on our own, relying on our own strength to get us by, we are bound to fall into sin and to become reactive to the world around us. However when we hold on to Christ, confident and secure in *His* ability to sustain and protect us, we too will remain strong and sure, able to withstand temptation and to respond to others' insults with patience and love.

- The meek realize that they are nothing without Christ but that, by uniting themselves to Him, they are everything with Him. By looking not to ourselves but to Christ as the source of our strength and our worth, we become confident and sure of ourselves in all circumstances.
- With this surety and confidence that we have in Christ, we are able to be completely steady and secure. In the face of harsh words or unloving actions, we can remain undisturbed. Rather than getting defensive, we willingly accept others' criticism, admitting our own weaknesses and need for Christ's mercy. Rather than seeking revenge, we respond to the mistreatment of others with patience, compassion, and love.
- The meek are not only stable in the face of mistreatment but they are also stable in the face of temptation. They are self-controlled—or one might say instead that they are “Christ-controlled,” having submitted themselves wholly to Him. The meek have control over their tempers and tongues, being “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.” They also exercise self-control in the face of temptation and sin.

*For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written,
“Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.”
(1 Corinthians 1:25-31, RSV)*

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
(Philippians 4:13, RSV)*

*Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
(James 1:19-21, RSV)*

Choose Your Own Adventure Game

Situation for younger campers: You just got a new gaming system (or doll set or whatever you think would connect with your class) for your birthday.

Choice 1: Do you leave it sitting out, or do you hide it away where no one else can find it?

Meek: Leave it sitting out.

Not meek: Hide it away.

Choice 2 (meek): If they choose to leave it out, ask if they hide it away after they catch their sibling fiddling with the box, though their sibling swears they weren't going to open it.

Meek: Continue to leave it out.

Not meek: Hide it away. (this choice sends them to the not meek path, picking up at choice 2)

Choice 3(meek): If they still choose to leave it out, ask what they do when they find their sibling playing with it, despite you purposely asking them not to.

Meek: Rather than getting upset, sitting down and playing with them—FINAL RESULT: your mom walks in, sees the two of you calmly sharing and playing, and rewards you with a kitten (or candy or fruit or a trip to the park or whatever motivates your campers).

Not meek: Freaking out and getting in a fight with them—FINAL RESULT: your mom hears you fighting, comes in, and grounds you both for the rest of the week.

Choice 3(not meek): If they choose to hide it at this point, ask what they do when they find their sibling has found the hiding place and is getting it out. Do you get angry with them, or do you ask if they want to play with it with you?

Meek: Ask if they want to play—FINAL RESULT: you discover that it's more fun to play with someone else, and get more enjoyment out of it than you would have if you'd insisted on playing alone.

Not meek: Get angry with them—your parent(s) hear the fight and take the gaming system/doll system/whatever it is back.

Choice 2(not meek): If they choose to hide it, ask them what happens the first time they bring it out to play and their sibling asks to play with them, even though you had previously told them that you wanted to play alone the first time.

Meek: Letting them play with you.

Not meek: Telling them no and then ignoring them.

Choice 3 (meek): If they choose to let them play, ask what happens when their mom comes in and expresses surprise that they're letting their sibling play with them. Do they just shrug and let the statement stand, or do they make a comment about how they had hidden it in the first place because they didn't want to share.

Meek: Let the statement stand—FINAL RESULT: your mom praises you for sharing your gift, and lets you play for an hour longer than she usually does.

Not meek: Complaining about this being why you hid it so you wouldn't have to share—FINAL RESULT: your sibling feels hurt, begins to cry, and your mom gives you a lecture on sharing and being kind.

Choice 3 (not meek): If they choose to tell them no and ignore them ask what they do if their sibling starts to cry/complain. Do they continue ignoring them, or do they relent and let them play?

Meek: Let them play—FINAL RESULT: they have fun together, and avoid the lecture that they would have gotten otherwise.

Not meek: Continue ignoring them—FINAL RESULT: their sibling throws a tantrum, and they get a lecture and grounded from their game/doll set/whatever it is for a few days.

Situation for older campers: You find out that your best friend has been spreading really malicious rumors about you.

Choice 1: Do you gently pull them aside and ask why they've been doing this, or do you angrily confront them?

Meek: Pull them aside.

Not meek: Angrily confront them.

Choice 2 (meek): They tell you that they don't want to be your friend and that they think you're dumb and that no one likes you. Do you accept what they say, tell them that you're sorry they feel that way and ask if there's anything you can do, or do you storm off in a huff?

Meek: Accept what they say, ask if there's anything you can do.

Not meek: Storm off.

Choice 3 (meek): They respond to your question by repeating it back to you in a mocking voice. Do you lose your temper and yell at them, or do you explain that you're not trying to make them angry but are just trying to understand?

Meek: Explain that you're not trying to make them angry and just want to understand—FINAL RESULT: they calm down, the two of you talk things out, they stop spreading rumors, and your friendship is saved.

Not meek: You losing your temper turns into a yelling match and physical fight—FINAL RESULT: You both get suspended because your principal walks by and sees you.

Choice 3 (not meek): You storm off, but they continue yelling insults after you. Do you turn around and yell back, or do you just leave the situation?

Meek: Just leave—FINAL RESULT: your friend texts you later, apologizing for yelling, and asks if you guys can talk. You do, reach understanding, they stop spreading rumors and your friendship continues.

Not meek: Yell back—FINAL RESULT: the yelling match leads to you both saying horribly unkind things that you don't mean, and it ends your friendship.

Choice 2 (not meek): The two of you get into a yelling match and your mutual friend group hears and comes over. Do you try to get them to take your side, or do you suggest that the two of you continue the conversation later?

Meek: Suggest that you continue the conversation later.

Not meek: Try to get your mutual friends to take your side.

Choice 3 (meek): They don't want to wait until later, they want to have it out right now. Do you agree but ask that you do it privately, or do you refuse and tell them that they're being unreasonable?

Meek: Agree, but ask to talk in private—FINAL RESULT: they agree to not argue in front of everyone, and you go and have a very tense conversation, but one that ends with the two of you reaching an understanding.

Not meek: Refuse and call them unreasonable—FINAL RESULT: they take offense at you calling them unreasonable and retaliate by leaving the conversation, continuing to spread rumors, and the two of you never really speak again.

Choice 3 (not meek): You try to get your mutual friends to take your side, and they do. Now everyone is ganging up on your best friend; do you egg them on and tear down your friend, or do you realize that this is going too far and tell everyone to stop?

Meek: Realize it's going too far and make everyone stop—FINAL RESULT: your best friend is taken aback by how you defend them even though they've been spreading rumors about you, realize that they do care about you, apologize, and you reconcile with them.

Not meek: Egg them on—FINAL RESULT: all of the verbal abuse being thrown at your best friend

makes them feel awful, they leave as fast as they can, and then avoid both you and your friend group from then on.

3. *It is through this example of extreme patience, mercy, gentleness, and self-control that the meek express their strength, exert their influence, and shine as lights in a darkened world.*

Marshmallow Relay

Directions: Split the campers into two or three groups, and give them each a handful of marshmallows that they have to transport from one side of the room to the other using forks as tongs. The team who handles their marshmallows the most gently and are thus the least dented then gets to eat their marshmallows.

Debrief: Use this game to explain to the campers that meekness requires restraint of our own will. The more we submit to God's will for us and rely upon His perfect strength, the greater the influence we will have on the world. Also point out their reward, and discuss how they think meekness could bring sweetness and joy into our lives.

- By responding to others the way Christ responds to us—and by living the way Christ lived—we humbly and quietly show Christ to the world. By peacefully accepting the criticism of other people, we radiate a confidence that cannot be found in anything less than an all-powerful God. By responding to mistreatment with forgiveness and love, we become examples of the mercy and forgiveness that is found in Christ alone. And, finally, by bearing the burdens of temptation peacefully and without giving in, we glorify the God who faithfully enables us to endure until the end.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Romans 12:19-22, RSV)

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
(Proverbs 15:1, RSV)

Younger Campers: Read the stories of St. Doulas the Passion-Bearer of Egypt, St. John the Russian, and St. Monica of Hippo, located in the back of this lesson.

APPLICATION

Now that we have talked a little more about meekness, what do you think we, as Christians today, can do to cultivate it?

- **Asking the Lord for guidance and strength** reminds us that we cannot do anything on our own but are in great need of His wisdom, direction, and help. This helps us to become obedient

to Him—to align our will with God’s will such that all we want is what He wants for us—and to grow in confidence as we rely on His strength to guide and secure us.

- **Praying for the people who hurt us or make us angry** helps us to respond to them with compassion and love rather than retaliation and defensiveness.
- **Holding our tongues**, though easier said than done, actually calms our tempers rather than stirring them up. If we resolve to let something go quickly, before we’ve expressed it out loud (or before rehashing it repeatedly in our minds), it will cease to bother us.
- **Fasting** trains us to exercise self-control and submission to the Lord not just in the area of food but also in other areas of our life.

REVIEW

Let’s review what we learned today. What does it mean to be meek? And what did we learn about meekness?

Meekness requires humility, submission, and obedience to Christ. To be meek is to be completely given over to the will of God and guided by the Holy Spirit. The meek are also bold and confident. They are secure in Christ, unaffected by the opinions, words, and actions of others and able to resist the temptations of the world. It is through their patience, mercy, gentleness, and self-control that the meek express their strength, exert their influence, and show Christ to the world.

FOR REFERENCE

Humility and Submission

Matthew 18:1-4, RSV: At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Luke 14:7-11): Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, “When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet (John 13:3-5, 12-17): Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. [...] When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you

also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.

The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:2-7): For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

It is a great good to be given over to the will of God. Then the Lord alone is in the soul, and no other thought, and she prays to God with a pure mind. When the soul is entirely given over to the will of God, then the Lord Himself begins to guide her, and the soul learns directly from God [...] A proud man does not will to live according to the will of God. He likes to direct himself, and does not understand that man does not have enough understanding to direct himself without God.

+ *St. Silouan the Athonite*

Whoever bears even a little grace in himself joyfully submits himself to all direction. He knows that God directs even the heavens and the netherworld, and himself, and his business, and everything in the world, and therefore he is always at peace.

+ *St. Silouan the Athonite*

Confidence in Christ

Meekness is an unchangeable state of mind which remains the same in honor and dishonor. Meekness is the rock overlooking the sea of irritability which breaks all the waves that dash against it, remaining itself unmoved. Meekness is the buttress of patience, the mother of love and the foundation of wisdom, for it is said, "The Lord will teach the meek His way" (Psalm 24:9). It prepares the forgiveness of sins; it is boldness in prayer, an abode of the Holy Spirit. "But to whom shall I look," says the Lord, "to him who is meek and quiet and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). In meek hearts the Lord finds rest, but a turbulent soul is the seat of the devil.

+ *St. John Climacus*

Hebrews 13:20-21, RSV: Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 7:24-25, RSV: Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

Happy is the man in whom there is love for God, for he bears God within himself. The one in whom there is love is with God, above all things. Whoever has love in himself does not fear. He is never mad at anyone, nor does he exalt himself above anyone. He does not calumniate anyone, nor does he listen to the calumniator. He does not compete with anyone, is not jealous, does not rejoice in the fall of another, does

not slander the fallen, but sympathizes with him and helps him. He does not disdain his brother who is fallen into need, but helps him and is ready to die for him. Whoever has love fulfills the will of God. □

+ *St. Ephraim the Syrian* □

Gentle Strength

Romans 12:14-18, RSV: Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.

1 Peter 3:1-5, RSV: Wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior. Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothing, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands.

2 Timothy 2:23-26: Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Ephesians 4:1-3, RSV: I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Matthew 5:38-42, RSV: You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.

Matthew 10:16, RSV: Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Romans 12:9-12, RSV: Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

If we are opposed, we will be humble. If anyone is arrogant with us, we will be helpful. If anyone torments or oppresses us by making fun of us or swearing at us, we will not answer in kind, so as not to destroy ourselves through vengeance.

+ *St John Chrysostom*

Whoever has known the love of God loves the whole world and never murmurs against his fate, for the burden of sorrow for the sake of God gains eternal joy.

+ *St. Silouan the Athonite*

As fire is not extinguished by fire, so anger is not conquered by anger, but is made even more inflamed. But meekness often subdues even the most beastly enemies, softens them and pacifies them.

+ *St. Tikhon of Zadonsk*

Inasmuch as you pray with all your soul for the one who has slandered you, so much will God reveal the truth to them who have believed the slander.

+ *St. Maximus the Confessor*

We must receive the one who curses us as a messenger from God, rebuking our hidden evil thoughts, so that we, seeing our thoughts with exactness, might correct ourselves. For we do not know how many hidden evils we have; Only a perfect man can understand all of his own shortcomings.

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+ *St. Mark the Ascetic*

Love sinners, but hate their deeds, and do not disdain sinners for their failings, so that you yourself do not fall into the temptation in which they abide [...]. Do not be angry at anyone and do not hate anyone, neither for their faith, nor for their shameful deeds [...] Do not foster hatred for the sinner, for we are all guilty... Hate his sins, and pray for him, so that you may be made like unto Christ, who had no dislike for sinners, but prayed for them.

+ *St. Isaac the Syrian*

Bible Story Scripts: Lesson Two

The Trial of Jesus (Luke 22, Matthew 26-27)

Characters: Narrator, Jesus, Crowd (4), Caiaphas, Pilate, Soldiers (2)

Narrator: Jesus distanced Himself from His disciples about a stone's throw and knelt there, praying.

Jesus (*kneeling*): Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me. Yet not My will, but Your will, be done.

Narrator: Then a messenger from heaven appeared to strengthen Him. And in His anguish, He prayed even more intensely, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When He rose from prayer and returned to the disciples, the sound of a crowd could be heard in the distance, and as the crowd came into view, it was clear that Judas was leading them. They grabbed Him at this point and took Him away to the high priest's home.

Narrator: The high priest and his council of advisors first produced false evidence against Jesus—false evidence meant to justify Jesus' execution. But even though many men were willing to lie, the council couldn't come up with the evidence it wanted. Finally, two men stood up.

Man in the Crowd #1: Look, He said, "I can destroy God's temple and rebuild it in three days."

Man in the Crowd #2: What more evidence do we need?

Narrator: Then Caiaphas the high priest stood up and addressed Jesus.

Caiaphas: Aren't You going to respond to these charges? What exactly are these two men accusing You of?

Narrator: But Jesus remained silent.

Caiaphas (*to Jesus*): Under a sacred oath before the living God, tell us plainly: are You the Anointed One, the Son of God?

Jesus: You have said so.

Narrator: The high priest tore his robes. Then they spat in His face and hit Him. Some of them smacked Him, slapped Him across the cheeks, and jeered.

Man in the Crowd #3: Well, Anointed One, prophesy for us, if You can—who hit You?

Man in the Crowd #4: And who is about to hit You next?

Narrator: Now Jesus was standing before the governor, Pilate.

Pilate: Are You the King of the Jews?

Jesus: So you say.

Narrator: The chief priests and the elders stood and poured out their accusations:

Man in the Crowd #1: You're crazy!

Man in the Crowd #2: You're a traitor!

Man in the Crowd #3: You're no King!

Man in the Crowd #2: You're no Savior!

Narrator: Jesus stood in the stream of accusations, but He did not respond.

Pilate: Do You hear these accusations they are making against You?

Narrator: Still Jesus said nothing, which Pilate found rather astounding—no protests, no defense, nothing.

Pilate: What would you have me do with this Jesus, whom some call the Anointed One?

Crowd (*shouting*): Crucify Him!

Pilate: Why? What crime has this man committed?

Crowd (*responding with a shout*): Crucify Him!

Narrator: So Pilate had Jesus flogged and handed over to be crucified.

Narrator: The governor's soldiers took Jesus into a great hall, gathered a great crowd, and stripped Jesus of His clothes, draping Him in a bold scarlet cloak, the kind that soldiers sometimes wore. They gathered some thorny vines, wove them into a crown, and perched that crown upon His head. They stuck a reed in His right hand, and then they mockingly knelt before him as if He were a king.

Soldiers (*mockingly*): Hail, the King of the Jews!

Narrator: They spat on Him and whipped Him on the head with His scepter of reeds, and when they had their fill, they pulled off the bold scarlet cloak, dressed Him in His own simple clothes, and led Him off to be crucified.

Saint Stories: Lesson Two

St. Doulas the Passion-Bearer of Egypt

Saint Doulas the Passion-Bearer was a monk at one of the Egyptian monasteries. He distinguished himself by his meekness, humility and obedience. For twenty years he endured the mockery, abuse and contempt of several of the monastic brethren. At first it was difficult for him to bear up and humbly endure the insult, but eventually he reached such a degree of passionlessness (apatheia), that he pitied his detractors and prayed for them with all his heart.

At the end of his life Saint Doulas underwent temptation. A certain monk stole some church vessels and hid them. When the Igumen and elders of the monastery started to investigate the theft, they accused Saint Doulas of this sin, because on that day he had not appeared at the Vigil service. Saint Doulas had always come to church before this, but he had been ill that day, and was unable to attend the service. They led Saint Doulas to the elders, to whom he protested his innocence, but his enemies slandered him, saying that they were witnesses of his sin. When he saw that they did not believe his words, Saint Doulas did not argue but said, "Forgive me, holy Fathers, I am a sinner." The Igumen ordered that the innocent Doulas be stripped of his monastic garb and dressed in secular clothes. Sobbing bitterly, Saint Doulas prayed, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, because of Thy Holy Name I clothed myself in monastic garb, but now, through my sins, it is stripped from me."

Saint Doulas was placed in chains, and the steward demanded to know where the church vessels were hidden, but the innocent passion-bearer only repeated, "Forgive me, I have sinned."

Then they turned him over to the civil authorities for trial and subjected him to torture, but the saint repeated, "I have neither silver, nor the lost vessels." The city eparch asked the monks what to do with him, since they had delivered him over to the secular court. They answered, "Do with him as the laws prescribe." The saint was sentenced to have both his hands cut off. Before the execution of the sentence the governor said, "Tell us where the vessels are and you shall go free." The saint answered, "Governor, do you want me to confess something that I did not do? I do not want to tell lies about myself, since every lie is from the devil." They took the saint to the place of execution. Finally, the perpetrator of the theft experienced remorse and went to the Igumen to confess that he had committed the crime.

After twenty years of exile and humiliation, Saint Doulas was allowed to return to the monastery. The monks began to ask forgiveness of the saint. Not only did he not bear them malice, but he was even grateful that they had given him the opportunity to wipe out his sins by enduring guiltless suffering. The saint asked the Lord to pardon his accusers.

After three days they found the saint had departed to the Lord while kneeling at prayer. His body was locked in the cathedral, and burial was delayed until the arrival of the Igumen and brethren of a nearby monastery. When everyone had gathered and gone into the church, the body of the innocent passion-bearer was not in the cathedral. Only his clothes and sandals remained.

Thus, those who had accused Saint Doulas of sin, were shown to be unworthy of burying his holy body.

St. John the Russian

St. John was born in the south of Russia of pious Orthodox parents. He was still young when, in 1711, he took part in the battle against the Turks. Sharing the unhappy fate of many other Russian soldiers, the Saint was captured and sold as a slave to a Turkish cavalry commander from the village of Procopion near Caesarea in Asia Minor. Fanatic in their Moslem beliefs, the Turks inflicted cruel tortures upon their Christian slaves in trying to force them to renounce their faith. While some succumbed to this form of persuasion, many preferred to suffer death and a whole multitude of martyrs was thus added to the heavenly choir. In their misguided zeal the Turks would also kidnap the sons of Christians and raise them as fanatical Moslem soldiers. Procopion was the army-camp of these Christian-hating Janissaries and the new slave of the Turkish Agha became a target of their derisions. But neither their insults nor the beatings of his Turkish master were able to shake the faith of the pious Russian youth who confessed outright that he would sooner die than lose what he treasured above all--the holy Orthodox faith.

The blessed John was assigned to work in the stable where he was also told to sleep. Recalling the lowly Bethlehem cave and The manger where the Saviour of the world first lay His head, the Saint rejoiced in his rude dwelling place. In his humility he regarded his dark corner of the stable as a little paradise where he could freely offer prayer and praise to the true God. The unshakable firmness of his faith, his patience, fortitude, and gentleness of spirit, gradually won the hearts of the Agha and his wife who offered the meek stable boy to sleep in a small room near the hayloft. John, however, preferred to remain in the stable where he could toil more assiduously in the ascetic life, bringing his body into subjection to the spirit according to the Apostle's command. He ate very sparingly and spent long hours in prayer with the Psalms of David continually on his lips. Weekly he prepared himself to partake of the Most Holy Mysteries in a nearby church, for he knew that without the strength of Christ he was powerless to persevere on the path of the true Faith. At night he would secretly go and keep vigil in the narthex of the church. The Lord rewarded the labors of His faithful servant and through him bestowed blessings also upon his Turkish master who became one of the wealthy and powerful men of Procopion. The Agha understood the cause of his new prosperity and did not shrink from telling it to his fellow citizens.

Once the Agha undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca, the city most sacred to the Moslems. While he was away, his wife invited friends and relatives to pray for the Agha's safe return from such an arduous journey. As they were getting ready to eat, the mistress turned to John, who was serving at the table, and said, "How much pleasure your master would have, Gavan, if he were here now and ate this pilaff with us!" The pilaff, a common grain dish of the Middle East, was a favorite with the Agha. Wishing the best for his master and firmly believing in the almighty power of God, John asked for a plate full of pilaff from his mistress, saying that he would send it to his master in Mecca. The guests laughed but the mistress asked the cook to comply with the youth's request, thinking that he would take it to some poor Christian family as was his custom.

Those who are familiar with the Gospel should not be astonished at what happened next, for did the Lord not say that faith as small as a mustard seed is enough to move mountains? Strong in his faith, the blessed one returned with the plate of pilaff to the stable and, as he was petitioning the Lord, in answer to his firm entreaty, the plate disappeared. What was the amazement of the entire household when the Agha finally returned from Mecca bringing with him the copper plate which had held the food. He had been equally astonished to discover the steaming plate of pilaff upon his return from the Mosque to the locked room where he was staying. Still greater was his confusion when he realized that the copper plate was engraved with his initials--just as all the vessels in his house. "For the sake of Allah, I cannot understand how it came even unto Mecca and who brought it!" When his wife told him of John's request, they recognized the strange occurrence to be a miracle of God, and henceforth all considered John as a righteous man who had found favor with God.

Once again the Agha and his wife tried to persuade the blessed one to change his dwelling place, but the Saint preferred to remain among the animals, willingly fulfilling his duties and continuing steadfast in his ascetic struggles.

He persevered in this manner of life until, after a few years, he became ill. Foreseeing his end, he called for a priest and asked to partake of the Holy Mysteries. Fearing the fanaticism of the Turks, the priest did not want to bring the Holy Mysteries openly to the stable, but receiving wisdom from above, he thought to hollow out an apple; lining the cavity with beeswax, he placed the Holy Mysteries inside and was thus able to safely bring Communion to the Saint. Upon receiving the immaculate Body and Blood of the Lord, the blessed one surrendered his holy soul into the hands of God Whom he loved so much. He reposed on the 27 of May, 1730, having spent some forty years in this temporal vale of sin and sorrow.

The Saint was given a Christian burial by order of the Agha who, as a token of his love and great respect for the Saint, gave an expensive cloth to cover his relics. Three years later a light appeared over the tomb which was seen by many. At the same time, the Saint appeared in a dream to his father confessor revealing that it was the will of God that his relics be exhumed, for his body was incorrupt. Until 1924 the relics were kept in the church of St. George there in Procopion. When, however, the exchange of population took place between Greece and Turkey, and many of the Christian inhabitants of Procopion were resettled on the island of Euboia, the relics of their beloved St. John were also moved and were received with great acclaim and veneration by the Greeks who built a majestic temple in his honor there in the village of New Procopion. To this day, streams of pious Greek pilgrims make their way to this village on the island of Euboia, where the Saint answers the faith of their earnest petitions with his strong and quick intercession before the throne of God.

The Saint performed many wonders even after his blessed repose. A descendent of the Agha told many of the following miracle: "My children would not live except for a short time, and would die while yet infants. Their unfortunate mother, after she had lost hope in the wisdom of medicine, fled without my knowledge to the relics of the slave John, so that he might grant her a little child which would not die while yet young, so that we also might rejoice to see it as a young man or even a young girl In truth the righteous John heard the supplication of my wife. God granted us a strong little boy whom we called, as you know, *Kole Guvan Oglu* (that is, "Son of the Slave John"), and he lives through the power of God and the prayers of John even until today."

Several times St. John has appeared in dreams and visions warning of impending dangers. Once he warned some Greek school children that the roof was about to fall; they had time enough to jump underneath their desks and when the roof fell, its beams came down upon the desks without striking even one of the children.

More recently we have heard about the miraculous healings of two severe cases of meningitis – one a 19 year old shepherd boy in southern Greece and the other a 3-year old boy in London.

Today a part of the right hand of St. John is enshrined in a special silver reliquary in the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, where many people come to venerate it and to ask the prayers of this simple Confessor of the Christian faith, knowing that the Lord – Who resisteth the proud – hears speedily the prayers of the meek.

St. Monica of Hippo

St. Monica was born in 332 in or near the North African town of Tagaste. Her parents were native Africans and were devout Christians. In addition to the careful nurturing of her parents, Monica benefited as a child from the vigilant attention of an elderly nurse. An excellent Christian and respected by her heads, she disciplined her charges wisely if sometimes inclined towards "holy severity." The entire household was imbued with a rare atmosphere of Christian piety, and it is not surprising that Monica grew to be a sober and virtuous maiden with a well-developed habit of prayer.

One would have expected Monica to consecrate herself wholly to God in the monastic life, or to become united to a like God-fearing and virtuous husband. Instead, as soon as she reached marriageable age, she was betrothed to Patricius, a pagan, a man of choleric temperament, and dissolute morals. Patricius was a native of Tagaste, and twice Monica's twenty-two years. Patricius was not without generous qualities, but these were largely dormant and became animate only later, in response to Monica's unflagging prayers and exemplary Christian behavior. Whatever Monica felt towards her betrothed, she was obedient to her parents' will, consoling herself with the thought that here was a lost soul that was being entrusted to her, and she determined to sacrifice herself to the task of guiding this soul onto the path to salvation. Nevertheless, she could not have anticipated just what this sacrifice was to entail.

In the days and weeks after the marriage, she became increasingly and painfully aware of the abyss that lay between her and her husband. He was annoyed by her prayers; he found her charity excessive; he could not understand her desire to visit the sick; he could not fathom her love for slaves. At every step in her Christian walk, Monica met with countless hindrances. As a young bride who had spent her life in a Christian atmosphere, where the very purpose of existence centered upon the love of God and neighbor, Monica suddenly found herself in an alien environment. Her husband, although he loved her in his own way, was a stranger, not a soul-mate; and her cantankerous mother-in-law, who lived with them, only reinforced his fits of anger with her own. These were prompted by the slanders of the maidservants, whose animosity towards their young mistress intensified an already painful loneliness. Even more grievous was Patricius' infidelity, for what wife, especially one raised, as Monica was, with high standards of chastity and marital devotion, can countenance the defilement of her marriage bed?

Prayer was Monica's strength, and the joys of motherhood further served to mitigate the bitterness of her circumstances. She bore two sons and a daughter, whom she nurtured in the faith with great diligence, but it was a source of great sorrow to her that Patricius would not permit them to be baptized.

As young as she was, Monica bore her cross with remarkable fortitude and spiritual maturity. She realized that her husband's weaknesses and moral failings stemmed from the fact that he had not yet been enlightened by the Gospel, that he lacked the grace of God. She shed bitter tears in his absence, but she knew that a man who did not love God could not be expected to be constant in his affection towards one of His creatures. With firm hope, she prayed that God Himself would grant her husband faith and love for Him, which alone are able to inspire a man with the desire to lead a chaste life.

Monica knew that reproaches were counterproductive, and she tamed her husband's violent temper by her meekness and devotion. Other women, who endured blows from their husbands, asked Monica how it was that Patricius, whom they knew to be irascible, did not once strike her. Monica replied that instead of blaming their husbands they should blame their tongues, for "she had learnt not to challenge an angry husband, not in deed only, but not even in word." (IX:9)

Regardless of Patricius' religious indifference and often unchristian behavior, Monica was very attentive towards him, "whom she, the better obeyed, therein also obeying [God] Who hast so commanded" (I:11). Compelled at times to contradict him and to go against his will in what concerned the Faith, she was all the more meek and submissive to him in other matters. And although superior to her husband in education

and moral qualities, she made every effort not to reveal her advantage. She firmly believed that if the light of the Gospel was reflected in all her actions, then Patricius would eventually be persuaded of its power and its truth, and would submit to it more readily than if she attempted to persuade him with rational arguments.

Indeed, her Christian conduct acted like a soothing balm on Patricius' soul, and, without his realizing it, drew him gradually closer to the Faith. As Saint John Chrysostom wrote half a century later in his homily, *On Virginité*, the believing wife "will be able to save her husband by putting the Gospel into practice." This is precisely what Saint Monica did, winning over not only her husband but also her mother-in-law.

This fruit of her prayers, of her long-suffering, and of her steadfast application of the Gospel precepts took a long time to mature. It was only after sixteen years that Patricius was baptized. Nor did Monica enjoy for long her husband's company at the Lord's Supper, for he died only a year later, in 371. Nevertheless, her aim had been to sanctify her husband for eternal life, and, by the Grace of God, this she had achieved.

Throughout this time, she also worried about her son, Augustine, who had never been baptized and lived with a young woman in Carthage, with whom he had an illegitimate son. She prayed fervently for him, weeping daily over his lost soul. Augustine, however, continued on the path that led away from Christ.

While in Carthage, Augustine fell under the influence of the heretical Manichean sect. His mother was horrified and tried to turn him away from his error. She had a dream in which she was told to be patient and gentle with her son. Augustine, however, paid little attention to her arguments, and remained in his delusion for nine years. Saint Monica must have felt disheartened and disappointed, but she never gave up on him. She even tried to enlist the help of a bishop who had once been a Manichean himself, but he would not dispute with Augustine. He said he couldn't reason with the young man, because he was still attracted by the novelty of the heresy. He did reassure her, however, saying, "Go on your way, and God bless you, for it is not possible that the son of these tears should be lost."

Saint Monica went to Rome with Augustine when he lectured there in 383. Later, he received an appointment to Milan, where he met Saint Ambrose (December 7) and was greatly impressed by his preaching. Bishop Ambrose came to have a high regard for Saint Monica, and often congratulated Augustine on having such a virtuous mother.

One day Augustine was reading the New Testament in a garden, and came to Romans 13:12-14. There and then Augustine decided to "cast off the works of darkness," and to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." He was baptized on the eve of Pascha in 387.

After his baptism, Augustine and his mother planned to return to Africa. They stopped to rest in Ostia, where Saint Monica fell asleep in the Lord at the age of fifty-six. She was buried at Ostia, and her holy relics were transferred to the crypt of a church in the sixth century. Nine centuries later, Saint Monica's relics were translated to Rome.

Monica was present at her son Augustine's baptism at the hands of Saint Ambrose in Milan at Pascha, 387, and they were returning to Africa when they stopped to rest in the port city of Ostia. One evening they had a long conversation in which she said to him, "Son, for mine own part I have no further delight in anything in this life. What I do here any longer, and to what end I am here, I know not, now that my hopes in this world are accomplished" (IX:10). Indeed, she had excellently fulfilled her purpose in life, and, after a brief illness, God took her that she might receive her due reward with the saints in His eternal kingdom.

St. Monica is remembered for her prayerfulness for both her husband and her son. Augustine wrote in his Confessions the following prayer of thankfulness to God for his mother's steadfast love: "But you sent down your help from above and rescued my soul from the depths of this darkness because my mother, your faithful servant, wept to you for me, shedding more tears for my spiritual death than other mothers shed for the bodily death of a son. For in her faith and in the spirit which she had from you she looked on me as dead. You heard her and did not despise the tears which streamed down and watered the earth in every place where she bowed her head in prayer."

Lesson Three: **Those Who Hunger & Thirst After Righteousness**

REVIEW

Yesterday we talked about the meek. What does it mean to be meek? And what did we learn about meekness?

Meekness requires humility, submission, and obedience to Christ. To be meek is to be completely given over to the will of God and guided by the Holy Spirit. The meek are also bold and confident. They are secure in Christ, unaffected by the opinions, words, and actions of others, and able to resist the temptations of the world. It is through their patience, mercy, gentleness, and self-control that the meek express their strength, exert their influence, and show Christ to the world.

And what are some ways that we can cultivate meekness?

We can grow in meekness by asking the Lord for guidance and strength, by aligning our will with His, by praying for the people who hurt us, by holding our tongues, and by fasting, which helps us to exercise self-control in all areas of life.

Reverse Taboo Activity

Directions: Start the lesson with this activity; don't explain the purpose or which Beatitude the lesson will cover. This is a bit like Taboo, but in reverse; you (the teacher) know the words they'll need to figure out, and they have to discover them. Use words to do with this lesson, like righteousness, hunger, thirst, blessed, filled, holiness, want, etc. Use as many or as few of these words as you'd like, depending on how quickly they get them and how much time you want to use.

Debrief: Ask how they figured out each word (the goal is to guide them to the idea of curiosity), and relate wanting to figure out the words to wanting to get to know God better. Ask if they honestly want to learn about God and the faith, if they have questions but maybe don't know how to ask them or have ever generally felt curious about all this but not known who or how to ask. Discuss the fact that we all have an innate desire to grow closer to God, we just have to follow it, and let that lead into the lesson.

Today we are going to be talking about the fourth beatitude, hunger and thirst for righteousness.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

Let's take a look at the following verses to learn more about what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

OPENING VERSE

John 6:25-27, RSV: Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal.

Matthew 6:31-33, RSV: Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

DISCUSSION & DEFINITION

What is Jesus saying in these verses? What do they mean? What do you think it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness?

Jesus is reminding us that we shouldn't be striving after earthly things (and don't need to be worried about them) but that we should, instead, be striving for something eternal, which we can only find in Christ. He's also saying that, when we seek righteousness above anything else, we will be provided with everything we need. To hunger and thirst after righteousness is to lay aside our earthly goals and to seek after righteousness above anything else.

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are those who long for righteousness and holiness, continually seeking Christ as their true source of nourishment and life.

Let's read (or act out) a story to help us learn more about what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

BIBLE STORY

Younger Campers: Have campers act out story from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson Three, located in the back of this lesson.

The Story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:5-42):

So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.” Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered him, “I have no

husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.” The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.” Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, “What do you wish?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” [...] Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

DISCUSSION

What happened in this story? Who did Christ meet at the well, and what did they talk about?

Jesus met a Samaritan woman the well. He asked her for a drink. They got into a discussion about “living water,” and Jesus subsequently revealed that He knew everything about this woman. She went back to her city and told everyone about Christ, whom she had just met, and they believed in Him, that He was the Messiah.

What is the “living water” that Jesus mentions? How did the Samaritan woman show that she “thirsted” for this living water?

The living water is water is Christ Himself. He has the ability to give us eternal life. The Samaritan woman was looking for “life” in other people and in worldly things—but when Christ told her about something greater that He could offer her, she dropped everything and ran to tell her whole village about it so that they all could “drink” of that which Christ was offering.

Let’s talk a little bit more about hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

TALKING POINTS

1. ***All human hunger, though often displaced, is ultimately a hunger for God Himself.***

Younger Campers: Ask the campers to tell the class what their favorite breakfast food is. (If they don’t usually eat breakfast, ask them to talk about another meal that keeps them fueled throughout the day.) Then ask them if they have ever gotten “hangry”—or so hungry that they start to get grouchy and rude to other people. Ask them to come up with examples of snacks that would be satisfying to eat when they get “hangry?”

Explain that most people start the day by eating breakfast, because this is the way we refuel our physical bodies to give them energy to go through the day. It is also important to feed ourselves spiritually at the start of each day. Taking time to connect with God in the morning is a great way to remind ourselves that we want to obey God and honor Him with the way we live during the day. We can “feed” ourselves spiritually by starting our day with prayer and by reading the Bible. The Bible tells us that if we commit (or dedicate/give) our way to God, He will make our righteousness shine like the dawn. In other words, when we ask God to guide our lives, He will help us live righteously.

When we haven’t spent time with God in a while, when we haven’t gone to him lately for spiritual “food,” we can start to get a little “hangry” spiritually as well. The good thing is that God is always available to us. Unlike your favorite snack, you don’t have to go searching for God when you start to feel a little irritable or are tempted to do the wrong thing. Whenever we face temptation, God is there to refuel us and to give us the strength to resist temptation. All we have to do is go to him in prayer and ask for His help!

- To hunger and thirst after righteousness is ultimately to hunger and thirst after God Himself, for He alone is truly righteous. It is a desire to be near to Christ, to be like Him, and to be pleasing to Him—to obey Him by contributing to the goodness of the world rather than that which is evil. It is a desire to show our love for Him by helping to transform the world’s brokenness, starting with ourselves.
- Often we look to other things to fill us up—other people’s attention and affection, new clothes or toys, wealth, appearance, popularity, or good grades—but these things quickly leave us feeling empty again. They mask our hunger for a time, but they ultimately leave us searching for more. All of these feelings of dissatisfaction are ultimately a hunger for Christ. It is God alone who can truly satisfy us, not an assortment of earthly things.
- When we are not near to Christ, our hunger for Him manifests itself in all forms of brokenness. Perhaps we feel lonely, discontent, empty, or ashamed. While a certain amount of discontent on this earth is inevitable, for only in Paradise will all be perfected, each of these forms of brokenness is actually a strange gift. Just as a loud, grumbling stomach alerts us to what we need—food!—these forms of brokenness are our wakeup calls, alerting us to our true need and of its source, Christ Himself.

Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.
(Isaiah 55, RSV)

2. *Hunger and thirst are signs of life. Hunger and thirst for righteousness are indications of a healthy, living faith. We must remain hungry for God, continually seeking after Him.*

- Physical hunger and thirst are signs that we are alive and healthy. These natural impulses lead us to the things we need most to survive—that is, food or water. A loss of appetite, in fact, is often a sign of or red flag alerting us to sickness and death. The same is true of spiritual hunger. When we are hungry for the Lord and striving to be righteous before Him, this is a sign that our faith is alive and well.

- While we have a hunger and thirst that God alone can satisfy and one that He *does* satisfy fully, we are to remain hungry for God, constantly seeking after Him. In order to grow, we must continually feed on the Lord, seeking after Christ and His righteousness. It is when we stop hungering that we stop growing in the Lord, making us vulnerable to spiritual atrophy and death.

I want to know Christ [...]. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 3:10-14, NIV)

3. ***To be “filled” means not just to be full but to be overflowing. When we are filled with righteousness, it flows out of us, touching the people around us.***

Younger Campers: Tell the campers to imagine a glass that is being filled up with water from a faucet. What do we usually do when the water reaches the top of the glass? It is at that point that we usually turn off the water. What would happen if we kept the water going at all times? The glass would overflow, and the water would get everywhere! When it comes to our own hearts, this is actually exactly what we want. We don't only want the love and strength and righteousness of God to pour into us—we want it to flow out of us too! Likewise, we don't just want it to flow out of us sometimes but all of the time! This means that we must continually seek to grow closer to Christ and to draw upon Him at all times as the wellspring of life.

- The word in Greek that we translate as “filled” actually means to be “overflowing.” For example, in Scripture, when someone is “filled with the Spirit,” it is not the case that that person simply feels something inside themselves. Instead, the Holy Spirit is literally “flowing” out of them, sometimes in ways that they cannot even control. Perhaps they are speaking in tongues, prophesying, singing with joy, or healing the sick around them. (Speaking in tongues and prophesying are not things we generally do as Orthodox Christians in the 21st century, but we certainly believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to give someone these gifts, when there is a purpose for them, as he did for some New Testament Christians.)
- The same is true of being “filled,” as Christ promises, with righteousness. If we are truly filled with righteousness, the righteousness of Christ will permeate our whole lives and emanate out of us wherever we go. God will not only fill us up completely but, through us, will touch the lives of everyone we meet.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. [...] If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

(John 6:28, 7:37-38, RSV)

Younger Campers: Read the stories of St. Simeon the Stylite the St. Anthony the Great, located in the back of this lesson.

APPLICATION

Now that we have talked a little more about hungering and thirsting after righteousness, what do you think we, as Christians today, can do to maintain that hunger and to ultimately be filled?

- **Going to confession** reminds us of our need for growth and helps us to recognize the forms of brokenness in us as warning signs, alerting us of our need to seek after Christ and grow closer to Him.
- **Fasting** keeps us hungry for the Lord. When we abstain from heavy foods, we are less distracted, making it easier to focus on Christ and growing in our relationship with Him.
- **Partaking of the Eucharist** is the way that we literally satisfy our hunger for Christ, by eating His Holy Body and drinking His Precious Blood. In the Eucharist, we draw as near to Christ as possible this side of Heaven, uniting our entire selves to Him.
- **Prayer** is another way that we draw near to God. Just as we would seek out the company of a friend when we are lonely, when we approach the Lord in prayer, our need for Him is satisfied. We are filled with His presence, growing closer to Him. Ideally, our prayers should be unceasing, meaning we are in conversation with Christ at all times!
- **Spending time in God's sanctuary**, like prayer, reminds us of God's presence. By surrounding ourselves with icons, incense, fellow believers, and angelic hymns, we are reminded that the object of our desires, Christ Himself, is with us in our midst.

REVIEW

Let's review what we learned today. What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Who alone can satisfy us? And what does it look like to be "filled?"

All human hunger, though often displaced, is ultimately a hunger for God Himself. Hunger and thirst are signs of life. Hunger and thirst for righteousness are indications of a healthy, living faith. We must remain hungry for God, continually seeking after Him. To be "filled" means not just to be full but to be overflowing. When are filled with righteousness, it flows out of us, touching the people around us.

FOR REFERENCE

Hunger for God

Psalm 144:13-20, RSV: The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

Psalm 33:8, RSV: Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

John 4:31-34, RSV: Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him food?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.”

Psalms 103:10-15, RSV: Thou makest springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, they give drink to every beast of the field; the wild asses quench their thirst. By them the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From thy lofty abode thou waterest the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy work. Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man’s heart.

Isaiah 41:17-20, RSV: When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together; that men may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Psalms 62:1-4, RSV: O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is. So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory. Because thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise thee. So I will bless thee as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.

Psalms 84:1-2, NKJV: How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

John 6:47-58, RSV: “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.”

There is a God-shaped vacuum [hole] in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.

– *Blaise Pascal*

Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.

+ *St. Augustine of Hippo*

The soul that has come to know God fully no longer desires anything else, nor does it attach itself to anything on the earth; and if you put before it a kingdom, it would not desire it, for the love of God gives such sweetness and joy to the soul that even the life of a king can no longer give it any sweetness.

+ *St. Silouan the Athonite*

Philippians 4:11-13, RSV: Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Ephesians 5:18-20, RSV: Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Bible Story Scripts: Lesson Three

The Story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:5-42):

Characters: Narrator, Jesus, Woman, Disciples (2-3), Samaritans (2-3)

Narrator: In a small Samaritan town, Jesus stopped to rest at the historic well that Jacob gave his son Joseph. It was about noon when Jesus found a spot to sit close to the well while the disciples ventured off to find provisions. From His vantage, He watched as a Samaritan woman approached to draw some water. Unexpectedly He spoke to her.

Jesus: Would you draw water, and give Me a drink?

Woman: I cannot believe that You, a Jew, would associate with me, a Samaritan woman; much less ask me to give You a drink.

Narrator: Jews, you see, have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus: You don't know the gift of God or who is asking you for a drink of this water from Jacob's well. Because if you did, you would have asked Him for something greater; and He would have given you the living water.

Woman: Sir, You sit by this deep well a thirsty man without a bucket in sight. Where does this living water come from? Are You claiming superiority to our father Jacob who labored long and hard to dig and maintain this well so that he could share clean water with his sons, grandchildren, and cattle?

Jesus: Drink this water, and your thirst is quenched only for a moment. You must return to this well again and again. I offer water that will become a wellspring within you that gives life throughout eternity. You will never be thirsty again.

Woman: Please, Sir, give me some of this water, so I'll never be thirsty and never again have to make the trip to this well.

Jesus: Then bring your husband to Me.

Woman: I do not have a husband.

Jesus: Technically you are telling the truth. But you have had five husbands and are currently living with a man you are not married to.

Woman: Sir, it is obvious to me that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped here on this mountain, but Your people say that Jerusalem is the only place for all to worship. Which is it?

Jesus: Woman, I tell you that neither is so. You worship what you don't know while we worship what we do know, for God's salvation is coming through the Jews. But a new day is coming—in fact, it's already here—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and

truth,. The Father is spirit, and He is seeking followers whose worship is grounded in truth and deeply spiritual as well. Regardless of whether you are in Jerusalem or on this mountain, if you do not seek the Father, then you do not worship.

Woman: I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.

Jesus: I who speak to you am He. I am the One you have been looking for.

Narrator: The disciples returned to Him and gathered around Him in amazement that He would openly break their customs by speaking to this woman, but none of them would ask Him what He was looking for or why He was speaking with her. The woman went back to the town, leaving her water pot behind. She stopped men and women on the streets and told them about what had happened.

Woman: I met a stranger who knew everything about me. Come and see for yourselves; can He be the Christ?

Narrator: A crowd came out of the city and approached Jesus. During all of this, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat the food they gathered.

Jesus: I have food to eat that you know nothing about.

Disciples (to one another): Is it possible someone else has brought Him food while we were away?

Jesus: I receive My nourishment by serving the will of the Father who sent Me and completing His work.

Narrator: Meanwhile, because the woman shared with her neighbors how Jesus exposed her past and present, the village was transformed—many Samaritans heard and believed. The Samaritans approached Jesus and invited Him to stay with them, so He lingered there for two days. With the words that came from His mouth, there were many more believing Samaritans.

Samaritans (to the woman): “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Saint Stories: Lesson Three

St. Simeon the Stylite

Saint Simeon the Stylite was born in the Cappadocian village of Sisan of Christian parents, Sisotian and Martha. At thirteen years of age he began to tend his father's flock of sheep. He devoted himself attentively and with love to this, his first obedience.

Once, after he heard the Beatitudes in church, he was struck by their profundity. Not trusting to his own immature judgment, he turned therefore with his questions to an experienced Elder. The Elder readily explained to the boy the meaning of what he had heard. The seed fell on good soil, and it strengthened his resolve to serve God.

When Simeon was eighteen, he received monastic tonsure and devoted himself to feats of the strictest abstinence and unceasing prayer. His zeal, beyond the strength of the other monastic brethren, so alarmed the igumen that he told Simeon that to either moderate his ascetic deeds or leave the monastery.

Saint Simeon then withdrew from the monastery and lived in an empty well in the nearby mountains, where he was able to carry out his austere struggles unhindered. After some time, angels appeared in a dream to the igumen, who commanded him to bring back Simeon to the monastery.

The monk, however, did not long remain at the monastery. After a short while he settled into a stony cave, situated not far from the village of Galanissa, and he dwelt there for three years, all the while perfecting himself in monastic feats. Once, he decided to spend the entire forty days of Great Lent without food or drink. With the help of God, the monk endured this strict fast. From that time he abstained from food completely during the entire period of the Great Lent, even from bread and water. For twenty days he prayed while standing, and for twenty days while sitting, so as not to permit the corporeal powers to relax.

A whole crowd of people began to throng to the place of his efforts, wanting to receive healing from sickness and to hear a word of Christian edification. Shunning worldly glory and striving again to find his lost solitude, the monk chose a previously unknown mode of asceticism. He went up a pillar six to eight feet high, and settled upon it in a little cell, devoting himself to intense prayer and fasting.

Reports of Saint Simeon reached the highest church hierarchy and the imperial court. Patriarch Dominos II (441-448) of Antioch visited the monk, celebrated Divine Liturgy on the pillar and communed the ascetic with the Holy Mysteries.

Elders living in the desert heard about Saint Simeon, who had chosen a new and strange form of ascetic striving. Wanting to test the new ascetic and determine whether his extreme ascetic feats were pleasing to God, they sent messengers to him, who in the name of these desert fathers were to bid Saint Simeon to come down from the pillar.

In the case of disobedience they were to forcibly drag him to the ground. But if he was willing to submit, they were to leave him on his pillar. Saint Simeon displayed complete obedience and deep Christian humility. The monks told him to stay where he was, asking God to be his helper.

Saint Simeon endured many temptations, and he invariably gained the victory over them. He relied not on his own weak powers, but on the Lord Himself, Who always came to help him. The monk gradually

increased the height of the pillar on which he stood. His final pillar was 80 feet in height. Around him a double wall was raised, which hindered the unruly crowd of people from coming too close and disturbing his prayerful concentration.

Women, in general, were not permitted beyond the wall. The saint did not make an exception even for his own mother, who after long and unsuccessful searches finally succeeded in finding her lost son. He would not see her, saying, "If we are worthy, we shall see one another in the life to come." Saint Martha submitted to this, remaining at the foot of the pillar in silence and prayer, where she finally died. Saint Simeon asked that her coffin be brought to him. He reverently bid farewell to his dead mother, and a joyful smile appeared on her face.

Saint Simeon spent 80 years in arduous monastic feats, 47 years of which he stood upon the pillar. God granted him to accomplish in such unusual conditions an indeed apostolic service. Many pagans accepted Baptism, struck by the moral staunchness and bodily strength which the Lord bestowed upon His servant.

The first one to learn of the death of the saint was his close disciple Anthony. Concerned that his teacher had not appeared to the people for three days, he went up on the pillar and found the dead body stooped over at prayer. Patriarch Martyrius of Antioch performed the funeral before a huge throng of clergy and people. They buried him near his pillar. At the place of his ascetic deeds, Anthony established a monastery, upon which rested the special blessing of Saint Simeon.

St. Anthony the Great

Saint Anthony the Great is known as the Father of monasticism, and the long ascetical sermon in *The Life of Saint Anthony* by Saint Athanasius (Sections 16-34), could be called the first monastic Rule.

He was born in Egypt in the village of Coma, near the desert of the Thebaid, in the year 251. His parents were pious Christians of illustrious lineage. Anthony was a serious child and was respectful and obedient to his parents. He loved to attend church services, and he listened to the Holy Scripture so attentively, that he remembered what he heard all his life.

When Saint Anthony was about twenty years old, he lost his parents, but he was responsible for the care of his younger sister. Going to church about six months later, the youth reflected on how the faithful, in the Acts of the Apostles (4:35), sold their possessions and gave the proceeds to the Apostles for the needy.

Then he entered the church and heard the Gospel passage where Christ speaks to the rich young man: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me" (Mt.19:21). Anthony felt that these words applied to him. Therefore, he sold the property that he received after the death of his parents, then distributed the money to the poor, and left his sister in the care of pious virgins in a convent.

Leaving his parental home, Saint Anthony began his ascetical life in a hut not far from his village. By working with his hands, he was able to earn his livelihood and also alms for the poor. Sometimes, the holy youth also visited other ascetics living in the area, and from each he sought direction and benefit. He turned to one particular ascetic for guidance in the spiritual life.

In this period of his life Saint Anthony endured terrible temptations from the devil. The Enemy of the race of man troubled the young ascetic with thoughts of his former life, doubts about his chosen path, concern for his sister, and he tempted Anthony with lewd thoughts and carnal feelings. But the saint extinguished that fire by meditating on Christ and by thinking of eternal punishment, thereby overcoming the devil.

Realizing that the devil would undoubtedly attack him in another manner, Saint Anthony prayed and intensified his efforts. Anthony prayed that the Lord would show him the path of salvation. And he was granted a vision. The ascetic beheld a man, who by turns alternately finished a prayer, and then began to work. This was an angel, which the Lord had sent to instruct His chosen one.

Saint Anthony tried to accustom himself to a stricter way of life. He partook of food only after sunset, he spent all night praying until dawn. Soon he slept only every third day. But the devil would not cease his tricks, and trying to scare the monk, he appeared under the guise of monstrous phantoms. The saint however protected himself with the Life-Creating Cross. Finally the Enemy appeared to him in the guise of a frightful looking black child, and hypocritically declaring himself beaten, he thought he could tempt the saint into vanity and pride. The saint, however, vanquished the Enemy with prayer.

For even greater solitude, Saint Anthony moved farther away from the village, into a graveyard. He asked a friend to bring him a little bread on designated days, then shut himself in a tomb. Then the devils pounced upon the saint intending to kill him, and inflicted terrible wounds upon him. By the providence of the Lord, Anthony's friend arrived the next day to bring him his food. Seeing him lying on the ground as if dead, he took him back to the village. They thought the saint was dead and prepared for his burial. At midnight, Saint Anthony regained consciousness and told his friend to carry him back to the tombs.

Saint Anthony's staunchness was greater than the wiles of the Enemy. Taking the form of ferocious beasts, the devils tried to force the saint to leave that place, but he defeated them by trusting in the Lord. Looking up, the saint saw the roof opening, as it were, and a ray of light coming down toward him. The demons disappeared and he cried out, "Where have You been, O Merciful Jesus? Why didn't You appear from the very beginning to end my pain?"

The Lord replied, "I was here, Anthony, but wanted to see your struggle. Now, since you have not yielded, I shall always help you and make your name known throughout all the world." After this vision Saint Anthony was healed of his wounds and felt stronger than before. He was then thirty-five years of age.

Having gained spiritual experience in his struggle with the devil, Saint Anthony considered going into the Thebaid desert to serve the Lord. He asked the Elder (to whom he had turned for guidance at the beginning of his monastic journey) to go into the desert with him. The Elder, while blessing him in the then as yet unheard of exploit of being a hermit, decided not to accompany him because of his age.

Saint Anthony went into the desert alone. The devil tried to hinder him, by placing a large silver disc in his path, then gold, but the saint ignored it and passed by. He found an abandoned fort on the other side of the river and settled there, barricading the entrance with stones. His faithful friend brought him bread twice a year, and there was water inside the fort.

Saint Anthony spent twenty years in complete isolation and constant struggle with the demons, and he finally achieved perfect calm. The saint's friends removed the stones from the entrance, and they went to Saint Anthony and besought him to take them under his guidance. Soon Saint Anthony's cell was

surrounded by several monasteries, and the saint acted as a father and guide to their inhabitants, giving spiritual instruction to all who came into the desert seeking salvation. He increased the zeal of those who were already monks, and inspired others with a love for the ascetical life. He told them to strive to please the Lord, and not to become faint-hearted in their labors. He also urged them not to fear demonic assaults, but to repel the Enemy by the power of the Life-Creating Cross of the Lord.

In the year 311 there was a fierce persecution against Christians, in the reign of the emperor Maximian. Wishing to suffer with the holy martyrs, Saint Anthony left the desert and went to Alexandria. He openly ministered to those in prison, he was present at the trial and interrogations of the confessors, and accompanying the martyrs to the place of execution. It pleased the Lord to preserve him, however, for the benefit of Christians.

At the close of the persecution, the saint returned to the desert and continued his exploits. The Lord granted the saint the gift of wonderworking, casting out demons and healing the sick by the power of his prayer. The great crowds of people coming to him disrupted his solitude, and he went off still farther, into the inner desert where he settled atop a high elevation. But the brethren of the monasteries sought him out and asked him to visit their communities.

Another time Saint Anthony left the desert and arrived in Alexandria to defend the Orthodox Faith against the Manichaeian and Arian heresies. Knowing that the name of Saint Anthony was venerated by all the Church, the Arians said that he adhered to their heretical teaching. But Saint Anthony publicly denounced Arianism in front of everyone and in the presence of the bishop. During his brief stay at Alexandria, he converted a great multitude of pagans to Christ.

People from all walks of life loved the saint and sought his advice. Pagan philosophers once came to Abba Anthony intending to mock him for his lack of education, but by his words he reduced them to silence. Emperor Constantine the Great (May 21) and his sons wrote to Saint Anthony and asked him for a reply. He praised the emperor for his belief in Christ, and advised him to remember the future judgment, and to know that Christ is the true King.

Saint Anthony spent eighty-five years in the solitary desert. Shortly before his death, he told the brethren that soon he would be taken from them. He instructed them to preserve the Orthodox Faith in its purity, to avoid any association with heretics, and not to be negligent in their monastic struggles. “Strive to be united first with the Lord, and then with the saints, so that after death they may receive you as familiar friends into the everlasting dwellings.”

The saint instructed two of his disciples, who had attended him in the final fifteen years of his life, to bury him in the desert and not in Alexandria. He left one of his monastic mantles to Saint Athanasius of Alexandria (January 18), and the other to Saint Serapion of Thmuis (March 21). Saint Anthony died peacefully in the year 356, at age 105, and he was buried in the desert by his disciples.

The Life of the famed ascetic Saint Anthony the Great was written by Saint Athanasius of Alexandria. This is the first biography of a saint who was not a martyr, and is considered to be one of the finest of Saint Athanasius’ writings. Saint John Chrysostom recommends that this Life be read by every Christian.

“These things are insignificant compared with Anthony’s virtues,” writes Saint Athanasius, “but judge from them what the man of God Anthony was like. From his youth until his old age, he kept his zeal for asceticism, he did not give in to the desire for costly foods because of his age, nor did he alter his clothing

because of the infirmity of his body. He did not even wash his feet with water. He remained very healthy, and he could see well because his eyes were sound and undimmed. Not one of his teeth fell out, but near the gums they had become worn due to his advanced age. He remained strong in his hands and feet.... He was spoken of everywhere, and was admired by everyone, and was sought even by those who had not seen him, which is evidence of his virtue and of a soul dear to God.”

Lesson Four: The Merciful

REVIEW

Yesterday we talked about those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Who alone can satisfy us? And what does it look like to be “filled?”

All human hunger, though often displaced, is ultimately a hunger for God Himself. Hunger and thirst are signs of life. Hunger and thirst for righteousness are indications of a healthy, living faith. We must remain hungry for God, continually seeking after Him. To be “filled” means not just to be full but to be overflowing. When we are filled with righteousness, it flows out of us, touching the people around us.

And what are some ways that we can maintain our hunger and thirst for righteousness, ultimately being filled?

We can remind ourselves of our need for growth and of the brokenness within us—a sign of our unmet hunger—by going to confession. And we can satisfy our hunger by regularly partaking of the Eucharist, by spending time in prayer, and spending time in God’s sanctuary.

Today we are going to be talking about the fifth beatitude, mercy.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

OPENING VERSE

Luke 6:34-36, RSV: But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

DISCUSSION & DEFINITION

What is Christ commanding us to do here? Who are we to imitate in the way we treat others? How does God treat us? How is loving our enemies different from loving our friends? What does this have to do with mercy?

Christ is commanding us to treat others in the way God treats us. We are to imitate God by loving our enemies, giving to those who will never repay us, being kind to the ungrateful, generous with the selfish, etc. Loving our friends is easy, because they love us back. Loving our enemies is difficult, because we have no obvious reason to love them, and our love is unlikely to be reciprocated. The mercy God has for us is similar to the love we might have for an enemy. It is not given because it is deserved or requited but is a free gift.

The merciful are those who show mercy to others in the same way that Christ shows mercy toward us, by offering what is undeserved to the undeserving and without expectation of anything in return.

Now we're going to read (or act out) two parables to help us learn more about what it means to be merciful as our Father is merciful.

BIBLE STORY

Younger Campers: Have campers act out stories from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson Four, located in the back of this lesson.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry. “Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant: Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord delivered

him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

DISCUSSION

What happened in the first story?

The younger son wanted his inheritance early so that he could go do whatever he wanted with his life. After spending all of his money, he realized that he had made a mistake and that he would be better off going back home and being a servant in his father’s house. He decided to come home, apologize for his sin, and ask his father’s forgiveness.

How did the Father respond to his son, and how is the father’s response similar to God’s response to us?

The son’s father runs to him, embraces him, and celebrates his return. He shows mercy, forgiveness, and unconditional love in response to his son’s homecoming. God responds to us in the same way. When we come back to Him, repenting of our sin, He always forgives us. Despite our sin, He loves us unconditionally.

And, in the second story, how many times does Jesus say to forgive our brother? What happens in the parable?

Jesus tells us to forgive our brother seventy times seven times. That’s 490 times! What He really means is that there is no limit to the amount of times we should forgive someone—even for the same thing! In the parable, a servant owes a king a lot of money, and the king is merciful to him, forgiving him of his debt. But then that same servant goes to someone else who owes him a very small amount of money, and he refuses to forgive it, instead throwing the man in jail. When the king hears about it, he is very angry and sends the servant to jail.

Who are we like in this story, and what will happen to us if we do not forgive—if we are not merciful—to the people around us?

We are like the first servant in this story when we fail to forgive those around us. God has forgiven us of a lifetime of sin and betrayal. If we refuse to forgive the people who have harmed us over the course of our life, the Lord will respond to us in the same way, refusing to forgive us for the many ways we have turned our back on Him in sin.

TALKING POINTS

1. ***God’s mercy toward us is an underserved gift of forgiveness, comfort, and love.***
 - Salvation, blessedness, and the favor of the Lord are not things that we can possibly earn in this life. None of us have lived up to our calling, and none of us have lived lives that are completely pleasing to the Lord. All of us are sinners, having turned our backs on God, and none of us deserve to be rewarded for the life we’ve led, even if we are “good people” for the most part.
 - The natural consequence of our sin is death and separation from God. That is what we truly deserve. However, the Lord, in His great mercy, treats each of us upon our return to Him as He

does the Prodigal Son. He does not cast us away when we fall before Him in repentance but accepts us, again and again, with joy. He embraces us, forgives us, comforts us, and reassures us with His unconditional love. This loving-kindness, which is our salvation itself, is an undeserved gift.

- God not only accepts us in our unworthiness but provides for us on this earth as He sees fit. Every good thing and every opportunity we have is a gift from Him. We are all at camp only because He has made it possible for us to be here. The same is true of any other good thing in our lives. Though we certainly play a part in all of these things, we have earned nothing in this life—not good health, wealth, friends, talent, or a strong faith—on our own.

*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
(Romans 3:23, RSV)*

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23, RSV)*

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
(Ephesians 2:8-9, RSV)*

2. ***To be merciful is to give forgiveness, comfort, and love even when it is “undeserved”—and to do so without hope for anything in return.***

Younger Campers: Have campers act out *The Parable of the Good Samaritan* in the “Bible Story Scripts” for Lesson Four, located at the end of the lesson.

- To be merciful as the Lord is merciful is to meet the needs of the people, or even just the one person, in front of us. It is to feed the hungry, to befriend the lonely, to comfort the one who is hurting, and to embrace and forgive the one by whom you have been wronged.
- The merciful do not keep score. They do not give only to the people who deserve it or love only the people who love them back. Instead, they give to everyone—even the people who are thankless. They love everyone—even the people who are mean to them. They lend not only to the people who will pay them back but to anyone who asks. And they do not forgive a person just once but indefinitely. They treat everyone as God has treated them.
- Just as we do not give out of greed, with the hope of receiving something in return, we also do not give out of pride, with the hope of being praised. When we are merciful and give, we should do so quietly and humbly. Ideally, we should not even be able to recall our good deeds; instead, mercy and compassion should so shape our lives that any one act of kindness we participate in is neither remarkable nor memorable.

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.
(Matthew 5:38-42, RSV)

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.
(1 John 3:17-18, RSV)

Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. "Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."
(Matthew 6:1-4, RSV)

- 3. *If we are not merciful to those around us, the Lord will not be merciful to us. We will be judged by the way we treat our neighbor.***

Web Activity

Directions: Take the two balls of yarn out of the bin (they should be different colors) and have the campers stand in a circle. In your own mind (but don't tell the campers) assign one color as merciful, and the other as unmerciful. Without explaining, ask some (or all) of the questions attached at the end of this lesson of the campers one by one. Have the first camper you ask hold the end of the color of yarn that matches the choice they make and throw the ball to someone else after they answer. Then ask that person a question, and so on until there's a web connecting all of the campers together. Then end the activity and rewind the yarn balls.

Debrief: Let the campers in on what the two colors meant, and discuss how every choice we make creates a web with everyone around us, and the choices we make determine what kind of web we weave, whether merciful or unmerciful. Talk about how choices may not always be clear and it may take some consideration to figure out what the right choice is. A good question to ask to help figure it out is what's the loving thing to do? (this is another good place to talk about how true love--as opposed to earthly love--sometimes corrects gently and with mercy instead of just validating every choice someone makes)

- If we think about what we have as the result of our own righteousness or hard work, we are more likely to hold on to it, claiming it as our own. However, when we see all that we have a gift—as a result of God's mercy toward us—it is only natural to pass on to others that which the Lord has given to us.

- God puts very few conditions on His mercy toward us. There is no sin that gets in the way of His love for us. Neither is there a sin too big to be forgiven. However, Christ makes it very clear that, in order to be forgiven, we must also forgive our neighbor. We will not be granted God's mercy unless we have given it to others.
- Likewise, when we treat others with compassion and mercy, we are not only imitating Christ but are showing our love for Him. If we cannot love the people around us, then we do not truly love Christ as we say we do. We will therefore be judged by the way we have treated the people we meet, because everyone is made in God's image. It is through showing love and mercy to others that we offer our love to Christ Himself.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
(Matthew 6:15, RSV)

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.
(Matthew 25:34-46, RSV)

Younger Campers: Read the stories of St. Elizabeth the New Martyr, St. Martin the Wonderworker, St. John the Merciful, and St. Vitalis of Gaza, located in the back of this lesson.

APPLICATION

Now that we have talked a little more about mercy, what do you think we, as Christians today, can do to cultivate it?

- **Going to confession** reminds us of the mercy that the Lord has given us. By seeing our own unworthiness, it makes it easier to have compassion on those around us.
- **Praying for others** helps us to grow in compassion for them, making it easier to forgive the people who have wronged us and to be willing to help the people who need it most. Prayer is itself an act of mercy. Occasionally, it is the only thing that we can do for a person in need.
- **Almsgiving** (giving away our money or, in some cases, our possessions), though it is itself an act of mercy, helps to remind us that all that we have is a gift from God—gifts that we are called not to hold onto but to distribute to those in need.
- **Being merciful to our family members** is sometimes the best place to start. Often we think of compassion and mercy as things we do outside of our normal lives. (We might give money to a homeless person or bring a meal to a sick person.) However, if we want mercy to become part of our everyday lives, then we must first learn to show kindness, forgiveness, and love to our own sisters, brothers, parents, classmates, teammates, and friends.

REVIEW

Let's review what we learned today. What does it mean to be merciful? To whom are we to be merciful? What does our mercy have to do with the way we will be judged?

To be merciful is to show mercy to others in the same way that Christ shows mercy toward us. God's mercy toward us is an underserved gift of forgiveness, comfort, and love. To be merciful is to give forgiveness, comfort, and love to everyone, even when it is "undeserved"—and to do so without hope for anything in return. If we are not merciful to those around us, the Lord will not be merciful to us. We will be judged by the way we treat our neighbor.

FOR REFERENCE

The Gift of God's Mercy

Isaiah 53:6, RSV: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.

Ephesians 2:3-7, RSV: Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:13-14, RSV: And you, who were dead in trespasses [...], God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Never say that God is just. If he were just, you would be in hell. Rely only on his injustice which is mercy, love, and forgiveness.

+ *St. Isaac the Syrian*

Even if we reach the summit of virtue, we are saved only by God's mercy.

+ *St. John Chrysostom*

Psalm 102, NKJV: Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies [...]. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him.

The Lord greatly loves the repenting sinner and mercifully presses him to His bosom: "Where were you, My child? I was waiting a long time for you." The Lord calls all to Himself with the voice of the Gospel, and his voice is heard in all the world: "Come to me, my sheep. I created you, and I love you. My love for you brought Me to earth, and I suffered all things for the sake of your salvation, and I want you all to know my love, and to say, like the apostles on Tabor: Lord, it is good for us to be with You."

+ *St. Silouan the Athonite*

Imitating God's Mercy

Luke 6:27-36, RSV: But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again. And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Luke 14:12-14, RSV: He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

If you are truly merciful, then when what is yours is unjustly taken, don't be sad inside, and do not tell of your loss to your neighbor. Let a better loss, inflicted by those who insult you, be absorbed by your mercy.

+ *St. Isaac the Syrian* □

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37): And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan,

as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

1 John 3:16-18, RSV: By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.

Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.

– *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

Forgiveness and Judgment

James 4:11-13, RSV: Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor? So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment.

Luke 6:37-38: Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

By this we are taught that when we do not show mercy, we will be punished just like those who steal. For our money is the Lord's, however we may have gathered it. If we provide for those in need, we shall obtain great plenty. This is why God allowed you to have more: not for you to waste on [...] drink, fancy food, expensive clothes, and all the other kinds of indulgence, but for you to distribute to those in need.

+ *St. John Chrysostom*

You may overflow with temporal things but remain in need of eternal life. You hear the voice of a beggar, but before God you are yourself a beggar. Someone is begging from you, while you yourself are begging. As you treat your beggar, so will God treat his. You who are empty are being filled. Out of your fullness fill an empty person in need, so that your own emptiness may be again filled by the fullness of God.

+ *St. Augustine of Hippo*

All condemnation is from the devil. Never condemn each other. We condemn others only because we shun knowing ourselves. When we gaze at our own failings, we see such a swamp that nothing in another can equal it. That is why we turn away, and make much of the faults of others. Instead of condemning others, strive to reach inner peace. Keep silent, refrain from judgment. This will raise you above the deadly arrows of slander, insult and outrage and will shield your glowing hearts against all evil.

+ *St. Seraphim of Sarov*

Works of Mercy

James 2:14-19, 26: What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. [...] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.

We have to become increasingly aware that the poor are the hope of humanity, for we will be judged by how we have treated the poor.

– *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed.

– *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

Bible Story Scripts: Lesson Four

The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32

Characters: Narrator, Younger Son, Older Son, Father, Servant

Narrator: Once there was a man who had two sons. One day the younger son came to his father and said,

Younger Son: “Father, eventually I’m going to inherit my share of your estate. Rather than waiting until you die, I want you to give me my share now.”

Narrator: And so the father divided all that he had and gave half of it to the younger son. A few days passed and this younger son gathered all his wealth and set off on a journey to a distant land. Once there, he wasted everything he owned on wild living. He had no money, a terrible famine struck that land, and he felt desperately hungry and in need. He got a job with one of the locals, who sent him into the fields to feed the pigs. The young man felt so miserably hungry that he wished he could eat the slop the pigs were eating. Nobody gave him anything.

Younger Son (to himself): “What am I doing here? Back home, my father’s hired servants have plenty of food. Why am I here starving to death? I’ll get up and return to my father, and I’ll say, ‘Father, I have done wrong—wrong against God and against you. I have forfeited any right to be treated like your son, but I’m wondering if you’d treat me as one of your hired servants?’”

Narrator: So he got up and returned to his father. The father looked off in the distance and saw the young man returning. He felt compassion for his son and ran out to him, enfolded him in an embrace, and kissed him.

Younger Son: “Father, I have done a terrible wrong in God’s sight and in your sight too. I have forfeited any right to be treated as your son.”

Narrator: But the father turned to his servants and said,

Father: “Quick! Bring the best robe we have and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Go get the fattest calf and butcher it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate because my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and has been found.”

Narrator: So they had a huge party, but the man’s older son was still out in the fields working. He came home at the end of the day and heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked,

Older Son: “What is going on!?”

Servant: “Your brother has returned, and your father has butchered the fattest calf to celebrate his safe return.”

Narrator: The older brother got really angry and refused to come inside, so his father came out and pleaded with him to join the celebration.

Father: “What are you doing? Come celebrate with us!”

Older Son: “Listen, all these years I’ve worked hard for you. I’ve never disobeyed one of your orders. But how many times have you even given me a little goat to roast for a party with my friends? Not once! This is not fair! So this son of yours comes, this wasteful delinquent who has wasted away your hard-earned wealth, and what do you do? You butcher the fattest calf from our herd!”

Father: “My son, you are always with me, and all I have is yours. Isn’t it right to join in the celebration and be happy? This is your brother we’re talking about. He was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found again!”

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant: Matthew 18:21-35

Characters: Peter, Jesus, Assistants (2), King, Other Servants (2), Friend, Magistrate/Jailer

Peter: Lord, when someone has sinned against me, how many times ought I forgive him? Once? Twice? As many as seven times?

Jesus: You must forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven.

Jesus: If you want to understand the kingdom of heaven, think about a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. Just as the king began to get his accounts in order, his assistants called his attention to a slave who owed a huge sum to him—what a laborer might make in 500 lifetimes.

Assistants (to the king): King, did you know that this servant of yours owes you ten thousand talents? This is a huge sum! You must collect this from him before you go collecting from anyone else.

King: “It would be impossible for him to repay such a sum! Instead I order that he, his wife, their children, and everything the family owns be sold; the proceeds from the sale will go toward my repayment.”

Jesus: Upon hearing this judgment, the servant fell down, prostrated himself before the king, and begged for mercy:

Servant: “Have mercy on me, and I will somehow pay you everything.”

Jesus: The king was moved, so he took pity on the servant, told him to stand up, and then forgave the debt.

King: “You have moved me to cancel your debt. You will no longer owe me anything.”

Jesus: But the slave went and found a friend, another slave, who owed him about a hundred days’ wages.

Servant (to his friend): “Pay me back that money!”

Jesus: The servant throttled his friend and shook him with threats and violence. The servant’s friend fell down prostrate and begged for mercy:

Friend (kneeling before the servant): “Have mercy on me, and I will somehow pay you everything.”

Jesus: But the first servant laughed and was hard-hearted and refused to hear his friend’s plea. He found a magistrate and had his friend thrown into prison.

Friend (while magistrate drags him to prison): “Here you will sit until you can pay me back.”

Jesus: The other servants saw what was going on. They were upset, so they went to the king and told him everything that had happened.

Other Servants (*to the king*): “We just saw the servant whose large debt you forgave, and he has gone and put his own friend in prison for failure to pay him back a very small debt! This is not right!”

Jesus: The king summoned the slave, the one who had owed so much money, the one whose debt the king had forgiven. The king was livid.

King: “You wicked servant! You begged me to forgive your debt, and I did. What would be the faithful response to such latitude and generosity? Surely you should have shown the same charity to a friend who was in your debt.”

Jesus: The king turned over the unmerciful servant to his jailers, and they locked him up until he should pay his whole debt. And that is what My Father in heaven will do to you, unless you forgive each of your brothers and sisters from the very depths of your heart.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37):

Characters: Narrator, Scholar, Robbers, Injured Man, Priest, Levite, Samaritan, Innkeeper

Narrator: Just then a scholar tried to trap Jesus.

Scholar: Teacher, what must I do to experience the eternal life?

Jesus (*answering with a question*): What is written in the Scriptures? How do you interpret their answer to your question?

Scholar: You shall love—“love your God with everything you have: all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind”—and “love your neighbor as yourself.”^[e]

Jesus: Perfect. Your answer is correct. Follow these commands and you will live.

Narrator: The scholar was frustrated by this response because he was hoping to make himself appear smarter than Jesus.

Scholar: Ah, but who is my neighbor?

Jesus: This fellow was traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho when some robbers mugged him. They took his clothes, beat him to a pulp, and left him naked and bleeding and in critical condition. By chance, a priest was going down that same road, and when he saw the wounded man, he crossed over to the other side and passed by. Then a Levite who was on his way to assist in the temple also came and saw the victim lying there, and he too kept his distance. Then a Samaritan journeyed by. When he saw the fellow, he felt compassion for him. The Samaritan went over to him, stopped the bleeding, applied some first aid, and put the poor fellow on his donkey. He brought the man to an inn and cared for him through the night. The next day, the Samaritan took out some money—two days’ wages to be exact—and paid the innkeeper, saying,

Samaritan: “Please take care of this fellow, and if this isn’t enough, I’ll repay you next time I pass through.”

Jesus: Which of these three proved himself a neighbor to the man who had been mugged by the robbers?

Scholar: The one who showed mercy to him.

Jesus: Well then, go and do likewise.

Saint Stories: Lesson Four

Saint Elizabeth the New Martyr

St. Elizabeth was an older sister of the Empress Alexandra of Russia, and was married to the Grand Duke Serge, a younger son of Tsar Alexander III and the Governor of Moscow. She converted from the Protestant faith to Orthodoxy several years after her marriage of her own free will, and organized women from all levels of society to help the sick and needy.

Grand Duke Serge was killed by an assassin's bomb on February 4, 1905, just as St Elizabeth was leaving for her workshops. She visited her husband's killer in prison and urged him to repent, giving him an icon. She eventually built a shrine over the site of her husband's martyrdom (which was said to have been destroyed by Vladimir Lenin himself in 1917).

After her husband's murder, she began to withdraw from her former social life. She founded the Convent of Sts. Martha and Mary in Moscow, a community of nuns which focused on worshiping God and helping the poor. She sold all her fine clothes and jewels, and moved out of her palace into the buildings that she had purchased on behalf of the convent.

St. Elizabeth and her sisters continued to visit the poor and hungry in Moscow. During the First World War, she nursed sick and wounded soldiers in the hospitals and on the battlefield. She was respected and admired throughout Russia and people came to her for spiritual direction.

After her brother-in-law, Tsar Nicholas II, abdicated the throne and he and his family were placed under house arrest, St. Elizabeth was urged to abandon her convent and seek shelter with her remaining family in Western Europe. She refused all offers of help, saying she would not leave the other sisters and would die in Russia if that was His Will.

On Pascha 1918, Soviet soldiers came to the convent and ordered her to leave Moscow to join the royal family near Ekaterinburg. She was allowed to leave with a novice, Sister Barbara, but was not permitted to say goodbye to the other sisters.

After arriving in Ekaterinburg, St. Elizabeth was denied access to the Tsar's family. She and Sister Barbara were placed in a convent, where she was warmly received by the sisters.

At the end of May St. Elizabeth and St. Barbara were moved to the nearby village of Alopaevsk with the Grand Dukes Sergius, John, and Constantine, and the young Count Vladimir Paley. They were all housed in a schoolhouse on the edge of town. St. Elizabeth was placed under guard, but was permitted to go to church and work in the garden.

On the night of July 5, they were all taken to a place in the woods, twelve miles from Alopaevsk, and executed. Grand Duke Sergius was shot, but the others were thrown down a mineshaft, with grenades being tossed in after them. St. Elizabeth lived for several hours, and could be heard singing hymns by local villagers who came up to the mineshaft after the murderers had left.

A few days later, the bodies of St. Elizabeth and St. Barbara were recovered from the mineshaft after the pro-Tsarist armies took Alopaevsk. They were ultimately taken to Jerusalem in 1920, and buried in the church of St. Mary Magdalene on the Mount of Olives.

St Martin the Wonderworker

Martin was born of pagan parents in the Pannonian [modern Hungary] town of Sabaria in the year 316. His father was a Roman officer, and the young Martin was given over to military service against his will. By then, however, he was already a catechumen in the Christian Church. From early childhood he had loved the Church with all his heart.

One winter, while traveling with his companions to the town of Amiens, he saw a beggar before the town gates, almost naked and shivering from the cold. Martin felt sorry for him, and fell behind his companions. He then removed his military cloak and cut it in two with his sword. He gave one half to the beggar and wrapped the other around himself, and left. That night, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in a dream, wrapped in the other half of his cloak, and said to His angels: "Martin is only a catechumen, yet behold: he has clothed Me with his garment!"

Leaving the army, Martin was immediately baptized, and then baptized his mother. He was then tonsured a monk in the diocese of St. Hilary of Poitiers and led a life of true asceticism. Martin was exceptionally humble, for which God endowed him with an abundant gift of working miracles, such that he raised the dead and drove out evil spirits. Martin was appointed Bishop of Tours against his will. After abundant labor in the vineyard of the Lord, and after a difficult struggle with pagans and Arian heretics, St. Martin gave his holy soul into the hands of his Lord in the year 397.

By what virtue have the saints been most exalted and glorified in the eyes of heaven and men? Primarily by their humility and service.

Even before his baptism, while he was still an officer, St. Martin had a servant whom he considered more a brother than a servant. He often served this servant unashamedly; in fact, he even rejoiced in it.

Again, when St. Hilary wanted to ordain him a priest, he refused this honor with tears, and begged the bishop to let him simply be a monk in some remote place.

Once, St. Martin was traveling from France to Pannonia to visit his parents. While he was crossing over the Alps, murderous robbers captured him. When one of the robbers raised his sword to behead him, Martin showed no fear, and remained motionless; he did not beg for mercy but was completely at peace, as if nothing were happening. The robber, amazed at such behavior, lay aside his sword and asked Martin who he was. Martin replied that he was a Christian, and hence, he was not afraid, for he knew that God, according to His great mercy, is always close to men, especially in times of danger. The thieves were astonished at the rare virtue of this man of God, and he who had drawn his sword against Martin believed in Christ, was baptized, and later became a monk.

When the episcopal throne in Tours became vacant, the people wanted Martin to be bishop, but Martin did not even want to hear of it. However, certain citizens of Tours craftily lured him from the monastery and carried him off. They came to the gate of Martin's monastery and told Martin that a sick man was out there with them, and they begged him for a blessing. When Martin came out they seized him, took him to Tours, and had him consecrated bishop.

In old age, he foresaw his approaching death. He told his brethren and they began to weep copiously, begging him not to leave them. The saint, seeking to comfort them, prayed to God in their presence and said: "Lord, if I am still needed by Thy people, I do not reject the labor. Let it be according to Thy holy will."

St. John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria

Saint John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria, was born on Cyprus in the seventh century into the family of the illustrious dignitary Epiphanius. At the wish of his parents he entered into marriage and had children. When the wife and the children of the saint died, he became a monk. He was zealous in fasting and prayer, and had great love for those around him.

His spiritual exploits won him honor among men, and even the emperor revered him. When the Patriarchal throne of Alexandria fell vacant, the emperor Heraclius and all the clergy begged Saint John to occupy the Patriarchal throne.

The saint worthily assumed his arch-pastoral service, concerning himself with the moral and dogmatic welfare of his flock. As patriarch he denounced every soul-destroying heresy, and drove out from Alexandria the Monophysite Phyllonos of Antioch.

He considered his chief task to be charitable and to give help all those in need. At the beginning of his patriarchal service he ordered his stewards to compile a list of all the poor and downtrodden in Alexandria, which turned out to be over seven thousand men. The saint ordered that all of these unfortunates be provided for each day out of the church's treasury.

Twice during the week, on Wednesdays and Fridays, he emerged from the doors of the patriarchal cathedral, and sitting on the church portico, he received everyone in need. He settled quarrels, helped the wronged, and distributed alms. Three times a week he visited the sick-houses, and rendered assistance to the suffering. It was during this period that the emperor Heraclius led a tremendous army against the Persian emperor Chosroes II. The Persians ravaged and burned Jerusalem, taking a multitude of captives. The holy Patriarch John gave a large portion of the church treasury for their ransom.

The saint never refused suppliants. One day, when the saint was visiting the sick, he met a beggar and commanded that he be given six silver coins. The beggar changed his clothes, ran on ahead of the Patriarch, and again asked for alms. Saint John gave him six more silver coins. When, however, the beggar sought charity a third time, and the servants began to chase the fellow away, the Patriarch ordered that he be given twelve pieces of silver, saying, "Perhaps he is Christ putting me to the test." Twice the saint gave money to a merchant that had suffered shipwreck, and a third time gave him a ship belonging to the Patriarchate and filled with grain, with which the merchant had a successful journey and repaid his obligations.

Saint John the Merciful was known for his gentle attitude towards people. Once, the saint was compelled to excommunicate two clergymen for a certain time because of some offense. One of them repented, but the other fellow became angry with the Patriarch and fell into greater sins. The saint wanted to summon him and calm him with kind words, but it slipped his mind. When he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy, the saint was suddenly reminded by the words of the Gospel: "If you bring your gift to the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar ... first, be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt. 5:23-24). The saint came out of the altar, called the offending clergyman to him, and falling down on his knees before him in front of all the

people he asked forgiveness. The cleric, filled with remorse, repented of his sin, corrected himself, and afterwards was found worthy to be ordained to the priesthood.

There was a time when a certain citizen insulted George, the Patriarch's nephew. George asked the saint to avenge the wrong. The saint promised to deal with the offender so that all of Alexandria would marvel at what he had done. This calmed George, and Saint John began to instruct him, speaking of the necessity for meekness and humility. Then he summoned the man who insulted George. When Saint John learned that the man lived in a house owned by the church, he declared that he would excuse him from paying rent for an entire year. Alexandria indeed was amazed by such a "revenge," and George learned from his uncle how to forgive offenses and to bear insults for God's sake.

Saint John, a strict ascetic and man of prayer, was always mindful of his soul, and of death. He ordered a coffin for himself, but told the craftsmen not to finish it. Instead, he would have them come each feastday and ask if it was time to finish the work.

Saint John was persuaded to accompany the governor Nicetas on a visit to the emperor in Constantinople. While on his way to visit the earthly king, he dreamed of a resplendent man who said to him, "The King of Kings summons you." He sailed to his native island of Cyprus, and died at Amanthos, the saint peacefully fell asleep in the Lord (616-620).

St. Vitalius of Gaza

Saint Vitalius, a monk of the monastery of Saint Seridus, arrived in Alexandria when Saint John the Merciful (November 12) was Patriarch of Alexandria.

When he was sixty years old, undertook an extraordinary task: he wrote down from memory the names of all the prostitutes of Alexandria and he began to pray for them. He worked from morning to evening, earning twelve copper coins each day. In the evening the saint bought a single bean, which he ate after sunset. Then he would give the rest of the money to one of the harlots, whom he visited at night and said, "I beg you, take this money and do not sin with anyone tonight." Then he stayed with the harlot in her room. While she slept, the Elder spent the whole night at prayer, reading the Psalms, and quietly left in the morning.

He did this each day, visiting all the harlots in turn, and he made them promise to keep the purpose of his visit secret. The people of Alexandria, not knowing the truth, became indignant over the monk's behavior, and they reviled him. However, he meekly endured their scorn, and he only asked that they not judge others.

The holy prayers of Saint Vitalius saved many fallen women. Some of them went to a monastery, others got married, and others found respectable work. But they were forbidden to tell anyone the reason why they had changed their life, and thereby stop the abuse heaped upon Saint Vitalius. They were bound by an oath they had made to the saint. When one of the women began to break her oath and stood up to defend the saint, she fell into a demonic frenzy. After this, the people of Alexandria had no doubt concerning the sinfulness of the monk.

Certain of the clergy, scandalized by the behavior of Saint Vitalius, reported him to the holy Patriarch John the Merciful. But the Patriarch did not believe the informers and he said, "Cease to judge, especially monks. Don't you know what happened at the First Council of Nicea? Some of the bishops and the clergy brought letters of denunciation against each other to the emperor Saint Constantine the Great (May 21). He commanded that a burning candle be brought, and not even reading the letters, he burned them and said, "If I had seen with my own eyes a bishop sinning, or a priest, or a monk, then I would have veiled such with his garb, so that no one might see his sin." Thus the wise hierarch shamed the calumniators.

Saint Vitalius continued on with his difficult exploit: appearing himself before people under the guise of a sinner and a prodigal, he led the prodigal to repentance.

One time, emerging from an house of ill repute, the monk encountered a young man going there -- a prodigal fellow, who with an insult struck him on the cheek and cried out, that the monk was a disgrace to the Name of Christ. The monk answered him: "Believe me, that after me, humble man that I be, thou also shalt receive such a blow on the cheek, that will have all Alexandria thronging to thine cry".

A certain while afterwards Saint Vitalius settled into a small cell and in it at night he died. At that very hour a terrifying demon appeared before the youth who had struck the saint, and the demon struck the youth on the cheek and cried out: "Here is a knock from Saint Vitalius." The youth went into a demonic madness. In a frenzy he thrashed about on the ground, tore the clothing from himself and howled so loudly, that a multitude of people gathered.

When the youth finally came to his senses after several hours, he then rushed off to the cell of the monk, calling out: "Have mercy on me, O servant of God, for I have sinned against thee." At the door of the cell he came fully to his senses and he told those gathered there about his former encounter with Saint Vitalius. Then the youth knocked on the door of the cell, but he received no answer. When they broke in the door, they then saw, that the monk was dead, on his knees before an icon. In his hand was a scroll with the words: "Men of Alexandria, judge not beforehand, til cometh the Lord, the Righteous Judge".

At this moment there came up the demon-possessed woman, punished by the monk for wanting to violate the secret of his exploit. Having touched the body of the saint, she was healed and told the people about everything that had happened with her.

When the women who had been saved by Saint Vitalius learned about his death, they gathered together and told everyone about the virtues and mercy of the saint.

Saint John the Merciful also rejoiced, in that he had not believed the calumniators, and that a righteous man had not been condemned. And then together with the throng of repentant women, converted by Saint Vitalius, the holy Patriarch solemnly conveyed his remains throughout all the city and gave them reverent burial. And from that time many of the Alexandria people made themselves a promise to judge no one.

Mercy Questions

- Somebody in front of you in the checkout line is taking forever finding their card (even though they had the 5 minutes to find it while waiting in line). Do you get angry at how unorganised they are or do you give them a reassuring smile?
- A mom and her baby gets on your bus (and there are no seats left). Do you get up and let her sit or do you stay seated?
- You are at a fancy restaurant (and the waitress is obviously overwhelmed). When she brings you the food, it does not reach the standard of the restaurant and could be better. Do you send the food back?
- You and your friend are having an argument and she offers a truce without apologizing, even though it is clearly her/his fault. Do you agree to the truce?
- Your sunglasses go missing and you have looked everywhere. You think that maybe your friend took them without telling you. Do you give him/her the benefit of the doubt or do you confront them?
- You are a pretty generous person, you give people as much as you can. But one of your friends starts depending on it, and expecting it. Do you continue giving unconditionally?
- You are use to working hard and people look to you for leadership. But somebody is taking lead on a group project. (They are clearly not as good as you at leading the group.) Do you give them the chance to experience this or do you take the reins?
- You are somebody's boss and the person has repeatedly messed up in the past month and has not had the best work habits. (It is obvious that he has things going on at home). Do you give him another chance or do you write him up (or fire him)?
- Your sister/brother spilled juice on the carpet and you know your mom is very mad. Do you tell your parents it was your sibling or do you help clean up the mess without a second word?
- A kid who is repeatedly mean to you is being bothered by another group of kids. Do you join in, let it happen, or help him out?
- You are walking down the street and a homeless person asks you for spare change so he can get some food. Do you give him the money you have or brush him off?
- There is a long line up at the theater and you have been waiting for 15 minutes to get your ticket. A group of kids comes and stands next to the person in front of you. Suddenly, your wait just got longer by another 10 minutes. Do you call the kids out on cutting the line?
- Your next door neighbors kicks a soccer ball into you flowers (again) and damages your garden. Do you hand him back the ball without scolding words or do you yell at him to stop playing soccer if he can't keep the ball in his yard?
- Your sister/brother broke their bike and decided it would be a good idea to borrow yours without telling you (in order to get to their friend's birthday party). Do you silently understand their reasoning or do you get angry at their actions?
- Your friend lied to your face, (multiple times) and you finally cut the person out of your life. He/she apologized and admitted to their faults. Do you forgive their mistake and start again?
- You have the best grades in your class, after all you spend all your time studying and working for your A's. During the last week of exams the class clown desperately asks you for help. Do you take the time out of your schedule to help somebody who did not help themselves?

- You have been volunteering for a carnival year after year and never got any recognition. This guy volunteers (and does half the amount of work you do) and gets rewarded. Do you address the unfairness of the situation?
- You have been working your way up the chain in the company you work in for years. You are finally being considered for the management position. But instead they hire somebody from outside the workforce. Although this person is great at management, they don't have the connections with people yet. They ask you to help him get to know the staff. Do you help your new coworker?
- It's blazing hot outside and you are on the way to the park with your family. You have been planning this day for weeks, and when you finally get there somebody is sitting under the tent that you reserved. Do you make them move or will you share the tent?
- You belong to a country club (that you pay thousands of dollars for a year) and every time you go to swim you find that it could be cleaner in there. Do you complain to management?
- Your little sister stole your sweater (again). You specifically told her not to take your stuff, and yet she did it again. She comes home wearing your sweater. Do you point out her error or do you pretend to not notice the situation?
- There is only one bathroom in your house and you need to share it with your brother. It's picture day at school and your brother is taking too long getting ready and is preventing you from looking your best. (Even though he knew it was your picture day) Do you get upset with him?
- You are on our way to the trip of a lifetime, and the flight has been overbooked. The flight attendant asks you if you could wait a day in the airport hotel for the next flight. Do you agree?
- You need to print an important document for school and your printer is out of ink. You figure out that your siblings used all the ink (even though you told them not to). Do you replace the ink without a second thought or do you confront them?
- The ice cream truck comes around the corner and you run up to get some ice cream. You are first in line and you pick the ice cream sandwich. As the ice cream man is handing you the ice cream sandwich he mentions that you just bought the last one. Behind you, you hear a kid sigh and say that it's his favorite ice cream. Do you leave the ice cream for the kid or do you take it and go?
- You come home and the lights won't turn on. You have asked your dad to change the light bulb 6 times and it still has not gotten done. Do you ask again or get angry?
- You have been collecting the sea shells your whole life and you accidentally leave them at home when you go off to college. Your mom knows how much you love them but accidentally throws them out. Do you get angry toward her for throwing year's worth of sea shells?
- You put an item on hold at a store and finally decided to go back and get it. When you arrive they tell you that they accidentally sold it. Do you demand an explanation and a refund?
- You have asked your younger sibling to clean her/his room a million times and you come home to find that it is still very messy. (and you know that your sibling did not do anything all day) Do you get angry at their lack of work or do you offer to help them clean?
- Your friend wanted to borrow your (very favorite) book. You tell him to be careful, but he brings it back with juice spilled all over it and pages bent everywhere. Do you point out their failure or do you accept the condition of the book without guilting them?
- You are at the park enjoying the hot weather with your friends. You knew you were going to get thirsty so you put water in your backpack. When you open your water bottle you realize it is

empty and your friend admits to drinking your water. Do you get angry at their actions or just accept that they forgot to ask you?

- You heard a person in your church say unkind things about you. Do you confront them or secretly forgive them?
- Your puppy is finally potty trained and but randomly after a month he decides to pee on the couch. Do you get angry at his mistake or just clean up?
- You finally have a day off and you can't wait to sleep in. You told your family to turn off the alarms in the house but your sister forgot and woke you up at 6 a.m. Do you confront her on her mistake or forget the whole thing ever happened?
- There are a bunch of kids who never listen in class and are always making a bunch of noise, and yet the teacher never kicks them out of class. The one time that you are being slightly loud your teacher orders you to leave the room. Do you call the teacher on her unfair treatment or do accept your punishment?
- You are finally getting settled into your new home in a new city and your parents make the decision to move once again. Do you trust their decision or protest the move?
- You made plans with your friends and they cancel last minute. It is not the first time they break a commitment they have made. Do you forgive them or make sure they feel guilty for canceling on you again?
- You have been waiting your turn in the gimme shop line for a really long time. Right before it's your turn, another camper cuts the line and takes the last of the klondike bars. Do you get angry at the camper or forgive their little mistake?
- You ordered a purse online and it came in the wrong color. (You even called to make sure that they had the right color.) Do you call and get angry over the phone or just tell let them know that a mistake was made?
- You worked really hard to get your brother the best present for his birthday. You finally wrap it up and you feel good about yourself. When you brother opens it he does not seem to excited and seems less than happy about it. Do you tell him how much work you put into it or do you let it be?
- You spent a lot of money on a beautiful cake for your sister's birthday and she decides it would be funny to smash her face in it. Do you get upset about her actions or decide to let her do what she would like with her birthday cake?
- A man sees a great big oak tree perfect for the cabin he wants to build. However, he notices a nest of baby chipmunks. Does he still choose to cut the tree down because of his desperation of needing somewhere to live in the winter or leave the tree and the nest alone?
- Jake is rushing home to take his wife to the hospital when he passes a car accident where no one is at the scene yet. He can see that the driver is unconscious and bleeding from his head. Does Jake continue to drive home for his wife's sake or stop to check on the driver?
- A knowledgeable Christian who is very quick to anger is confronted by an atheist who questions his beliefs. Although the Christian knew the answers to the questions, if he even tried to answer, he would explode with anger because of the atheist's condescending attitude. Does the Christian decide to walk away without answering the question or let his anger get the best of him?
- A hunter sees a mother deer with her 3 fawns in the woods. He understands that without the mother the children will starve. However, without the mother deer, the hunter's children may go hungry that night. Does he decide to leave the mother and her children putting his children at risk?

- Sally is really scared of bugs, but she really loves God and she knows God created bugs. Does Sally stomp on God's creation or let it live?
- David is scared to swim in the ocean because he watched a scary shark movie. However, his baby sister will only go in the water if he goes in with her. Did David put his sister before himself?
- Gabe has been really committed to the gym lately. His friend asks him to skip the gym one day so that Gabe could go with his friend to a concert that his mom won't let him go to alone. Gabe can only go to the gym during the same time as the concert. Will Gabe break his commitment in order to go to a concert with his friend?
- A Sunday school teacher wants to stay home with her sick son on Sunday morning. However she knows that it's to last minute for the church to find a substitute. If she stays home, she knows her class will miss a valuable lesson about Jesus Christ. Will she sacrifice her classes learning experience or leave her son when he needs her?
- Every light bulb Lily has ever changed has broken. Lily's mom asks her if she could change a light bulb in the living room because her mom's back really hurts. Will Lily put her fear to the side to save her mom from severe pain?

Lesson Five: The Pure in Heart

REVIEW

Yesterday we talked about the merciful. What does it mean to be merciful? To whom are we to be merciful? What does our mercy have to do with the way we will be judged?

To be merciful is to show mercy to others in the same way that Christ shows mercy toward us. God's mercy toward us is an underserved gift of forgiveness, comfort, and love. To be merciful is to give forgiveness, comfort, and love to everyone, even when it is "undeserved"—and to do so without hope for anything in return. If we are not merciful to those around us, the Lord will not be merciful to us. We will be judged by the way we treat our neighbor.

And what are some ways that we can cultivate meekness?

Going to confession reminds us of the mercy that the Lord has given us. Praying for others helps us to grow in compassion for them. Almsgiving helps to remind us that all that we have is a gift from God and that we are not to hold onto it but to distribute it to those in need. Being merciful to our family members is sometimes the best place to start.

Today we are going to be talking about the sixth beatitude, purity of heart.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

OPENING VERSE

1 Peter 1:13-23, RSV: Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." [...] Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

DISCUSSION & DEFINITION

What is Peter exhorting us to do here?

He is calling us to clear our minds, to put our hope completely in Christ, to be obedient to Him, to set ourselves apart for Him, to purify our souls, and to live as those who have been reborn into the family of Christ.

What do all of these things have to do with purity of heart? What does the word "purity" mean? What does it mean to be "pure?"

The things that Peter is exhorting us to—obedience, holiness, clarity, and devotion—are all aspects of purity of heart. To be pure means to be totally clean, sinless, spotless, and blameless. It means to be perfect and whole, to be unbroken and united. Purity also has to do with innocence.

The pure in heart are those who are single-minded, blameless, and sincere in their devotion to Christ.

Now we're going to read (or act out) a story from the gospels to help us learn more about what it means to be pure in heart.

BIBLE STORY

Younger Campers: Have campers act out stories from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson Five, located in the back of this lesson.

Mary of Bethany: Luke 10:38-42, John 12:1-8

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.” [...] Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, “Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

DISCUSSION

What happened in each of these stories? What did Mary do? How did those around her respond?

In the first story, Jesus comes to Mary and Martha's house. Martha is busy serving, while Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to him. Martha gets upset that Mary is not helping her serve. In the second story, Mary is again at Jesus' feet, anointing him with an expensive bottle of perfume. Judas gets upset that she has wasted this on Jesus when it could have been sold for the poor.

What do you think about Martha's response? What about Judas's response? What was the “one thing needful,” the “good portion” that Mary chose? Why do you think Jesus commends Mary both times for what she has done?

Both Martha's response and Judas's response make sense—so much so that it is tempting to agree with them! Serving the Lord is a very good thing. Selling our possessions and giving the money to the poor is also a very good thing. But Jesus commends Mary for her wholehearted devotion to him. He is the one thing needful. He is the good portion towards which she has chosen to devote all of her energy and attention and upon which she has chosen to lavish her affection and extravagance. While Christ is in her presence, she is completely focused on him. He has her full attention and complete adoration. When Christ is in her presence, nothing is more important than being with him.

This wholeheartedness that Mary of Bethany exemplifies is part of what it means to be pure in heart. Now that we've seen purity of heart in action, let's take a look at all of the different aspects that make up this beatitude.

TALKING POINTS

1. *In order to become pure in heart, we must prepare and maintain a “clean room” in our hearts for Christ.*
 - If Christ told us that He was going to come into our home, we would clean up for Him. We would not just straighten up a little bit—we would make our home look as beautiful and as clean as it possibly can. (Moreover, we would probably quickly get rid of anything sinful or inappropriate that we might have around.) The fact is, the Lord does not only want to be present in our homes—He already is, by the way!—but He also wants to come take up residence within our very hearts. He wants to live in our hearts and to be united with us. In order for Him to live within us, however, we must prepare a clean place for Him to stay, ridding our hearts of all of the mess and dirt that accumulates within them. We must repent of our sins, leaving them behind forever.
 - True purity of heart involves complete sinlessness. This does not mean that the pure in heart never make mistakes. It simply means that they are quick to pick themselves up whenever they fall. The pure in heart are those who are “clean freaks” when it comes to their hearts, guarding them against any form of defilement. Just as we must straighten up our rooms and our cabins on a regular basis, cleaning our hearts is not a one-time event. Instead, it is something we must do every single day. In order to maintain a clean room for Christ, we must clean up at the very first sign of “clutter,” “grime,” and “dust” in our hearts, never allowing them to become a den of sin. We must cut off temptations as soon as they arise and repent at the first sign of our sins.
 - This cleaning is not something we have to do alone. When we ask Him to, God will help us clean. He is not afraid of our messes, and we cannot become pure of heart without His help. However, we must be humble enough to own up to our messes and willing to throw out permanently the things that create them in the first place. We must admit our sin and be willing to do the work involved in ridding ourselves of it.

*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.
(2 Corinthians 7:1, RSV)*

*Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.
(Revelation 3:19-20, RSV)*

2. *To be pure in heart is to be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord. Our hearts must not only be clean but undivided.*

Younger Campers: Ask campers to list some things that can distract us from serving God and worshipping Him. Write their answers on the dry-erase board. If they do not think of it on their own, direct them to think of any good things that can distract us from Christ. (Examples may include family

and friends, academic or extracurricular goals, sports, etc.). Explain that, while there is obviously nothing wrong with being close to family or pursuing our dreams, we have to keep these things in their proper place. Are we holding on to them more dearly than we are to Christ? Do we choose these things over going to church or saying our prayers?

- Being pure in heart means having an undivided heart. It means being singularly focused on Christ, wholly devoted to Him and not to any other person or any other thing. To be pure in heart means that we really only desire one thing—to please the Lord and to be united to Him—and that we let nothing hinder or distract us from this goal.

*One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. [...] Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! Thou hast said, "Seek ye my face." My heart says to thee, "Thy face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not thy face from me."
(Psalm 26: 4, 7-9, RSV)*

*Obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ.
(Colossians 3: 22-24, RSV)*

*But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."
(Matthew 22:34-40, RSV)*

3. ***When we become pure in heart, our lives become characterized by innocence. We not only become innocent ourselves but begin to see the whole world as good and pure.***

Dirty Goggles Activity

Directions: Have the campers put on goggles that have been covered with paint. Ask them to tell you what it is like to look through the glasses. Now, place an icon of Christ somewhere nearby (without telling them where) and ask them to go find it and bring it to you.

Debrief: Explain that our hearts are like the goggles. When they are full of sin, it is difficult to see the truth. It is difficult to see God working in the world and to see Him in the people around us. All we can see is our own sin—and rather than recognizing it as our own, we assume that the sin is “out there” in the people around us rather than in our own hearts. But even with sin blocking our spiritual vision, it’s still important to continue seeking Christ (we did eventually find the icon). No matter how dark your world and spiritual eyes may seem, we can all still seek and find Christ.

- To be pure in heart is to see all things as pure. This means assuming the best in others, giving people the benefit of the doubt, and never condemning or accusing another person. When we feel ourselves wanting to complain about someone, condemn them, or judge them, this is a good sign that we have room to grow when it comes to purity of heart. The pure in heart pay attention only to what is good in others, not even taking note of their faults or weaknesses.
- It is only by first recognizing our own sin that we are able to neglect the sins of others. By focusing on our own sinfulness, we are able to ignore the sins of others, viewing the people around us through a lens of compassion and grace.

*To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted.
(Titus 1:15, RSV)*

*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.
(Philippians 4:8-9, RSV)*

- 4. *When we are pure in heart, we have clarity of heart. We begin to clearly reflect the image of Christ and to see the truth with unhindered vision.***

Dirty Jars Activity

Directions: Throughout the lesson, pass the jar around with a cloth and some cleaning spray, having each child spend a little time cleaning the jar. At the end of the lesson, hold up the clean jar and reveal what is inside.

Debrief: Explain that our hearts must be clean in order for others to see Christ in us. Ask what it was like cleaning the jar. Was it easy to get rid of the “sin” that was blocking Christ’s image? What kinds of things do we hold on to that make it hard for others to see Christ in us? What are some things we do or say that are not a good reflection of who Christ is? Also, when we purify our hearts, however, we see the truth clearly. We see God working through everything, and we recognize Him in the people around us. And because our own hearts are clean and pure, we see everything else as being clean and pure too. Notice that everyone did their own piece to clean the jar. It’s just like our own spiritual journey; we can’t do it alone, and need the help of others around us to find our way to Christ.

- It is through our hearts that we see the world. If our hearts, like glass, are dirty, our vision of the world will be distorted. When we are pure in heart, however, there is nothing that hinders our vision of the truth. We are able to see the world through God’s eyes, and we are able to see Him in every living thing.
- It is also through our hearts that the world sees Christ in us. If our hearts, like a mirror, are dirty, we cannot shine as a clear reflection of Christ. When we are pure in heart, however, others see Christ clearly in us, because we are living reflections of His love, beauty, and goodness.

*Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.
(Philippians 2:14-16, RSV)*

*Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.
(1 John 3:2-3, RSV)*

Can the pure in heart literally see God? In this age, we will only ever see Him “dimly.” When the eyes of our hearts are open and we are attentive to His presence, we will be able to recognize Him in everyone and everything. However, it is only in the age to come that we will see Him face to face.

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.
(1 Corinthians 13:12, RSV)*

Younger Campers: Read the stories of St. Bathildis, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and St. Seraphim of Sarov, located in the back of this lesson.

APPLICATION

Now that we have talked a little more about purity of heart, what do you think we, as Christians today, can do to cultivate it?

- **Praying the Jesus prayer** helps us to keep our lives focused on Christ. It also helps us to drive out sinful thoughts and guard ourselves against temptation.
- **Self-examination, repentance, and confession** help us to keep our hearts clean. It is only when we inspect our hearts closely can we find the filth that needs to be removed, and it is only by doing the work to remove that filth that we can present our hearts spotless before Christ. By focusing on our own sin, we also begin to empathize with the sins of others and to see the innocence of the people around us.
- **Regular Communion** is one way in which we physically invite God to take up residence within us, unworthy though we may be. Only by the power of God can we become pure in heart, and only by continually drawing upon this power can we remain this way.

Encourage campers, if they have not done so already, to take advantage of the opportunity to go to confession while they are here at camp. If they are interested in learning more, you can give them a copy of the Self-Examination Before Confession, located at the end of Lesson One.

REVIEW

Let's review what we learned today. What does it mean to be pure and heart?

Purity of heart requires spiritual cleanliness. In order to become pure in heart, we must prepare and maintain a “clean room” in our hearts for Christ. Purity of heart requires wholeheartedness. We must be undivided in our devotion to Christ. Purity of heart is characterized by innocence. We must not only become innocent ourselves but begin to see the whole world as good and pure. When we are pure in heart, our hearts are clear. We begin to reflect the image of Christ and to see the truth with unhindered vision.

FOR REFERENCE

Blamelessness

2 Timothy 2:21-22, RSV: If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. So shun sinful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.

For older campers only: 1 Corinthians 6: 15-20: Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? [...] Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two shall become one flesh.” He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun immorality. [...] Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 Peter 2:1-5, RSV: So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Matthew 23:25-26, RSV: Woe to you [...]! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. [...] First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

Ezekiel 36:25-28, RSV: I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

James 1:27, RSV: Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Psalms 23:3-6, RSV: Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Titus 2:11-14, RSV: For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

One must clean the royal house from every impurity and adorn it with every beauty, then the king may enter into it. In a similar way one must first cleanse the earth of the heart and uproot the weeds of sin and the passionate deeds and soften it with sorrows and the narrow way of life, sow in it the seed of virtue, water it with lamentation and tears, and only then does the fruit of dispassion and eternal life grow. For the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a man until he has been cleansed from passions of the soul and body.

+ *St. Paisius Velichkovsky*

Happiness is a pure heart, for such a heart becomes the throne of God. Thus says Christ of those who have pure hearts: "I will visit them, and will walk in them, and I will be a God to them, and they will be my people." What can be lacking to them? Nothing, nothing at all! For they have the greatest good in their hearts: God Himself!

+ *St. Nektarios of Aegina*

Take a look at your heart. Everything you see in it that might sadden God, remove. God wants to come to you. [...] If I were to tell you I was coming to stay with you, you would clean your house. Now it is God who wants to come into your heart. Do you not hasten to purify it? How could He dwell with avarice?

+ *St. Augustine of Hippo*

We ought to make ourselves each day such as we should be when we are to appear before God.

+ *St. Philotheos of Sinai*

2 Peter 3:10-14, RSV: But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. [...] So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

O thou who willingly dost give thy flesh to me as food, Thou who art a Fire, consuming the unworthy, consume me not, O my Creator; but rather pass through all my body parts, into all my joints, my reins, my heart. Burn thou the thorns of all my transgressions, cleanse my soul, and hallow thou my thoughts. Make firm my knees, and my bones likewise; enlighten as one my five senses, establish me wholly in thy fear; ever shelter me, and guard and keep me from every soul-corrupting deed and word, chasten me, purify me, and control me; adorn me, teach me, and enlighten me. Show me to be a Tabernacle of thy Spirit only, and in no wise the dwelling-place of sin, that from me, thy habitation, through the entrance of thy Communion, every evil deed and every passion may flee as from fire. [...] For thou alone, Good Lord, are the sanctification and splendor of our souls, and to thee as God and Master, day by day, duly we ascribe all glory.

+ *Post-Communion Prayer of St. Simon Metaphrastes*

Wholeheartedness

Hebrews 10:19-22, RSV: Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full

assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Colossians 1:21-23, RSV: And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard.

Romans 12:1-2, RSV: I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Ephesians 6:5-8, RSV: Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Purity of heart hates luxury, laziness, bodily beauty, fine garments, rich food, and drunkenness. It overcomes the flesh and penetrates the heavenly with its eye. It is the fountainhead of love and the dwelling place of Angels. It is a gift of God, filled with goodness, edification and knowledge. It is a peaceful and fitting haven which fends off evil and cleaves to goodness. This purity of heart is characterized by cleanliness of body and soul, a peaceful nature, meekness, humility, love and closeness to God, and attainment in all the virtues, including strict abstinence.

+ *St. Ephraim the Syrian*

I thank thee, O Lord my God, that thou hast not rejected me, a sinner, but hast accounted me worthy to become a communicant of thy holy Mysteries. [...] Grant that they may be for me [...] unto the healing of soul and body, unto the averting of everything contrary thereto; unto the enlightenment of the eyes of my heart; unto the peace of my spiritual powers; unto faith invincible; unto love unfeigned; unto fulfilling of wisdom; unto the keeping of thy commandments; unto growth in thy divine grace, and the attainment of thy kingdom; that by them preserved in thy holiness, I may ever remember thy grace, and henceforth live not unto myself, but unto thee, our Master and Benefactor. And thus, when this life is ended in the hope of eternal life, I may attain unto everlasting rest, where the voice of those who keep festival is unceasing, and the delight of those who behold the ineffable beauty of thy countenance is boundless: for thou art the true desire and unutterable joy of those who love thee, O Christ our God, and all creation hymneth thee forever.

+ *A Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion*

Innocence

A person is truly pure of heart when he considers all human beings good and no created thing appears impure or defiled to him.

+ *St. Isaac the Syrian*

Matthew 12: 34-35, RSV: You brood of vipers! how can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Luke 6:45, RSV: The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Matthew 15:18-19, RSV: But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

Psalms 18:25-26, RSV: With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal; with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless; with the pure thou dost show thyself pure; and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.

Proverbs 4:23, RSV: Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life.

Clarity

Just as a mirror reflects an image when it is clean, so can a pure and holy soul see God and understand the Scriptures.

+ *St. Theophilact*

When your mind is untainted by any evil, free of passion, purified of all stain, then you will be blessed because your eye is clear. Then because you have been purified you will perceive things that are invisible to the unpurified. [...] And what is that vision? It is purity, holiness, simplicity, and other such brilliant reflections of the nature of God; for it is in these that God is seen.

+ *St. Gregory of Nyssa*

While in other sciences the instruments you use are things external to yourself (things like microscopes and telescopes), the instrument through which you see God is your whole self. And if a man's self isn't kept clean and bright, his glimpse of God will be blurred—like the Moon seen through a dirty telescope.

– *C.S. Lewis*

Sunlight, though it has no favorites, cannot be reflected in a dusty mirror as clearly as a clean one.

– *C.S. Lewis*

We can see God only when, by God's grace, we have cleansed the soul of its passions. For sin is darkness, and a deep darkness.

+ *St. John Chrysostom*

Since your reason inclines you to believe and yet you cannot believe, your inability to believe comes from your passions. Try, then, not to convince yourself by multiplying the proofs of the existence of God but by diminishing your passions.

– *Blaise Pascal*

Bible Story Scripts: Lesson Five

Mary of Bethany: Luke 10:38-42, John 12:1-8

Characters: Narrator, Martha, Mary, Jesus, Lazarus, Judas

Narrator: Jesus continued from there toward Jerusalem and came to another village. Martha, a resident of that village, welcomed Jesus into her home, and her sister, Mary, went and sat at Jesus' feet, listening to Him teach. Meanwhile Martha was anxious about all the hospitality arrangements.

Martha (*interrupting Jesus*): Lord, why don't You care that my sister is leaving me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to get over here and help me.

Jesus: Oh Martha, Martha, you are so anxious and concerned about a million details, but really, only one thing matters. Mary has chosen that one thing, and I won't take it away from her.

...

Narrator: Six days before the Passover feast, Jesus journeyed to the village of Bethany, to the home of Lazarus who had recently been raised from the dead, where they hosted Him for dinner. Martha was busy serving as the hostess, Lazarus reclined at the table with Him, and Mary took a pound of rare and expensive ointment, and anointed Jesus' feet with it; and then she wiped them with her hair. As the pleasant fragrance of this extravagant ointment filled the entire house, Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (who was plotting to betray Jesus), began to speak.

Judas Iscariot: How could she pour out this vast amount of fine oil? Why didn't she sell it? It is worth nearly a year's wages; the money could have been given to the poor.

Narrator: This had nothing to do with Judas's desire to help the poor. The truth is he served as the treasurer, and he helped himself to the money from the common pot at every opportunity.

Jesus: Leave her alone. She has observed this custom in anticipation of the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.

Saint Stories: Lesson Five

St. Bathildis

An Anglo-Saxon by birth, Bathildis was captured by the invading armies from Denmark in 641 and sold to Erchinoald, the chief officer of the palace of Clovis II, King of France. She quickly gained favor, for she had charm, beauty, and a graceful and gentle nature. She also won the affection of her fellow-servants, for she showed them many kindnesses such as cleaning their shoes and mending their clothes, and her bright and attractive disposition endeared her to all.

Erchinoald, impressed by her fine qualities, wished to make her his wife, but Bathildis, alarmed at the prospect, disguised herself in old and ragged clothes, and hid herself away among the servants at the palace. Erchinoald, thinking she had run away, married another woman.

Her next suitor, however, was King Clovis. When Bathildis discarded her old clothes and appeared again, the king noticed her grace and beauty, and declared his love for her. In 649, the 19-year-old slave girl Bathildis became Queen of France. She bore Clovis three sons: Clotaire III, Childeric II, and Thierry III, all of whom became kings. On the death of her husband, she was appointed regent for her eldest son, Clotaire, who was only five, and she ruled capably for eight years with St. Eligius as her adviser.

She made a good queen and ruled wisely. She never forgot that she had been a slave, and did all within her power to relieve those in captivity. It was written that Queen Bathildis was the holiest and most devout of women. Remembering her own bondage, she set apart vast sums for the redemption of captives. Bathildis helped promote Christianity by following the teachings of St. Ouen, St. Leodegarius, and many other bishops.

During this period, the poorer inhabitants of France were often obliged to sell their children as slaves to meet the crushing taxes imposed upon them. Bathildis reduced their taxes, outlawed the purchase of Christian slaves and the sale of French subjects, and declared that any slave who set foot in France would from that moment be free. Thus, this enlightened woman earned the love of her people and was a pioneer in the abolition of slavery.

She also founded many abbeys, such as Corbie, Saint-Denis, and Chelles, which became settlements in wild and remote areas of France. Under her guidance, forests were reclaimed and agriculture flourished. She built hospitals and sold her jewelry to help the needy.

When her son, Clotaire, came of age and ascended to the throne as King of France, Bathildis retired to her own royal abbey of Chelles, near Paris, where she served as an ordinary nun with humility and obedience.

She died at Chelles before she had reached her 50th birthday. Death touched her with a gentle hand; as she died, she said she saw a ladder reaching from the altar to heaven, and up this she climbed in the company of angels.

St. Bathildis is generally pictured as a crowned queen or nun before the altar of the Virgin, two angels support a child on a ladder, and reflects the vision she is said to have had at her death.

St. Catherine, the Great-Martyr of Alexandria

The Holy Great Martyr Catherine was the daughter of Constus, the governor of Alexandrian Egypt during the reign of the emperor Maximian (305-313). Living in the capital, the center of Hellenistic knowledge, and possessed of a rare beauty and intellect, Catherine received an excellent education, studying the works of the greatest philosophers and teachers of antiquity. Young men from the most worthy families of the empire sought the hand of the beautiful Catherine, but she was not interested in any of them. She told her parents that she would enter into marriage only with someone who surpassed her in nobility, wealth, comeliness and wisdom.

Catherine's mother, a secret Christian, sent her to her own spiritual Father, a saintly Elder living in a cave outside the city, for advice. After listening to Catherine, the Elder said that he knew of a Youth who surpassed her in everything. "His countenance is more radiant than the shining of the sun, and all of creation is governed by His wisdom. His riches are given to all the nations of the world, yet they never diminish. His compassion is unequalled."

This description of the Heavenly Bridegroom produced in the soul of the holy maiden an ardent desire to see Him. "If you do as I tell you," said the monk, "you will gaze upon the countenance of this illustrious man." In parting, the Elder handed Catherine an icon of the Theotokos with the divine Child Jesus on Her arm and told her to pray with faith to the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the Heavenly Bridegroom, and She would hear Catherine and grant her heart's desire.

Catherine prayed all night and was permitted to see the Most Holy Virgin, Who said Her Divine Son, "Behold Thy handmaiden Catherine, how fair and virtuous she is." But the Child turned His face away from her saying, "No, she is ugly and unbelieving. She is a foolish pauper, and I cannot bear to look at her until she forsakes her impiety."

Catherine returned again to the Elder deeply saddened, and told him what she had seen in the dream. He lovingly received her, instructed her in the faith of Christ, admonished her to preserve her purity and integrity and to pray unceasingly. She then received the Mystery of holy Baptism from him. Again Saint Catherine had a vision of the Most Holy Theotokos with Her Child. Now the Lord looked tenderly at her and gave her a beautiful ring, a wondrous token of her betrothal to the Heavenly Bridegroom (This ring is still on her hand).

At that time the emperor Maximian was in Alexandria for a pagan festival. Therefore, the celebration was especially splendid and crowded. The cries of the sacrificial animals, the smoke and the smell of the sacrifices, the endless blazing of fires, and the bustling crowds at the arenas defiled the city of Alexandria. Human victims also were brought, the confessors of Christ, those who would not deny Him under torture. They were condemned to death in the fire. The saint's love for the Christian martyrs and her fervent desire to ease their sufferings compelled Catherine to speak to the pagan priest and to the emperor Maximian.

Introducing herself, the saint confessed her faith in the One True God and with wisdom exposed the errors of the pagans. The beauty of the maiden captivated the emperor. In order to convince her and to show the superiority of pagan wisdom, the emperor ordered fifty of the most learned philosophers and rhetoricians of the Empire to dispute with her, but the saint got the better of the wise men, so that they came to believe in Christ themselves. Saint Catherine made the Sign of the Cross over the martyrs, and they bravely accepted death for Christ and were burned alive by order of the emperor.

Maximian, no longer hoping to convince the saint, tried to entice her with the promise of riches and fame. Receiving an angry refusal, the emperor gave orders to subject the saint to terrible tortures and then throw her in prison.

Here the Lord appeared to her. When she asked Him, "Lord, where have You been all this time?" He answered, "I was here all the time, in your heart." "How can that be, O Lord, when my heart is impure, and full of evil and pride?" she asked. "Yes," said the Lord, "but you have left room in it for Me. Had I not been with you, you would not have been able to bear all these tortures. I will give you strength so that you can endure until the end."

The Empress Augusta, who had heard much about the saint, wanted to see her. She prevailed upon the military commander Porphyrius to accompany her to the prison with a detachment of soldiers. The empress was impressed by the strong spirit of Saint Catherine, whose face was radiant with divine grace. The holy martyr explained the Christian teaching to them, and they were converted to Christ.

On the following day they again brought the martyr to the judgment court where, under the threat of being broken on the wheel, they urged that she renounce the Christian Faith and offer sacrifice to the gods. The saint steadfastly confessed Christ and she herself approached the wheels; but an angel smashed the instruments of execution, which shattered into pieces with many pagans standing nearby.

Having beheld this wonder, the Empress Augusta and the imperial courtier Porphyrius with 200 soldiers confessed their faith in Christ in front of everyone, and they were beheaded. Maximian again tried to entice the holy martyr, proposing marriage to her, and again he was refused. Saint Catherine firmly confessed her fidelity to the heavenly Bridegroom Christ, and with a prayer to Him she herself lay her head on the block beneath the executioner's sword.

The relics of Saint Catherine were taken by the angels to Mount Sinai. In the sixth century,, the venerable head and left hand of the holy martyr were found through a revelation and transferred with honor to a newly-constructed church of the Sinai monastery, built by the holy Emperor Justinian (November 14). Pilgrims to her monastery on Mt Sinai are given souvenir rings as a remembrance of their visit.

St. Seraphim the Wonderworker of Sarov

Saint Seraphim of Sarov, a great ascetic of the Russian Church, was born on July 19, 1754. His parents, Isidore and Agathia Moshnin, were inhabitants of Kursk. Isidore was a merchant. Toward the end of his life, he began construction of a cathedral in Kursk, but he died before the completion of the work. His little son Prochorus, the future Seraphim, remained in the care of his widowed mother, who raised her son in piety.

Young Prochorus, endowed with an excellent memory, soon mastered reading and writing. From his childhood he loved to attend church services, and to read both the Holy Scripture and the Lives of the Saints with his fellow students. Most of all, he loved to pray or to read the Holy Gospel in private.

At one point Prochorus fell grievously ill, and his life was in danger. In a dream the boy saw the Mother of God, promising to visit and heal him. Soon past the courtyard of the Moshnin home came a church procession with the Kursk Root Icon of the Sign (November 27). His mother carried Prochorus in her arms, and he kissed the holy icon, after which he speedily recovered.

While still in his youth Prochorus made his plans to devote his life entirely to God and to go to a monastery. His devout mother did not object to this and she blessed him on his monastic path with a copper cross, which he wore on his chest for the rest of his life. Prochorus set off on foot with pilgrims going from Kursk to Kiev to venerate the Saints of the Caves.

The Elder Dositheus, whom Prochorus visited, blessed him to go to the Sarov wilderness monastery, and there seek his salvation. Returning briefly to his parental home, Prochorus bid a final farewell to his mother and family. On November 20, 1778 he arrived at Sarov, where the monastery then was headed by a wise Elder, Father Pachomius. He accepted him and put him under the spiritual guidance of the Elder Joseph. Under his direction Prochorus passed through many obediences at the monastery: he was the Elder's cell-attendant, he toiled at making bread and prosphora, and at carpentry. He fulfilled all his obediences with zeal and fervor, as though serving the Lord Himself. By constant work he guarded himself against despondency, this being, as he later said, "the most dangerous temptation for new monks. It is treated by prayer, by abstaining from idle chatter, by strenuous work, by reading the Word of God and by patience, since it is engendered by pettiness of soul, negligence, and idle talk."

With the blessing of Igumen Pachomius, Prochorus abstained from all food on Wednesdays and Fridays, and went into the forest, where in complete isolation he practiced the Jesus Prayer. After two years as a novice, Prochorus fell ill with dropsy, his body became swollen, and he was beset with suffering. The illness dragged on for about three years, and not once did anyone hear from him a word of complaint. The Elders, fearing for his very life, wanted to call a doctor for him, but Prochorus asked that this not be done, saying to Father Pachomius: "I have entrusted myself, holy Father, to the True Physician of soul and body, our Lord Jesus Christ and His All-Pure Mother."

He asked that a Molieben be offered for his health. While the others were praying in church, Prochorus had a vision. The Mother of God appeared to him accompanied by the holy Apostles Peter and John the Theologian. Pointing with Her hand towards the sick monk, the Most Holy Virgin said to Saint John, "He is one of our kind." Then She touched the side of the sick man with Her staff, and immediately the fluid that had swelled up his body began to flow through the incision that She made. After the Molieben, the brethren found that Prochorus had been healed, and only a scar remained as evidence of the miracle.

After eight years as a novice at the Sarov monastery, Prochorus was tonsured with the name Seraphim, a name reflecting his fiery love for the Lord and his zealous desire to serve Him. After a year, Seraphim was ordained as hierodeacon.

Earnest in spirit, he served in the temple each day, incessantly praying even after the service. The Lord granted him visions during the church services: he often saw holy angels serving with the priests. During the Divine Liturgy on Great and Holy Thursday, which was celebrated by the igumen Father Pachomius and by Father Joseph, Saint Seraphim had another vision. After the Little Entrance with the Gospel, the hierodeacon Seraphim pronounced the words "O Lord, save the God-fearing, and hear us." Then, he lifted his orarion saying, "And unto ages of ages." Suddenly, he was blinded by a bright ray of light.

Looking up, Saint Seraphim beheld the Lord Jesus Christ, coming through the western doors of the temple, surrounded by the Bodiless Powers of Heaven. Reaching the ambo, the Lord blessed all those praying and entered into His Icon to the right of the royal doors. Saint Seraphim, in spiritual rapture after this miraculous vision, was unable to utter a word, nor to move from the spot. They led him by the hand into the altar, where he just stood for another three hours, his face having changed color from the great grace that shone upon him. After the vision the saint intensified his efforts. He toiled at the monastery by day, and he spent his nights praying in his forest cell.

In 1793, Hierodeacon Seraphim was ordained to the priesthood, and he served the Divine Liturgy every day. After the death of the igumen Father Pachomius, Saint Seraphim received the blessing of the new Superior Father Isaiah, to live alone in a remote part of the forest three and a half miles from the monastery. He named his new home “Mount Athos,” and devoted himself to solitary prayer. He went to the monastery only on Saturday before the all-night Vigil, and returned to his forest cell after Sunday’s Liturgy, at which he partook of the Divine Mysteries.

Father Seraphim spent his time in ascetical struggles. His cell rule of prayer was based on the rule of Saint Pachomius for the ancient desert monasteries. He always carried the Holy Gospels with him, reading the entire New Testament in the course of a week. He also read the holy Fathers and the service books. The saint learned many of the Church hymns by heart, and sang them while working in the forest.

The holy Elder was sometimes so absorbed by the unceasing prayer of the heart that he remained without stirring, neither hearing nor seeing anything around him. The schemamonk Mark the Silent and the hierodeacon Alexander, also wilderness-dwellers, would visit him every now and then. Finding the saint immersed in prayer, they would leave quietly, so they would not disturb his contemplation.

His solitude was often disturbed by visits from monks and laymen, who sought his advice and blessing. With the blessing of the igumen, Father Seraphim prohibited women from visiting him, then receiving a sign that the Lord approved of his desire for complete silence, he banned all visitors. Through the prayers of the saint, the pathway to his wilderness cell was blocked by huge branches blown down from ancient pine trees. Now only the birds and the wild beasts visited him, and he dwelt with them as Adam did in Paradise. They came at midnight and waited for him to complete his Rule of prayer. Then he would feed bears, lynxes, foxes, rabbits, and even wolves with bread from his hand. Saint Seraphim also had a bear which would obey him and run errands for him.

In 1807 the abbot, Father Isaiah, fell asleep in the Lord. Saint Seraphim was asked to take his place, but he declined. He lived in silence for three years, completely cut off from the world except for the monk who came once a week to bring him food. If the saint encountered a man in the forest, he fell face down and did not get up until the passerby had moved on. Saint Seraphim acquired peace of soul and joy in the Holy Spirit. The great ascetic once said, “Acquire the spirit of peace, and a thousand souls will be saved around you.”

After three years, the new Superior of the monastery, Father Niphon, and the older brethren of the monastery told Father Seraphim to move back into the monastery. In the spring of 1810, he returned to the monastery after fifteen years of living in the wilderness. Continuing his silence, he shut himself up in his cell, occupying himself with prayer and reading. He was also permitted to eat meals and to receive Communion in his cell. There Saint Seraphim attained the height of spiritual purity and was granted special gifts of grace by God: clairvoyance and wonderworking. After five years of solitude, he opened his door and allowed the monks to enter. He continued his silence, however, teaching them only by example.

On November 25, 1825 the Mother of God, accompanied by the two holy hierarchs commemorated on that day (Hieromartyr Clement of Rome, and Saint Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria), appeared to the Elder in a vision and told him to end his seclusion and to devote himself to others. He received the igumen’s blessing to divide his time between life in the forest, and at the monastery. At that time, he opened the doors of his cell to pilgrims as well as his fellow-monks.

The Elder saw into the hearts of people, and as a spiritual physician, he healed their infirmities of soul and body through prayer and by his grace-filled words. Those coming to Saint Seraphim felt his great love and tenderness. No matter what time of the year it was, he would greet everyone with the words, “Christ is Risen, my joy!” He especially loved children. Once, a young girl said to her friends, “Father Seraphim only looks like an old man. He is really a child like us.”

Nicholas Alexandrovich Motovilov, was also healed by the monk. It was revealed to Saint Seraphim that Motovilov had been desiring to know the aim of the Christian life since childhood, without receiving a satisfactory answer. The holy Elder told him that the aim of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, and went on to explain the great benefits of prayer and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

Motovilov asked the saint how we can know if the Holy Spirit is with us or not. Saint Seraphim spoke at length about how people come to be in the Spirit of God, and how we can recognize His presence in us, but Motovilov wanted to understand this better. Then Father Seraphim took him by the shoulders and said, “We are both in the Spirit of God now, my son. Why don’t you look at me?”

Motovilov replied, “I cannot look, Father, for your eyes are flashing like lightning, and your face is brighter than the sun.”

Saint Seraphim told him, “Don’t be alarmed, friend of God. Now you yourself have become as bright as I am. You are in the fulness of the Spirit of God yourself, otherwise you would not be able to see me like this.”

Then Saint Seraphim promised Motovilov that God would allow him to retain this experience in his memory all his life.

Everyone knew and esteemed Saint Seraphim as a great ascetic and wonderworker. A year and ten months before his end, on the Feast of the Annunciation, Saint Seraphim was granted to behold the Queen of Heaven once more in the company of Saint John the Baptist, the Apostle John the Theologian and twelve Virgin Martyrs (Saints Barbara, Katherine, Thekla, Marina, Irene, Eupraxia, Pelagia, Dorothea, Makrina, Justina, Juliana, and Anysia). The Most Holy Virgin conversed at length with the monk. Concluding the conversation, She said to him: “Soon, My dear one, you shall be with us.”

Saint Seraphim became noticeably weaker and he spoke much about his approaching end. During this time they often saw him sitting by his coffin, which he had placed in the ante-room of his cell, and which he had prepared for himself.

The saint himself had marked the place where finally they would bury him, near the altar of the Dormition cathedral. On January 1, 1833 Father Seraphim came to the church of Saints Zosimas and Sabbatius one last time for Liturgy and he received the Holy Mysteries, after which he blessed the brethren and bid them farewell, saying: “Save your souls. Do not be despondent, but watchful. Today crowns are being prepared for us.”

On January 2, Father Paul, the saint’s cell-attendant, left his own cell at six in the morning to attend the early Liturgy. He noticed the smell of smoke coming from the Elder’s cell. Saint Seraphim would often leave candles burning in his cell, and Father Paul was concerned that they could start a fire.

“While I am alive,” he once said, “there will be no fire, but when I die, my death shall be revealed by a fire.” When they opened the door, it appeared that books and other things were smoldering. Saint Seraphim was found kneeling before an icon of the Mother of God with his arms crossed on his chest. His pure soul was taken by the angels at the time of prayer, and had flown off to the Throne of the Almighty God, Whose faithful servant Saint Seraphim had been all his life.

Lesson Six: The Peacemakers

REVIEW

Yesterday we talked about the pure in heart. What does it mean to be pure and heart?

Purity of heart requires spiritual cleanliness. In order to become pure in heart, we must prepare and maintain a “clean room” in our hearts for Christ. Purity of heart requires wholeheartedness. We must be undivided in our devotion to Christ. Purity of heart is characterized by innocence. We must not only become innocent ourselves but begin to see the whole world as good and pure. When we are pure in heart, our hearts are clear. We begin to reflect the image of Christ and to see the truth with unhindered vision.

And what are some ways that we can cultivate purity of heart?

Praying the Jesus prayer helps us to keep our lives focused on Christ and to guard ourselves against temptation. Self-examination, repentance, and confession help us to inspect our hearts and keep them clean. It also helps us to empathize with the sins of others and to see the world as pure. Regular Communion is a way in which we physically invite God to take up residence within us, drawing upon His power to become and remain pure in heart.

Today we are going to be talking about the sixth beatitude, purity of heart.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

OPENING VERSES

John 14:27, RSV: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

1 Corinthians 1:10, NIV: I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

DISCUSSION & DEFINITION

What kind of peace does Christ offer us? How is it different from the peace the world gives?

The peace the world offers has to do with our circumstances—what’s going on around us. It is defined by the absence of conflict, danger, chaos, or stress, all of which come and go. The peace Christ offers, however, is a constant. It is something we can experience at all times, regardless of—or in spite of—our circumstances.

What is Paul saying to the Corinthians? How should they treat one another?

He is calling them to be united, to be in agreement with one another, and not to have divisions among them.

What do these things have to do with one another? What does it mean to be a peacemaker?

The peace Christ offers us allows us to be united to one another as a result of being united, or rather reunited, to Christ. By making peace with God, we are able to make peace with one another and to live in unity as Christ has called us to.

The peacemakers are those who participate in the peace Christ offers and, in doing so, promote peace with those around them.

Now we're going to read (or act out) a story from the Old Testament to help us learn more about what it means to be a peacemaker.

BIBLE STORY

Younger Campers: Have campers act out story from "Bible Story Scripts" Lesson Six, located in the back of this lesson.

David and the Wife of Nabal: 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 25:1-35

Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. And there was a man in Maon, whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was of good understanding and beautiful, but the man was churlish and ill-behaved; he was a Calebite. David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. So David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. And thus you shall salute him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. I hear that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing, all the time they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes; for we come on a feast day. Pray, give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'" When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David; and then they waited. And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" So David's young men turned away, and came back and told him all this. And David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword!" And every man of them girded on his sword; David also girded on his sword; and about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage. But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed at them. Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them; they were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know this and consider what you should do; for evil is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is so ill-natured that one cannot speak to him." Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two skins of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched grain, and a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. And as she rode on the ass, and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her; and she met them. Now David had said, "Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him." When Abigail saw David, she made haste, and

alighted from the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, "Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt; pray let your handmaid speak in your ears, and hear the words of your handmaid. Let not my lord regard this ill-natured fellow, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I your handmaid did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. Now then, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, seeing the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt, and from taking vengeance with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. And now let this present which your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. Pray forgive the trespass of your handmaid; for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord; and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause or for my lord taking vengeance himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your handmaid." And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand! For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had made haste and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male." Then David received from her hand what she had brought him; and he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house; see, I have hearkened to your voice, and I have granted your petition."

DISCUSSION

What happened in this story? What was the conflict? What did Abigail do to make peace with David? How did David respond?

King David asked to be received in Nabal's home as a guest with all of his men. Nabal refused to receive him. David got very angry and prepared to fight against Nabal and his men. When Abigail heard how Nabal had responded to David and his men, she intervened. She prepared a banquet for David and his men, and she fell at David's feet, taking the blame for her husband and asking for David's forgiveness for her husband's rude behavior. David responded with gratitude and a change of heart. Because of her intervention—her making peace—He was no longer angry and thanked her for intervening.

How was Abigail an example of peacemaking?

Abigail took responsibility for her husband's actions. She was proactive, coming to apologize to David before he even came into her house. She was humble rather than defensive. She bridged the gap between David and Nabal.

Now that we've seen an example of peacemaking, let's talk a little bit more about this beatitude.

TALKING POINTS

- 1. The peace that Christ offers us is different from and far greater than worldly peace. It is the peace of being reconciled to Him.***

Younger Campers: Have campers act out *Jesus Calms the Storm* from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson Six, located in the back of this lesson.

- We described peace last year, when we talking about the fruit of the spirit, as “the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is.” It is this kind of peace that Christ offers us. Worldly peace, on the other hand, relies on a lack of conflict, discord, and difficulty. It is what we experience only when everything around us is calm, comfortable, and easy. The peace Christ offers us, however, is something much deeper and more enduring. It is the idea that, no matter what surrounds us, our hearts are calm and free of fear because of the faith we have in Christ, who has forgiven our sins and reunited us to Himself.
- We are reconciled to God first through Christ’s death on the cross. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, death and sin have been conquered, meaning that with Christ we are no longer enslaved to sin and no longer have to live in fear of death. Instead, we rejoice in the fact that Christ is Risen and in the hope that, as a result of His resurrection, we too, being united with Him in His death through baptism, may also be united with Him in His resurrection. It is through this act of love that we experience Christ’s peace, because we know that we have been freed from sin and death and have instead been granted the gift of communion with God for all of eternity.
- We are also reconciled to God (and to each other) in the Eucharist. By partaking of Communion, we are all gathered into one Body, united to each other and to Christ such that there exist no divisions among us. The Eucharist unites us as one in Christ, bridging the gap between earth and heaven and transforming us into instruments of His peace in the world.

For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and, through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him [...].
(Colossians 1:19-22, RSV)

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.
(Romans 5:1-2, RSV)

2. Often our false sense of peace must be disturbed before we can accept true peace.

- Christ says that he came “not to bring peace but a sword.” Part of what this means is that achieving peace can be an uncomfortable and even painful process.
- Achieving peace requires a “sword” of clarity, cutting down all that obstructs our vision of the truth. In order to achieve peace, we must rid ourselves of the things that feed our egos and keep us from putting our trust in Christ Himself. By cutting away these things that hinder our vision of Christ, we are brought face to face with our own sinfulness, leading us to humility, repentance, and reconciliation with God Himself.

- Achieving peace also requires a “sword” of opposition. In order to achieve peace, we must fight against our true enemies of peace—temptation and sin. By attacking and defeating the sins that burden us, we rid ourselves of all that hinders our relationship with Christ, leading us to righteousness and union with Him, who is Himself our true Peace.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For [...] he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.
(Matthew 10:34-39, RSV)

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
(Hebrews 4:12, RSV)

3. ***When we have accepted Christ’s peace, we are able to make peace with others, maintaining the unity we have with fellow believers.***

All Five Senses Activity

Directions: To illustrate how important each part of the body is and how the whole body works together, complete your choice of these fun and potentially messy exercises. After each exercise, ask your camper what body parts they used to complete the challenge and what parts they missed using!

Option 1: Blindfold one camper, then have a second camper clasp their hands behind his or her back. Then instruct the blindfolded camper to feed the other some cheerios. The first time you do this exercise, allow the person being fed to speak out loud to direct the person feeding them. The second time, don't allow the person being fed to give any instructions at all.

Option 2: Play a very basic game of Charades. Beforehand, you'll need to prepare notecards featuring pictures of household appliances. Examples that work well include a kettle, microwave, toaster, stove, fridge, washing machine, dryer, blow-dryer, curling iron, blender, radio, television or computer. Have each child draw a card and act as if they are the appliance, while the remaining children try to guess which appliance is being mimicked. Begin with a "no noise" rule. If guessing the correct appliance proves too difficult, allow the actor to make noise.

Option 3: Blindfold a camper and ask them to draw a picture of something simple. Guide their hands to the paper, but leave the rest to the camper. Next, have the camper draw the same item with their eyes open. Compare the results.

Option 4: Play Tape the Tail on the Bunny. Print or draw a picture of a rabbit on some poster paper (minus the fluffy tail). Put tape on some cotton balls and have your campers take turns trying to accurately tape a tail on the rabbit while wearing a blindfold.

Debrief: After completing your choice of the activities, use the discussion questions to talk about how the different parts of the body working together can be like a family working together.

- How hard does life become when you don't have the use of your eyes?
- What happens to our ability to communicate when we don't have the use of our mouths?
- Which is more valuable: the use of our eyes, the use of our ears or the use of our mouths?
- Imagine that our hands, mouth and ears could talk to each other. What might they say to each other if they were becoming overly proud of their role in the body?
- What would happen if they got in an argument and refused to work together?
- Why do you think God gave people different gifts?
- Can you think of a special talent or ability that God that has given to someone in this room?
- How could that person use his or her ability to serve others?

All of these fun exercises help illustrate that we need all the parts of our body working together in peace in order to function well. Basic life tasks become very difficult when we don't have the use of our eyes to guide our hands. If we cannot use our voice, it is challenging to communicate. God gives everyone gifts and abilities so we can use them to serve others. When we have disagreements within our brothers and sisters in Christ, we keep the "body of Christ" from functioning as a unified whole and accomplishing all that God has created us to do together. When we make peace with one another, however, we can all work together again to accomplish His will and to bring Him glory.

- Being a peacemaker means relinquishing our need to be right. It means being willing to let the little things go and being willing to lose an argument for the sake of maintaining a sense of unity and peace with the people around us.
- Peacemakers are those who quickly make things right with others and those who are willing to be the first person to do it. They are willing to ask for forgiveness, willing to grant it to others, and willing to let things go.
- Peacemaking is not, however, the same as indifference to or appeasement of wrongdoing. Being a peacemaker sometimes means boldly standing up, with gentleness, to that which disturbs the peace. Peacemaking is active, not passive. To make peace requires something of us—and sometimes that means speaking up against injustice, abuse, sacrilege, or heresy.

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing.
(1 Peter 3:8-9, RSV)

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
(Galatians 6:1-2, RSV)

4. When we have embraced Christ's peace, it will be contagious to the people around us.

- While it is possible for one person to hold a grudge against another, it takes two people to be in an active argument. In other words, while it is easy to get sucked into an argument with an argumentative person, it is likewise easy to be peaceful with those who are peaceful. When we are willing to admit our mistakes, to forgive freely, and to let things go, those around us are much more likely to be willing to do the same. By being peaceful ourselves, we will spread peace to those around us.
- True peace in our culture is a rarity. While it is something many people strive for, it is something few people have. When we possess the peace of Christ, however, resting in and drawing upon His forgiveness, guidance, and love, we act differently, and others notice this quality in us, desiring to have it too. Having the peace of Christ and treating others accordingly is part of the way that we spread the gospel and share Christ with those who do not know Him.

Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved.
+ St. Seraphim of Sarov

Forgiveness Line (Rite of Forgiveness)

Directions: Have the campers line up and go through a forgiveness line, like the one we do during forgiveness vespers (and often at the end of staff training week). Counselors and CIT(s), if they are present, should begin the line. Explain to those campers who have never participated in forgiveness vespers that this practice is done at the beginning of Lent to prepare us for a time of repentance. Explain that each person should say, as (s)he greets his or her peer, "*Name*, have mercy on me a sinner." Each person should respond with, "God forgives, and I forgive." Indicate beforehand whether

you want your class to do metanias, hug, and/or greet each other with a “holy kiss.”

Younger Campers: Read the stories of St. Dionysius, St. Spyridon, and St. Nicholas, located in the back of this lesson.

APPLICATION

Now that we have talked a little more about peace and peacemaking, what do you think we, as Christians today, can do to cultivate it?

- **Aligning our will with God’s will** gives us the peace of being at God’s service and under His guidance and protection.
- **Prayer and Scripture reading** help us to remember that we are in God’s presence, and under His care, at all times.
- **Going to confession**, as well as asking the forgiveness of those whom we’ve wronged, gives us the peace of being reconciled with God and others.
- **Praying for those who have wronged us** helps us to build the courage and compassion needed to forgive.

REVIEW

Let’s review what we learned today. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? What is peace?

The peace that Christ offers us is different from and far greater than worldly peace. It is the peace of being reconciled to Him. Often our false sense of peace must be disturbed before we can accept true peace. When we have accepted Christ’s peace, we are able to make peace with others, maintaining the unity we have with fellow believers. When we have embraced Christ’s peace, it will be contagious to the people around us.

FOR REFERENCE

Reconciliation with God

John 16:33, RSV: I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Romans 6:23, RSV: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Isaiah 9:6-7, RSV: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace will be no end.

Romans 8:5-6, RSV: For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Philippians 4:6-7, RSV: Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Jeremiah 29:11, RSV: For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

It is when peace reigns in your life and when your soul is obedient to you, and the rest of you along with it, that the peace of God is born in your heart.

+ *St Isaac the Syrian*

Ephesians 2:11-22, RSV: Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh [...] were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us [Jews and Gentiles] both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Unity in Christ

Psalms 132:1, RSV: Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

If your brother disagrees with what you say, do not be angry, but renounce your own will for the sake of love and peace.

+ *St. Ephraim the Syrian*

Philippians 2:1-3: So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Ephesians 4:1-3, 29, 31-32, RSV: I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one

another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [...] Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. [...] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Titus 3:9-11, RSV: But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned.

1 Corinthians 12:25-27, RSV: But God has so composed the body [...] that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Galatians 3:26-28, RSV: For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 5:23-24, RSV: Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Bible Story Scripts: Lesson Six

David and the Wife of Nabal: 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 25:1-35

Characters: Narrator, Nabal, Young Man #1, Young Man #2, Abigail

Narrator: David and his men went down to the wilderness of Carmel, where there lived a very rich man: he owned 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats. It was sheep-shearing time in Carmel, which was celebrated with feasting and generosity. This rich man's name was Nabal, which means "foolish," and his wife was Abigail, which means "my father is joy." She was smart and beautiful, but he was mean-spirited and bad-tempered. From his hiding place in the wilderness, David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, so David gathered 10 young men to send to Nabal asking for gifts.

David (to the young men): Go up to Carmel, to Nabal, and greet him in my name:

Tell him that his shepherds have been among us in the wilderness, and not only did we not harm them, but not an animal was taken during their time among us in Carmel. Ask him to return our kindness and look on us with favor since we come on this feast day. Ask him to please offer us whatever he can spare to us."

Narrator: When David's young men came to Nabal, they delivered David's message and waited for Nabal's response.

Young Man #1: "Nabal, Peace be to you, your entire household, and all you possess. We hear that it is time to shear the sheep. I want you to know that your shepherds have been among us in the wilderness, and not only did we not harm them, but not an animal was taken during their time among us in Carmel.

Young Man #2: Ask your young men; they will tell you this is true. Please return our kindness and look on David and upon us with favor since we come on this feast day. Please give whatever you can spare to us and to David."

Nabal: Who is David? Who is this son of Jesse? I've never heard of him, so he must be nothing more than a slave who abandoned his master. Should I take bread and water and meat from my own servants and give it to men who come from who knows where?

Narrator: So David's young men returned to him by the same road and told him what had happened.

David (ordering his men): Well then, strap on your swords, and prepare for battle!

Narrator: All of them put on their swords, including David, and about 400 of his men followed him while 200 remained behind with their supplies. One of Nabal's servants recognized his master's insolence and told Abigail, Nabal's wife, what was happening.

Servant (to Abigail): David sent messengers from the wilderness to salute our master, and Nabal returned their honor with insults. David's men have been very good to us. Nothing

happened to us while we were with his company, and we never lost a single sheep in the fields in the time we were there. They were like a wall protecting us day and night the whole time we were near them keeping the sheep. You should know this and think about what to do next. Evil is coming to my master and his entire household if you don't do something.

Narrator: Then Abigail, knowing the stakes, rushed about gathering gifts similar to what her husband should have offered: 200 loaves, 2 jugs of wine, 5 sheep (butchered and dressed), more than 50 quarts of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 fig cakes. She had these loaded on donkeys.

Abigail (to her servants): Go ahead of me with all the gifts. I'll be right behind you.

Narrator: But she never stopped to speak to her husband Nabal. She had decided to approach David herself. As she rode down the mountain on a hidden trail, David and his men were approaching, and they met. Earlier David had made an oath.

David: It looks as though we protected everything this man owns for nothing. We did something good for him, and now he rewards us with evil. May the True God do so to my enemies—and more—if tomorrow morning I've left alive a single male of Nabal's household.

Narrator: When Abigail saw David, she dropped quickly from her donkey and fell to the ground in front of him, bowing.

Abigail (at David's feet): My lord, any guilt here falls on me. Please let me, your servant, speak, and may you hear the words I speak. My lord, you must not take seriously the words of this worthless man, Nabal. His actions have proven that his name and his nature are the same: Nabal is a fool. Unfortunately I, your servant, did not see the young men you sent. Now, my lord, as God lives and as you live, since your God has kept you from senseless killing and from seizing vengeance yourself, may your enemies and all who seek to harm you be like Nabal. Now, please, accept my gift and distribute it among the young men who are with you. Please forgive my shortcomings. God will certainly make your house into a lasting dynasty because you fight on behalf of Him, and no evil will be found in you as long as you live. If anyone dares to rise up against you and seek your life, then you will be protected by God, your True God, who will launch the lives of your enemies like stones from a sling. When God has done for you all the good things He has promised and has installed you as ruler over all Israel, you will never have to be grieved or conscience-stricken for having shed blood needlessly or for taking vengeance into your own hands. When He has dealt generously with you, I pray you will remember me, your servant.

David (to Abigail): Blessed is the Eternal God of Israel, who sent you here today to intercept me. And blessed is your wisdom—blessed are you—for keeping me from shedding blood needlessly and from taking vengeance into my own hands. For as surely as the God of Israel lives and sent you to me, if you had not hurried out to meet me, tomorrow there would not have been a single male left alive in Nabal's household.

Narrator: Then David accepted her gifts.

David (to Abigail): Arise, and return home in peace. I have listened to your words, and I have granted your request.

Jesus Calms the Storm: Mark 4:35-41

Characters: *Narrator, Disciples (2)*

Narrator: The same evening, Jesus suggested they cross over to the other side of the lake. With Jesus already in the boat, they left the crowd behind and set sail along with a few other boats that followed. As they sailed, a storm formed. The winds whipped up huge waves that broke over the bow, filling the boat with so much water that even the experienced sailors among them were sure they were going to sink. Jesus was back in the stern of the boat, sound asleep on a cushion, when the disciples shook Him awake.

Disciples (shouting over the storm): Jesus, Master, don't You care that we're going to die?

Narrator: He got up, shouted words into the wind, and commanded the waves.

Jesus: Peace! Be still!

Narrator: And immediately the wind died down to nothing, the waves stopped.

Jesus: How can you be so afraid? After all you've seen, where is your faith?

Narrator: The disciples were still afraid, slowly coming to grips with what they had seen.

Disciples (to one another): Who is this Jesus? How can it be that He has power over even the wind and the waves?

Saint Stories: Lesson Six

St. Dionysius of Olympus

Saint Dionysius of Olympus was born into a family of poor parents in the village of Platina. When he was an infant, the Cross shone over his crib. Fond of prayer and reading spiritual books from his youth, Saint Dionysius decided to become a monk after the death of his parents. With this aim he went to Meteora, and then to Mount Athos. There he lived with a pious Elder, the priest Seraphim, and under his guidance he began to lead an ascetic life, keeping a strict fast. During Passion Week he went into the forest, and ate only chestnuts. Soon he was ordained deacon, and then priest.

The exalted life of Saint Dionysius became known, and many monks came to hear his edifying words. He also guided many lawless people onto the path of salvation, among whom was a robber who intended to rob the saint's cell, but was moved to repentance by the Elder's kind and wise words.

The brethren of the Philotheou monastery lost their igumen and asked Saint Dionysius to be their head. However, he did not receive enough votes, and dissensions arose. Valuing peace and love most of all, Saint Dionysius withdrew and went to Verria. Later, he fled to Mount Olympus in order to avoid being consecrated as a bishop.

Here those zealous for monasticism began to flock to him. Dionysius built cells for them and also a church and they spent their time in fasting and prayer. Having attained the spiritual heights, he worked many miracles. Often, through the prayers of the saint, the Lord punished iniquitous people who oppressed the monks of Olympus or broke the commandments of Christ. The holdings of a Turk who had expelled the monks and wrecked their monastery were destroyed by severe drought and by hail. The cattle of a herdsman who had oppressed the monastery were stricken with disease and sickness; because of her impudence, a maiden from one of the villages was subjected to an assault of the devil. They all received healing and deliverance from misfortune through the prayers of Saint Dionysius, after being led to penitence by his lack of malice.

The saint compiled a Rule for monastic life, and was an example of monastic activity. He built a church on Olympus, and also a monastery dedicated to the Prophet Elias. He left the brethren his final testament about the monastic life based on the Rule of the Holy Mountain.

Saint Dionysius died in the sixteenth century at an advanced age, and was buried on Olympus, in the church portico of the monastery he founded.

St. Spyridon the Wonderworker and Bishop of Tremithus

Saint Spyridon of Tremithus was born towards the end of the third century on the island of Cyprus. He was a shepherd, and had a wife and children. He used all his substance for the needs of his neighbors and the homeless, for which the Lord rewarded him with a gift of wonderworking. He healed those who were incurably sick, and cast out demons.

After the death of his wife, during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337), he was made Bishop of Tremithus, Cyprus. As a bishop, the saint did not alter his manner of life, but combined pastoral service with deeds of charity.

According to the witness of Church historians, Saint Spyridon participated in the sessions of the First Ecumenical Council in the year 325. At the Council, the saint entered into a dispute with a Greek philosopher who was defending the Arian heresy. The power of Saint Spyridon's plain, direct speech showed everyone the importance of human wisdom before God's Wisdom: "Listen, philosopher, to what I tell you. There is one God Who created man from dust. He has ordered all things, both visible and invisible, by His Word and His Spirit. The Word is the Son of God, Who came down upon the earth on account of our sins. He was born of a Virgin, He lived among men, and suffered and died for our salvation, and then He arose from the dead, and He has resurrected the human race with Him. We believe that He is one in essence (consubstantial) with the Father, and equal to Him in authority and honor. We believe this without any sly rationalizations, for it is impossible to grasp this mystery by human reason."

As a result of their discussion, the opponent of Christianity became the saint's zealous defender and later received holy Baptism. After his conversation with Saint Spyridon, the philosopher turned to his companions and said, "Listen! Until now my rivals have presented their arguments, and I was able to refute their proofs with other proofs. But instead of proofs from reason, the words of this Elder are filled with some sort of special power, and no one can refute them, since it is impossible for man to oppose God. If any of you thinks as I do now, let him believe in Christ and join me in following this man, for God Himself speaks through his lips."

At this Council, Saint Spyridon displayed the unity of the Holy Trinity in a remarkable way. He took a brick in his hand and squeezed it. At that instant fire shot up from it, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in the hands of the wonderworker. "There was only one brick," Saint Spyridon said, "but it was composed of three elements. In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but only one God."

The saint cared for his flock with great love. Through his prayers, drought was replaced by abundant rains, and incessant rains were replaced by fair weather. Through his prayers the sick were healed and demons cast out.

A woman once came up to him with a dead child in her arms, imploring the intercession of the saint. He prayed, and the infant was restored to life. The mother, overcome with joy, collapsed lifeless. Through the prayers of the saint of God, the mother was restored to life.

Another time, hastening to save his friend, who had been falsely accused and sentenced to death, the saint was hindered on his way by the unanticipated flooding of a stream. The saint commanded the water: "Halt! For the Lord of all the world commands that you permit me to cross so that a man may be saved." The will of the saint was fulfilled, and he crossed over happily to the other shore. The judge, apprised of the miracle that had occurred, received Saint Spyridon with esteem and set his friend free.

Similar instances are known from the life of the saint. Once, he went into an empty church, and ordered that the lampadas and candles be lit, and then he began the service. When he said, "Peace be unto all," both he and the deacon heard from above the resounding of "a great multitude of voices saying, "And with thy spirit." This choir was majestic and more sweetly melodious than any human choir. To each petition of the litanies, the invisible choir sang, "Lord, have mercy." Attracted by the church singing, the people who lived nearby hastened towards it. As they got closer and closer to the church, the wondrous singing filled their ears and gladdened their hearts. But when they entered into the church, they saw no one but the bishop and several church servers, and they no longer heard the singing which had greatly astonished them."

Saint Simeon Metaphrastes (November 9), the author of his Life, likened Saint Spyridon to the Patriarch Abraham in his hospitality. Sozomen, in his CHURCH HISTORY, offers an amazing example from the life of the saint of how he received strangers. One time, at the start of the Forty-day Fast, a stranger

knocked at his door. Seeing that the traveller was very exhausted, Saint Spyridon said to his daughter, "Wash the feet of this man, so he may recline to dine." But since it was Lent there were none of the necessary provisions, for the saint "partook of food only on certain days, and on other days he went without food." His daughter replied that there was no bread or flour in the house. Then Saint Spyridon, apologizing to his guest, ordered his daughter to cook a salted ham from their larder. After seating the stranger at table, he began to eat, urging that man to do the same. When the latter refused, calling himself a Christian, the saint rejoined, "It is not proper to refuse this, for the Word of God proclaims, "Unto the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15).

Another historical detail reported by Sozomen, was characteristic of the saint. It was his custom to distribute one part of the gathered harvest to the destitute, and another portion to those having need while in debt. He did not take a portion for himself, but simply showed them the entrance to his storeroom, where each could take as much as was needed, and could later pay it back in the same way, without records or accountings.

There is also the tale by Socrates Scholasticus about how robbers planned to steal the sheep of Saint Spyridon. They broke into the sheepfold at night, but here they found themselves all tied up by some invisible power. When morning came the saint went to his flock, and seeing the tied-up robbers, he prayed and released them. For a long while he advised them to leave their path of iniquity and earn their livelihood by respectable work. Then he made them a gift of a sheep and sending them off, the saint said kindly, "Take this for your trouble, so that you did not spend a sleepless night in vain."

All the Lives of the saint speak of the amazing simplicity and the gift of wonderworking granted him by God. Through a word of the saint the dead were awakened, the elements of nature tamed, the idols smashed. At one point, a Council had been convened at Alexandria by the Patriarch to discuss what to do about the idols and pagan temples there. Through the prayers of the Fathers of the Council all the idols fell down except one, which was very much revered. It was revealed to the Patriarch in a vision that this idol had to be shattered by Saint Spyridon of Tremithus. Invited by the Council, the saint set sail on a ship, and at the moment the ship touched shore and the saint stepped out on land, the idol in Alexandria with all its offerings turned to dust, which then was reported to the Patriarch and all the bishops.

Saint Spyridon lived his earthly life in righteousness and sanctity, and prayerfully surrendered his soul to the Lord. His relics repose on the island of Corfu (Kerkyra), in a church named after him (His right hand, however, is located in Rome). His memory is also celebrated on Cheesefare Saturday.

St. Nicholas the Wonderworker and Archbishop of Myra in Lycia

Saint Nicholas, the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia is famed as a great saint pleasing unto God. He was born in the city of Patara in the region of Lycia (on the south coast of the Asia Minor peninsula), and was the only son of pious parents Theophanes and Nonna, who had vowed to dedicate him to God.

As the fruit of the prayer of his childless parents, the infant Nicholas from the very day of his birth revealed to people the light of his future glory as a wonderworker. His mother, Nonna, after giving birth was immediately healed from illness. The newborn infant, while still in the baptismal font, stood on his feet three hours, without support from anyone, thereby honoring the Most Holy Trinity. Saint Nicholas from his infancy began a life of fasting, and on Wednesdays and Fridays he would not accept milk from his mother until after his parents had finished their evening prayers.

From his childhood Nicholas thrived on the study of Divine Scripture; by day he would not leave church, and by night he prayed and read books, making himself a worthy dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Bishop Nicholas of Patara rejoiced at the spiritual success and deep piety of his nephew. He ordained him a reader, and then elevated Nicholas to the priesthood, making him his assistant and entrusting him to instruct the flock.

In serving the Lord the youth was fervent of spirit, and in his proficiency with questions of faith he was like an Elder, who aroused the wonder and deep respect of believers. Constantly at work and vivacious, in unceasing prayer, the priest Nicholas displayed great kind-heartedness towards the flock, and towards the afflicted who came to him for help, and he distributed all his inheritance to the poor.

There was a certain formerly rich inhabitant of Patara, whom Saint Nicholas saved from great sin. The man had three grown daughters, and in desperation he planned to sell their bodies so they would have money for food. The saint, learning of the man's poverty and of his wicked intention, secretly visited him one night and threw a sack of gold through the window. With the money the man arranged an honorable marriage for his daughter. Saint Nicholas also provided gold for the other daughters, thereby saving the family from falling into spiritual destruction. In bestowing charity, Saint Nicholas always strove to do this secretly and to conceal his good deeds.

The Bishop of Patara decided to go on pilgrimage to the holy places at Jerusalem, and entrusted the guidance of his flock to Saint Nicholas, who fulfilled this obedience carefully and with love. When the bishop returned, Nicholas asked his blessing for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Along the way the saint predicted a storm would arise and threaten the ship. Saint Nicholas saw the devil get on the ship, intending to sink it and kill all the passengers. At the entreaty of the despairing pilgrims, he calmed the waves of the sea by his prayers. Through his prayer a certain sailor of the ship, who had fallen from the mast and was mortally injured was also restored to health.

When he reached the ancient city of Jerusalem and came to Golgotha, Saint Nicholas gave thanks to the Savior. He went to all the holy places, worshiping at each one. One night on Mount Sion, the closed doors of the church opened by themselves for the great pilgrim. Going round the holy places connected with the earthly service of the Son of God, Saint Nicholas decided to withdraw into the desert, but he was stopped by a divine voice urging him to return to his native country. He returned to Lycia, and yearning for a life of quietude, the saint entered into the brotherhood of a monastery named Holy Sion, which had been founded by his uncle. But the Lord again indicated another path for him, "Nicholas, this is not the vineyard where you shall bear fruit for Me. Return to the world, and glorify My Name there." So he left Patara and went to Myra in Lycia.

Upon the death of Archbishop John, Nicholas was chosen as Bishop of Myra after one of the bishops of the Council said that a new archbishop should be revealed by God, not chosen by men. One of the elder bishops had a vision of a radiant Man, Who told him that the one who came to the church that night and was first to enter should be made archbishop. He would be named Nicholas. The bishop went to the church at night to await Nicholas. The saint, always the first to arrive at church, was stopped by the bishop. "What is your name, child?" he asked. God's chosen one replied, "My name is Nicholas, Master, and I am your servant."

After his consecration as archbishop, Saint Nicholas remained a great ascetic, appearing to his flock as an image of gentleness, kindness and love for people. This was particularly precious for the Lycian Church during the persecution of Christians under the emperor Diocletian (284-305). Bishop Nicholas, locked up in prison together with other Christians for refusing to worship idols, sustained them and exhorted them to endure the fetters, punishment and torture. The Lord preserved him unharmed. Upon the accession of

Saint Constantine (May 21) as emperor, Saint Nicholas was restored to his flock, which joyfully received their guide and intercessor.

Despite his great gentleness of spirit and purity of heart, Saint Nicholas was a zealous and ardent warrior of the Church of Christ. Fighting evil spirits, the saint made the rounds of the pagan temples and shrines in the city of Myra and its surroundings, shattering the idols and turning the temples to dust.

In the year 325 Saint Nicholas was a participant in the First Ecumenical Council. This Council proclaimed the Nicean Symbol of Faith, and he stood up against the heretic Arius with the likes of Saints Sylvester the Bishop of Rome (January 2), Alexander of Alexandria (May 29), Spyridon of Trimythontos (December 12) and other Fathers of the Council.

Saint Nicholas, fired with zeal for the Lord, assailed the heretic Arius with his words, and also struck him upon the face. For this reason, he was deprived of the emblems of his episcopal rank and placed under guard. But several of the holy Fathers had the same vision, seeing the Lord Himself and the Mother of God returning to him the Gospel and omophorion. The Fathers of the Council agreed that the audacity of the saint was pleasing to God, and restored the saint to the office of bishop.

Having returned to his own diocese, the saint brought it peace and blessings, sowing the word of Truth, uprooting heresy, nourishing his flock with sound doctrine, and also providing food for their bodies. Even during his life the saint worked many miracles. One of the greatest was the deliverance from death of three men unjustly condemned by the Governor, who had been bribed. The saint boldly went up to the executioner and took his sword, already suspended over the heads of the condemned. The Governor, denounced by Saint Nicholas for his wrong doing, repented and begged for forgiveness.

Witnessing this remarkable event were three military officers, who were sent to Phrygia by the emperor Constantine to put down a rebellion. They did not suspect that soon they would also be compelled to seek the intercession of Saint Nicholas. Evil men slandered them before the emperor, and the officers were sentenced to death. Appearing to Saint Constantine in a dream, Saint Nicholas called on him to overturn the unjust sentence of the military officers.

He worked many other miracles, and struggled many long years at his labor. Through the prayers of the saint, the city of Myra was rescued from a terrible famine. He appeared to a certain Italian merchant and left him three gold pieces as a pledge of payment. He requested him to sail to Myra and deliver grain there. More than once, the saint saved those drowning in the sea, and provided release from captivity and imprisonment.

Having reached old age, Saint Nicholas peacefully fell asleep in the Lord. His venerable relics were preserved incorrupt in the local cathedral church and flowed with curative myrrh, from which many received healing. In the year 1087, his relics were transferred to the Italian city of Bari, where they rest even now (See May 9).

The name of the great saint of God, the hierarch and wonderworker Nicholas, a speedy helper and suppliant for all hastening to him, is famed in every corner of the earth, in many lands and among many peoples. In Russia there are a multitude of cathedrals, monasteries and churches consecrated in his name. There is, perhaps, not a single city without a church dedicated to him.

It is impossible to list all the grace-filled icons of Saint Nicholas, or to enumerate all his miracles. Saint Nicholas is the patron of travelers, and we pray to him for deliverance from floods, poverty, or any misfortunes.

Lesson Seven: The Persecuted

REVIEW

Yesterday we talked about peacemaking. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? What is peace?

The peace that Christ offers us is different from and far greater than worldly peace. It is the peace of being reconciled to Him. Often our false sense of peace must be disturbed before we can accept true peace. When we have accepted Christ's peace, we are able to make peace with others, maintaining the unity we have with fellow believers. When we have embraced Christ's peace, it will be contagious to the people around us.

And what are some ways that we can cultivate the peace of Christ?

Aligning our will with God's will gives us the peace of being at God's service and under His guidance and protection. Prayer and Scripture reading help us to remember that we are in God's presence and under His care at all times. Going to confession, as well as asking the forgiveness of those whom we've wronged, gives us the peace of being reconciled with God and others. Praying for those who have wronged us helps us to build the courage and compassion needed to forgive.

Today we are going to be talking about the final beatitude, persecution.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."

OPENING VERSE

1 Peter 4:12-19, RSV: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. [...] If one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. [...] Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.

DISCUSSION & DEFINITION

What is Peter saying here? What are we called to do in the face of suffering, and why? What does it mean to be persecuted for righteousness sake?

Peter is saying that, as Christians, we should expect persecution and suffering for our faith. We are to rejoice and glorify God when we suffer for His sake, because we are sharing in Christ's suffering and will be rewarded for doing so. To be persecuted for righteousness sake is to suffer or to be willing to suffer for Christ and for our faith.

The persecuted are those who willingly suffer for Christ's sake.

Now we're going to read (or act out) another story from the Old Testament to help us learn more about what it means to be willing to suffer for God's sake.

BIBLE STORY

Younger Campers: Have campers act out stories from “Bible Story Scripts” Lesson Seven, located in the back of this lesson.

The Three Holy Youths: Daniel 3

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to assemble the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, were assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live for ever! You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no heed to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.” Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image which I have made, well and good; but if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace; and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.” Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he ordered certain mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their mantles, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was strict and the furnace very hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He said to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered the king, “True, O king.” He answered, “But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace and said, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come here!” Then

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their mantles were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set at nought the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

DISCUSSION

What happened in this story? What was asked of the three holy youths, and how did they respond? How were they treated because of it?

Everyone in Babylon was ordered to fall down and worship a gold image, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused. When King Nebuchadnezzar asked them about it, they still refused. The King ordered that they be thrown into a fiery furnace in response to their refusal to worship anything other than God Himself.

Did God prevent them from being thrown into the furnace? What did he do instead? Who was the fourth person in the furnace? What happened to the three holy youths?

No, God didn't prevent them from being thrown into the furnace. Instead, he was present with them in furnace. The fourth person was, we believe, the Holy Spirit, accompanying them in the flames. Ultimately, the holy youths came out of the furnace completely fine. Not even their clothes showed any signs of the fire. They were promoted and protected in Babylon.

How did the youths bring glory to God?

They showed courage and unwillingness to back down in the face of persecution and punishment for their beliefs. They showed that they trusted God's ability to preserve them and protect them. They showed that the reward for doing what was right in the eyes of God outweighed the suffering involved in doing it. Ultimately, many came to know God because of their courage and trust in Him and their willingness to undergo persecution for His sake.

Now that we've seen an example of those willing to undergo persecution, let's learn more about this final beatitude.

Younger Campers: Supplement this lesson by reading from the selection of saint stories located at the end of this chapter.

TALKING POINTS

1. ***Persecution is something to be expected in the life of a Christian.***

- Christ does not promise to protect us from suffering. Instead, he actually promises that we will suffer as a result of following Him. From the beginning, Christians have been persecuted for their faith in all kinds of different ways. Some have been killed for their faith, enslaved or tortured, or sent into exile. In some parts of the world this is still happening.
- In present-day America, the most common forms of persecution are subtler but still very painful. Here persecution most often takes the form of mockery, social pressure (“peer pressure”), and ostracism. All of us have probably experienced a time when it would have been much easier to go along with the crowd (even though it went against our beliefs) or to downplay and dismiss our faith when others were ridiculing it. Some of us have maybe even lost friends and relationships because we’ve stayed true to our faith and firm in our resolve to do what is right. This persecution is part of being a Christian!

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [...] If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me.
(John 15:18-27, RSV)

Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
(2 Timothy 3:12, RSV)

2. Persecution brings us closer to Christ.

- Though Christ promises suffering, He also promises to be with us in the midst of it. He is the perfect example of one who has suffered, having done so for us through His death on the cross. When we suffer for Christ’s sake, He co-suffers with us. And, through suffering, we draw near to Him, relying on His strength and His love to endure the difficult things that are before us.
- Moreover, when we endure suffering for Christ’s sake, we become more like Him, growing in love, strength, and self-sacrifice as we offer our reputations and sometimes even our lives for His sake.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.
(2 Corinthians 1:3-7, RSV)

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
(Isaiah 43:1-3, RSV)

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow

of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

(Psalm 22, NKJV)

3. Christ promises that, despite persecution, He will deliver us.

- As Christians, we believe that there is no Cross without an eventual Resurrection. Only the Resurrection explains the Cross. The same is true of our suffering. We may not be able to see any good that will come from our suffering now, but as Christians we know that we will be delivered. The reward of our endurance is much greater than the pain of our endurance. Though it is difficult now, we see a light at the end of the tunnel, which is an eternity with Christ in the Kingdom, where there is no suffering, sickness, or death.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.”

(Revelation 21:1-7, RSV)

4. The persecution of Christians gives testimony to the Gospel of Christ.

- The persecution of Christians throughout history has been one of the most compelling testimonies to the Gospel of Christ. When we endure persecution—of any kind!—we also give testimony to the Good News of Christ. That is what it means to be a “martyr”—to give witness to something. Martyrdom is a witness to the resurrection of Christ and His followers. It is a testimony of life’s triumph over death and an affirmation that death is not the end but is the door to God’s fuller presence.
- No matter how we experience it, we are considered “martyrs” when we endure persecution for Christ’s sake. Through suffering we show the world that the Gospel of Christ—the good news that Christ has conquered death by the gift of His own suffering, death, and Resurrection—is worth more than any earthly sacrifice.

As an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (James 5:7-11, RSV)

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [...] We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. [...] What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?

(Romans 8:18-39, RSV)

*Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.
(James 1:12, RSV)*

5. *We will be rewarded for enduring persecution.*

- When we experience persecution for Christ's sake, we join the company of martyrs and prophets who have also suffered with Christ and share, in a small way, in their glory. Moreover, we await Christ's promise of a heavenly reward that far outweighs any temporary suffering we may experience in this life.

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him [...]; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
(Philippians 3:7-11)*

APPLICATION

Now that we have talked a little more about persecution, what do you think we, as Christians today, can do to remain faithful in the face of persecution?

- **Asking the saints to intercede for us** strengthens us and helps us to grow in patience and perseverance.
- **Remembering the stories of the saint and martyrs** encourages us and inspires us to remain firm when we are weak. It also helps us to remember the reward of our suffering and keeps us from forgetting that we are not alone but surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses."
- **Surrounding ourselves with Christian friends** makes it easier to resist the temptation to dismiss our faith and to stand firm in our commitment to the Lord. Having Christian friends also reminds us that we are not alone. Even when others mock us or ostracize us for our faith, we know that we will be accepted and supported by our fellow believers.

REVIEW

Let's review what we learned today about persecution.

Persecution is something to be expected in the life of a Christian. Persecution brings us closer to Christ. Christ promises that, despite persecution, He will deliver us. The persecution of Christians gives testimony to the Gospel of Christ. We will be rewarded for enduring persecution.

FOR REFERENCE

The Expectation of Persecution

Luke 21:10-18, RSV: Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

Matthew 7:13-14, RSV: Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Luke 14:27, RSV: Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 10:21-22, RSV: Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Christ’s Comfort and Deliverance

Hebrews 2:14-18, RSV: Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

1 Peter 2:19-23, RSV: For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly.

Psalms 26:1-6, RSV: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and foes, they shall stumble and fall. Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. [...] For [the Lord] will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me; and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Matthew 10:28, RSV: And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Romans 5:3-5, RSV: We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

1 Peter 3:13-22, RSV: Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right? But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. [...] For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

Romans 15:1-4, RSV: We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me." For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

1 Peter 5:8-11, RSV: Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Corinthians 1:9, RSV: For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers.

Rejoicing and Hope in the Resurrection

If the waves of the sea or the wrath of the armies rage against me, all this is of less importance to me than a spider's web. Surely the waves are many and the storms perilous, but still we fear no shipwreck, for we stand upon the Rock. The sea may rage. It will not shake the cliff. The waves may roar. But when Jesus is present, the ship cannot be lost. Nothing earthly can impress the least fear upon me. Death? It will lead me into the embrace of eternal rest. The loss of property? Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. Exile? "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." False accusations? "Rejoice when they shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." I saw swords and I thought of heaven; I expected death, and I thought of resurrection. I saw sufferings here and I counted the blessings beyond. The good cause for which I fight is rich enough to comfort me. I was carried off, but that was no shame for me. There is only one thing to be ashamed of. That is sin. [...] There is only one treason, that of one's own conscience. If you do not betray your own conscience, you betray no one.

+ *St. John Chrysostom*

Hebrews 12:1-2, RSV: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Romans 6:5-11, RSV: For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [...] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 6:1-10, RSV: Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

1 Peter 1:6-9, RSV: In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [...] As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, RSV: So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

All men they love, but they are persecuted by all. They are misunderstood, they stand condemned: they are put to death, and through death they gain life. They are poor, yet this makes them rich. They lack everything, yet they have all things in abundance. They are despised, but such contempt is their highest glory. They are slandered: they repay it with honor; they do nothing but good and are treated as criminals; receiving their punishment, they are overjoyed as if they were born to some new life.

– *Letter to Diognetus (early Christian document, here referring to Christian martyrs/witnesses)*

The Christian martyr was not a hero, however, but a witness; by accepting suffering and death he affirmed that the rule of death had ended, that life had triumphed. He died not for Christ but with Him; and in Him he also received life. The Church exalted martyrdom because it was proof of the most important Christian affirmation, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. [...] In the cult of martyrs the Church laid the foundation for the glorification of the saints; each of them is a witness, and their blood is a seed that promises new shoots. The Church does not consider its conflict with the Roman Empire a tragic misunderstanding but the fulfillment of the promise of the Savior: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). For the Church, persecution was the best pledge of victory.

+ *Alexander Schmemman*

When we bravely and quietly endure the afflictions sent to us, we participate a little, albeit not fully, in the sufferings of Christ. □

+ *St. Macarius of Optina* □

John 15:18-27, RSV: If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [...] If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me. [...] But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.

Conclusion

Colossians 3:12-17, RSV: Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

1 Timothy 6: 11-16, RSV: But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ [...] To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

There are many people in the world who are poor in spirit, but not in the way that they should be; there are many that mourn, but for some financial loss or the death of their children; many are gentle, but towards unclean passions; many hunger and thirst, but only to seize what does not belong to them and to profit from injustice; many are merciful, but towards their bodies and the things that serve the body; many are pure in heart, but for the sake of self-esteem; many are peacemakers, but by making the soul submit to the flesh; many are persecuted, but as wrongdoers; many are reviled, but for shameful sins. Only those are blessed who do or suffer these things for the sake of Christ and after His example.

– *St. Maximos the Confessor*

Bible Story Scripts: Lesson Seven

The Three Holy Youths (Daniel 3)

Characters: *Narrator, Herald, Officials (2), King Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Advisors (2), Fourth Man*

Narrator: One day King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his craftsmen to make a statue plated with gold that was 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. When finished, it was set up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon, and King Nebuchadnezzar planned an elaborate ceremony to dedicate the statue. He sent out invitations to his officials. At the appointed time, his all of his provincial leaders arrived and gathered near the statue for the dedication ceremony.

Herald (*shouting*): People of all nations and languages: by order of the king, you are commanded to bow down and worship the golden statue erected by King Nebuchadnezzar every time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, lute, harp, pipe, and all the other musical instruments. Anyone who does not obey the king's command and refuses to bow and worship will be taken immediately and thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.

Narrator: So, on cue, the moment all the people in the crowd heard the sound of the musical instruments—horn, flute, lyre, lute, harp, pipe, and all the rest—all of the people, regardless of their heritage, nationality, or language, bowed down and worshiped the golden statue erected by King Nebuchadnezzar. Meanwhile, certain Chaldean leaders stepped forward to make accusations against the Jews.

Officials (*to King Nebuchadnezzar*): Long live the king! You, good king, have made a decree that every person who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, lute, harp, pipe, and all the other musical instruments is supposed to bow down and worship the golden statue you erected. You have also decreed that anyone who does not obey the king's command and refuses to bow and worship will be taken immediately and thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. It has come to our attention that certain Jews whom you appointed to govern in the province of Babylon are ignoring your order, O king. They refuse to serve your gods, and they do not fall and worship the golden statue you erected. Their names are Shadrach (SHAD-rack), Meshach (MEE-shack), and Abednego (uh-BED-neh-go).

King Nebuchadnezzar (*shouting, to his officials*): How dare they disobey the king! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego must be brought in for questioning! Go out and find them, and bring them to me at once!

Narrator: So his officials went out, found them, and brought these men before the king.

King Nebuchadnezzar: It is reported to me that you, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refuse to serve my gods and do not bow and worship the golden statue I had set up. Is that true? If you are ready to comply with my order and fall down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, lute, harp, pipe, and all the other musical instruments, then things will go well for you from here. But if you refuse to worship, you will be

taken immediately and thrown in a furnace of blazing fire. What god could possibly rescue you from my hands then?

Shadrach: King Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to defend our actions in this matter. We are ready for the test.

Meshach: Go ahead and throw us into the blazing furnace. The God we serve *is* able to rescue us—from a furnace of blazing fire or any other thing—and release us from your power, Your Majesty.

Abednego: But even if He chooses not to rescue us, O king, you can be sure that we still will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue you erected.

Narrator: Daniel's friends are men of conviction. They are ready for anything the king throws at them and know that God can release them from the king's angry grip. They just don't know if He will. That line—"But even if He does not"—resonates with faith. Everyone wants to follow a God who does miracles-on-demand. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego know the one True God does not *always* rescue His martyrs. Still they will not back down; they will not compromise. They will follow Him and not serve King Nebuchadnezzar's gods.

Narrator: At their response, King Nebuchadnezzar flew into such a rage at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that onlookers saw his face twisted and distorted. With fury burning in his eyes, he ordered the furnace heated up seven times hotter than usual.

King Nebuchadnezzar (*to his officials*): Heat up the furnace immediately! Tie up these men up and throw them into the blazing fire!

Narrator: So the Jews were taken and tied up so quickly that they were still wearing the clothes they had on when they arrived—pants, cloaks, hats, and all. Then they were picked up and thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. The furnace was so hot and the king's command carried out so quickly, without any precautions, that the soldiers who took Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego up to the furnace were themselves killed by the heat of the raging fire! And the three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, tied and bound, fell into the furnace.

Fourth Man: (*entering the furnace and walking around with the three youths*)

Narrator: After several minutes, King Nebuchadnezzar looked in and could hardly believe his eyes. Shocked, the king jumped up and asked his advisors,

Nebuchadnezzar: Didn't we tie up and throw three men into the heart of the fire?

Advisors: Yes, O king.

King Nebuchadnezzar: Then why do I see four men, completely unbound, walking around in the middle of the fire? They don't appear to be hurt at all. And the fourth . . . he appears to be like a son of the gods.

Narrator: Then Nebuchadnezzar moved as close to the door of the furnace as he dared without being scorched. He shouted over the roar of the blazing fire.

King Nebuchadnezzar: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, right now. Come here!

Narrator: So the three men made their way out of the fiery furnace. The officers, prefects, governors, and king's advisors moved closer to see what had happened to these men. They, too, could hardly believe their eyes. The fire had done nothing to harm these men. Their hair was not singed. Their clothes were not scorched. They didn't have the faintest smell of smoke on them.

King Nebuchadnezzar: Praise is certainly due the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego today. He sent His heavenly representative and rescued His servants who put their trust in Him. They had the audacity to disobey the king's order and surrendered their bodies to the fire rather than serve and worship any god other than their own. Therefore, I decree that any people—regardless of their heritage, nationality, or language—who speak against the God worshiped by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn apart, limb from limb, and their houses reduced to rubble; for no god I have ever heard of is able to rescue as this God has rescued His servants today.

Narrator: Afterward the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.

Saint Stories: Lesson Seven

Great Martyr, Victory Bearer, and Wonderworker George

The Holy Great Martyr George the Victory-Bearer, was a native of Cappadocia (a district in Asia Minor), and he grew up in a deeply believing Christian family. His father was martyred for Christ when George was still a child. His mother, owning lands in Palestine, moved there with her son and raised him in strict piety.

When he became a man, Saint George entered into the service of the Roman army. He was handsome, brave and valiant in battle, and he came to the notice of the emperor Diocletian (284-305) and joined the imperial guard with the rank of comites, or military commander.

The pagan emperor, who did much for the restoration of Roman might, was clearly concerned with the danger presented to pagan civilization by the triumph of the Crucified Savior, and intensified his persecution against the Christians in the final years of his reign. Following the advice of the Senate at Nicomedia, Diocletian gave all his governors full freedom in their court proceedings against Christians, and he promised them his full support.

Saint George, when he heard the decision of the emperor, distributed all his wealth to the poor, freed his servants, and then appeared in the Senate. The brave soldier of Christ spoke out openly against the emperor's designs. He confessed himself a Christian, and appealed to all to acknowledge Christ: "I am a servant of Christ, my God, and trusting in Him, I have come among you voluntarily, to bear witness concerning the Truth."

"What is Truth?" one of the dignitaries asked, echoing the question of Pontius Pilate. The saint replied, "Christ Himself, Whom you persecuted, is Truth."

Stunned by the bold speech of the valiant warrior, the emperor, who had loved and promoted George, attempted to persuade him not to throw away his youth and glory and honors, but rather to offer sacrifice to the gods as was the Roman custom. The confessor replied, "Nothing in this inconstant life can weaken my resolve to serve God."

Then by order of the enraged emperor the armed guards began to push Saint George out of the assembly hall with their spears, and they then led him off to prison. But the deadly steel became soft and it bent, just as the spears touched the saint's body, and it caused him no harm. In prison they put the martyr's feet in stocks and placed a heavy stone on his chest.

The next day at the interrogation, powerless but firm of spirit, Saint George again answered the emperor, "You will grow tired of tormenting me sooner than I will tire of being tormented by you." Then Diocletian gave orders to subject Saint George to some very intense tortures. They tied the Great Martyr to a wheel, beneath which were boards pierced with sharp pieces of iron. As the wheel turned, the sharp edges slashed the saint's naked body.

At first the sufferer loudly cried out to the Lord, but soon he quieted down, and did not utter even a single groan. Diocletian decided that the tortured one was already dead, and he gave orders to remove the battered body from the wheel, and then went to a pagan temple to offer thanks.

At this very moment it got dark, thunder boomed, and a voice was heard: "Fear not, George, for I am with you." Then a wondrous light shone, and at the wheel an angel of the Lord appeared in the form of a radiant youth. He placed his hand upon the martyr, saying to him, "Rejoice!" Saint George stood up healed.

When the soldiers led him to the pagan temple where the emperor was, the emperor could not believe his own eyes and he thought that he saw before him some other man or even a ghost. In confusion and in terror the pagans looked Saint George over carefully, and they became convinced that a miracle had occurred. Many then came to believe in the Life-Creating God of the Christians.

Two illustrious officials, Saints Anatolius and Protoleon, who were secretly Christians, openly confessed Christ. Immediately, without a trial, they were beheaded with the sword by order of the emperor. Also present in the pagan temple was Empress Alexandra, the wife of Diocletian, and she also knew the truth. She was on the point of glorifying Christ, but one of the servants of the emperor took her and led her off to the palace.

The emperor became even more furious. He had not lost all hope of influencing Saint George, so he gave him over to new and fiercesome torments. After throwing him into a deep pit, they covered it over with lime. Three days later they dug him out, but found him cheerful and unharmed. They shod the saint in iron sandals with red-hot nails, and then drove him back to the prison with whips. In the morning, when they led him back to the interrogation, cheerful and with healed feet, the emperor asked if he liked his shoes. The saint said that the sandals had been just his size. Then they beat him with ox thongs until pieces of his flesh came off and his blood soaked the ground, but the brave sufferer, strengthened by the power of God, remained unyielding.

The emperor concluded that the saint was being helped by magic, so he summoned the sorcerer Athanasius to deprive the saint of his miraculous powers, or else poison him. The sorcerer gave Saint George two goblets containing drugs. One of them would have quieted him, and the other would kill him. The drugs had no effect, and the saint continued to denounce the pagan superstitions and glorify God as before.

When the emperor asked what sort of power was helping him, Saint George said, "Do not imagine that it is any human learning which keeps me from being harmed by these torments. I am saved only by calling upon Christ and His Power. Whoever believes in Him has no regard for tortures and is able to do the things that Christ did" (John 14:12). Diocletian asked what sort of things Christ had done. The Martyr replied, "He gave sight to the blind, cleansed the lepers, healed the lame, gave hearing to the deaf, cast out demons, and raised the dead."

Knowing that they had never been able to resurrect the dead through sorcery, nor by any of the gods known to him, and wanting to test the saint, the emperor commanded him to raise up a dead person before his eyes. The saint retorted, "You wish to tempt me, but my God will work this sign for the salvation of the people who shall see the power of Christ."

When they led Saint George down to the graveyard, he cried out, “O Lord! Show to those here present, that You are the only God in all the world. Let them know You as the Almighty Lord.” Then the earth quaked, a grave opened, the dead one emerged from it alive. Having seen with their own eyes the Power of Christ, the people wept and glorified the true God.

The sorcerer Athanasius, falling down at the feet of Saint George, confessed Christ as the All-Powerful God and asked forgiveness for his sins, committed in ignorance. The obdurate emperor in his impiety thought otherwise. In a rage, he commanded both Athanasius and the man raised from the dead to be beheaded, and he had Saint George again locked up in prison.

The people, weighed down with their infirmities, began to visit the prison and they there received healing and help from the saint. A certain farmer named Glycerius, whose ox had collapsed, also visited him. The saint consoled him and assured him that God would restore his ox to life. When he saw the ox alive, the farmer began to glorify the God of the Christians throughout all the city. By order of the emperor, Saint Glycerius was arrested and beheaded.

The exploits and the miracles of the Great Martyr George had increased the number of the Christians, therefore Diocletian made a final attempt to compel the saint to offer sacrifice to the idols. They set up a court at the pagan temple of Apollo. On the final night the holy martyr prayed fervently, and as he slept, he saw the Lord, Who raised him up with His hand, and embraced him. The Savior placed a crown on Saint George’s head and said, “Fear not, but have courage, and you will soon come to Me and receive what has been prepared for you.”

In the morning, the emperor offered to make Saint George his co-administrator, second only to himself. The holy martyr with a feigned willingness answered, “Caesar, you should have shown me this mercy from the very beginning, instead of torturing me. Let us go now to the temple and see the gods you worship.”

Diocletian believed that the martyr was accepting his offer, and he followed him to the pagan temple with his retinue and all the people. Everyone was certain that Saint George would offer sacrifice to the gods. The saint went up to the idol, made the Sign of the Cross and addressed it as if it were alive: “Are you the one who wants to receive from me sacrifice befitting God?”

The demon inhabiting the idol cried out, “I am not a god and none of those like me is a god, either. The only God is He Whom you preach. We are fallen angels, and we deceive people because we are jealous.”

Saint George cried out, “How dare you remain here, when I, the servant of the true God, have entered?” Then noises and wailing were heard from the idols, and they fell to the ground and were shattered.

There was general confusion. In a frenzy, pagan priests and many of the crowd seized the holy martyr, tied him up, and began to beat him. They also called for his immediate execution.

The holy empress Alexandra tried to reach him. Pushing her way through the crowd, she cried out, “O God of George, help me, for You Alone are All-Powerful.” At the feet of the Great Martyr the holy empress confessed Christ, Who had humiliated the idols and those who worshipped them.

Diocletian immediately pronounced the death sentence on the Great Martyr George and the holy Empress Alexandra, who followed Saint George to execution without resisting. Along the way she felt faint and slumped against a wall. There she surrendered her soul to God.

Saint George gave thanks to God and prayed that he would also end his life in a worthy manner. At the place of execution the saint prayed that the Lord would forgive the torturers who acted in ignorance, and that He would lead them to the knowledge of Truth. Calmly and bravely, the holy Great Martyr George bent his neck beneath the sword, receiving the crown of martyrdom on April 23, 303.

Greatmartyr and Healer Panteleimon

The Great Martyr and Healer Panteleimon was born in the city of Nicomedia into the family of the illustrious pagan Eustorgius, and he was named Pantoleon. His mother Saint Euboula (March 30) was a Christian. She wanted to raise her son in the Christian Faith, but she died when the future martyr was just a young child. His father sent Pantoleon to a pagan school, after which the young man studied medicine at Nicomedia under the renowned physician Euphrosynus. Pantoleon came to the attention of the emperor Maximian (284-305), who wished to appoint him as royal physician when he finished his schooling.

The hieromartyrs Hermolaus, Hermippus and Hermocrates, survivors of the massacre of 20,000 Christians in 303 (December 28), were living secretly in Nicomedia at that time. Saint Hermolaus saw Pantoleon time and again when he came to the house where they were hiding. Once, the priest invited the youth to the house and spoke about the Christian Faith. After this Pantoleon visited Saint Hermolaus every day.

One day the saint found a dead child on the street. He had been bitten by a great snake, which was still beside the child's body. Pantoleon began to pray to the Lord Jesus Christ to revive the dead child and to destroy the venomous reptile. He firmly resolved that if his prayer were fulfilled, he would become a follower of Christ and receive Baptism. The child rose up alive, and the snake died before Pantoleon's eyes.

After this miracle, Pantoleon was baptized by Saint Hermolaus with the name Panteleimon (meaning "all-merciful"). Speaking with Eustorgius, Saint Panteleimon prepared him to accept Christianity. When the father saw how his son healed a blind man by invoking Jesus Christ, he then believed in Christ and was baptized by Saint Hermolaus together with the man whose sight was restored.

After the death of his father, Saint Panteleimon dedicated his life to the suffering, the sick, the unfortunate and the needy. He treated all those who turned to him without charge, healing them in the name of Jesus Christ. He visited those held captive in prison. These were usually Christians, and he healed them of their wounds. In a short time, reports of the charitable physician spread throughout the city. Forsaking the other doctors, the inhabitants began to turn only to Saint Panteleimon.

The envious doctors told the emperor that Saint Panteleimon was healing Christian prisoners. Maximian urged the saint to refute the charge by offering sacrifice to idols. Saint Panteleimon confessed himself a Christian, and suggested that a sick person, for whom the doctors held out no hope, should be brought before the emperor. Then the doctors could invoke their gods, and Panteleimon would pray to his God to heal the man. A man paralyzed for many years was brought in, and pagan priests who knew the art of medicine invoked their gods without success. Then, before the very eyes of the emperor, the saint healed

the paralytic by calling on the name of Jesus Christ. The ferocious Maximian executed the healed man, and gave Saint Panteleimon over to fierce torture.

The Lord appeared to the saint and strengthened him before his sufferings. They suspended the Great Martyr Panteleimon from a tree and scraped him with iron hooks, burned him with fire and then stretched him on the rack, threw him into a cauldron of boiling tar, and cast him into the sea with a stone around his neck. Throughout these tortures the martyr remained unhurt, and denounced the emperor.

At this time the priests Hermolaus, Hermippus and Hermocrates were brought before the court of the pagans. All three confessed their faith in the Savior and were beheaded (July 26).

By order of the emperor they brought the Great Martyr Panteleimon to the circus to be devoured by wild beasts. The animals, however, came up to him and licked his feet. The spectators began to shout, "Great is the God of the Christians!" The enraged Maximian ordered the soldiers to stab with the sword anyone who glorified Christ, and to cut off the head of the Great Martyr Panteleimon.

They led the saint to the place of execution and tied him to an olive tree. While the martyr prayed, one of the soldiers struck him with a sword, but the sword became soft like wax and inflicted no wound. The saint completed his prayer, and a Voice was heard from Heaven, calling the passion-bearer by his new name and summoning him to the heavenly Kingdom.

Hearing the Voice, the soldiers fell down on their knees before the holy martyr and begged forgiveness. They refused to continue with the execution, but Saint Panteleimon told them to fulfill the emperor's command, because otherwise they would have no share with him in the future life. The soldiers tearfully took their leave of the saint with a kiss.

When the saint was beheaded, the olive tree to which the saint was tied became covered with fruit. Many who were present at the execution believed in Christ. The saint's body was thrown into a fire, but remained unharmed, and was buried by Christians. Saint Panteleimon's servants Laurence, Bassos and Probus witnessed his execution and heard the Voice from Heaven. They recorded the life, the sufferings and death of the saint.

Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

The Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen was the eldest of the seven deacons, appointed by the Apostles themselves, and therefore he is called "archdeacon." He was the first Christian martyr, and he suffered for Christ when he was about thirty. In the words of Asterias, he was "the starting point of the martyrs, the instructor of suffering for Christ, the foundation of righteous confession, since Stephen was the first to shed his blood for the Gospel."

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Saint Stephen preached Christianity and defeated Jewish teachers of the Law in debate. The Jews maligned Saint Stephen, saying that he had uttered blasphemy against God and against Moses. Saint Stephen came before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest to answer these charges. He gave a fiery speech, in which he recounted the history of the Jewish nation, and denounced the Jews for persecuting the prophets, and also for executing the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ (Acts ch. 7).

During his speech, Saint Stephen suddenly saw the heavens opened and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. The Jews shouted and covered their ears, and rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and stoned him, but the holy martyr prayed for his murderers. Far off on the heights stood the Mother of God with the holy Apostle John the Theologian, and She prayed fervently for the martyr. Before his death Saint Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Then he joyfully gave up his pure soul to Christ.

The body of the holy Protomartyr Stephen, left to be eaten by beasts, was secretly taken up by the Jewish teacher Gamaliel and his son Habib, who buried Stephen on his estate. They both believed in Christ, and later received holy Baptism.

Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-Bearer the Bishop of Antioch

The Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-Bearer, was a disciple of the holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, as was also Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (February 23). Saint Ignatius was the second bishop of Antioch, and successor to Bishop Euodius, Apostle of the Seventy (September 7).

Tradition suggests that when Saint Ignatius was a little boy, the Savior hugged him and said: "Unless you turn and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 18:3). The saint was called "God-Bearer" (Theophoros), because he bore God in his heart and prayed unceasingly to Him. He also had this name because he was held in the arms of Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

Saint Ignatius was a disciple of the Apostle John the Theologian, together with Saint Polycarp of Smyrna. As Bishop of Antioch, Saint Ignatius was zealous and spared no effort to build up the church of Christ. To him is attributed the practice of antiphonal singing (by two choirs) during church services. He had seen a vision of the angels in heaven alternately singing praises to God, and divided his church choir to follow this example. In the time of persecution he was a source of strength to the souls of his flock, and was eager to suffer for Christ.

In the year 106 the emperor Trajan (98-117), after his victory over the Scythians, ordered everyone to give thanks to the pagan gods, and to put to death any Christians who refused to worship the idols. In the year 107, Trajan happened to pass through Antioch. Here they told him that Bishop Ignatius openly confessed Christ, and taught people to scorn riches, to lead a virtuous life, and preserve their virginity. Saint Ignatius came voluntarily before the emperor, so as to avert persecution of the Christians in Antioch. Saint Ignatius rejected the persistent requests of the emperor Trajan to sacrifice to the idols. The emperor then decided to send him to Rome to be thrown to the wild beasts. Saint Ignatius joyfully accepted the sentence imposed upon him. His readiness for martyrdom was attested to by eyewitnesses, who accompanied Saint Ignatius from Antioch to Rome.

On the way to Rome, the ship sailed from Seleucia stopped at Smyrna, where Saint Ignatius met with his friend Bishop Polycarp. Clergy and believers from other cities and towns thronged to see Saint Ignatius. He exhorted everyone not to fear death and not to grieve for him. In his Epistle to the Roman Christians, he asked them to assist him with their prayers, and to pray that God would strengthen him in his impending martyrdom for Christ: "I seek Him Who died for us; I desire Him Who rose for our salvation... In me, desire has been nailed to the cross, and no flame of material longing is left. Only the living water speaks within me, saying, 'Hasten to the Father.'"

From Smyrna, Saint Ignatius went to Troas. Here he heard the happy news of the end of the persecution against Christians in Antioch. From Troas, Saint Ignatius sailed to Neapolis (in Macedonia) and then to Philippi.

On the way to Rome Saint Ignatius visited several churches, teaching and guiding the Christians there. He also wrote seven epistles: to the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna. The Roman Christians met Saint Ignatius with great joy and profound sorrow. Some of them hoped to prevent his execution, but Saint Ignatius implored them not to do this. Kneeling down, he prayed together with the believers for the Church, for love between the brethren, and for an end to the persecution against Christians.

On December 20, the day of a pagan festival, they led Saint Ignatius into the arena, and he turned to the people: "Men of Rome, you know that I am sentenced to death, not because of any crime, but because of my love for God, by Whose love I am embraced. I long to be with Him, and offer myself to him as a pure loaf, made of fine wheat ground fine by the teeth of wild beasts."

After this the lions were released and tore him to pieces, leaving only his heart and a few bones. Tradition says that on his way to execution, Saint Ignatius unceasingly repeated the name of Jesus Christ. When they asked him why he was doing this, Saint Ignatius answered that this Name was written in his heart, and that he confessed with his lips Him Whom he always carried within. When the saint was devoured by the lions, his heart was not touched. When they cut open the heart, the pagans saw an inscription in gold letters: "Jesus Christ." After his execution Saint Ignatius appeared to many of the faithful in their sleep to comfort them, and some saw him at prayer for the city of Rome.

Hearing of the saint's great courage, Trajan thought well of him and stopped the persecution against the Christians. The relics of Saint Ignatius were transferred to Antioch (January 29), and on February 1, 637 were returned to Rome and placed in the church of San Clemente.

Greatmartyr Marina of Antioch in Pisidia

The Holy Great Martyr Marina was born in Asia Minor, in the city of Antioch of Pisidia (southern Asia Minor), into the family of a pagan priest. In infancy she lost her mother, and her father gave her into the care of a nursemaid, who raised Marina in the Orthodox Faith. Upon learning that his daughter had become a Christian, the father angrily disowned her. During the time of the persecution against Christians under the emperor Diocletian (284-305), when she was fifteen years old, Saint Marina was arrested and locked up in prison. With firm trust in the will of God and His help, the young prisoner prepared for her impending fate.

The governor Olymbrios, charmed with the beautiful girl, tried to persuade her to renounce the Christian Faith and become his wife. But the saint, unswayed, refused his offers. The vexed governor gave the holy martyr over to torture. Having beaten her fiercely, they fastened the saint with nails to a board and tore at her body with tridents. The governor himself, unable to bear the horror of these tortures, hid his face in his hands. But the holy martyr remained unyielding. Thrown for the night into prison, she was granted heavenly aid and healed of her wounds. They stripped her and tied her to a tree, then burned the martyr with fire. Barely alive, the martyr prayed: "Lord, You have granted me to go through fire for Your Name, grant me also to go through the water of holy Baptism."

Hearing the word “water”, the governor gave orders to drown the saint in a large cauldron. The martyr besought the Lord that this manner of execution should become for her holy Baptism. When they plunged her into the water, there suddenly shone a light, and a snow-white dove came down from Heaven, bearing in its beak a golden crown. The fetters put upon Saint Marina came apart by themselves. The martyr stood up in the fount of Baptism glorifying the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Saint Marina emerged from the fount completely healed, without any trace of burns. Amazed at this miracle, the people glorified the True God, and many came to believe. This brought the governor into a rage, and he gave orders to kill anyone who might confess the Name of Christ. 15,000 Christians perished there, and the holy Martyr Marina was beheaded. The sufferings of the Great Martyr Marina were described by an eyewitness of the event, named Theotimos.

Up until the taking of Constantinople by Western crusaders in the year 1204, the relics of the Great Martyr Marina were in the Panteoponteia monastery. According to other sources, they were located in Antioch until the year 908 and from there transferred to Italy. Now they are in Athens, in a church dedicated to the holy Virgin Martyr. Her venerable hand was transferred to Mount Athos, to the Batopedi monastery.

Greatmartyr Irene of Thessalonica

The holy Great Martyr Irene was born in the city of Magedon in Persia during the fourth century. She was the daughter of the pagan king Licinius, and her parents named her Penelope.

Penelope was very beautiful, and her father kept her isolated in a high tower from the time she was six so that she would not be exposed to Christianity. He also placed thirteen young maidens in the tower with her. An old tutor by the name of Apellian was assigned to give her the best possible education. Apellian was a Christian, and during her lessons, he told the girl about Christ the Savior and taught her the Christian Faith and the Christian virtues.

When Penelope reached adolescence, her parents began to think about her marriage. One day, a dove flew through the window carrying an olive branch in its beak, depositing it upon a table. Then an eagle swooped in with a wreath of flowers in its beak, and also placed it upon the table. Finally, a raven flew in carrying a snake, which it dropped on the table. Penelope was puzzled by these events and wondered what they meant.

Apellian explained that the dove signified her education, and the olive branch stood for the grace of God which is received in Baptism. The eagle with the wreath of flowers represented success in her future life. The raven and the snake foretold her future suffering and sorrow.

At the end of the conversation Apellianus said that the Lord wished to betroth her to Himself and that Penelope would undergo much suffering for her heavenly Bridegroom. After this Penelope refused marriage, was baptized by the priest Timothy, and she was named Irene (peace). She even urged her own parents to become Christians. Shortly after this, she destroyed all her father’s idols.

Since Saint Irene had dedicated herself to Christ, she refused to marry any of the suitors her father had chosen for her. When Licinius learned that his daughter refused to worship the pagan gods, he was furious. He attempted to turn her from Christ by having her tortured. She was tied up and thrown beneath the hooves of wild horses so that they might trample her to death, but the horses remained motionless. Instead of harming the saint, one of the horses charged Licinius, seized his right hand and tore it from his

arm. Then it knocked Licinius down and began to trample him. They untied the holy virgin, and through her prayers Licinius rose unharmed in the presence of eyewitnesses with his hand intact.

Seeing such a miracle, Licinius and his wife, and many of the people, (about 3000 men) believed in Christ and turned from the pagan gods. Resigning his administrative duties, Licinius devoted himself to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Saint Irene lived in the house of her teacher Apellian, and she began to preach Christ among the pagans, converting them to the path of salvation.

When Sedecius, the new prefect of the city, heard of this miracle he summoned Apellian and questioned him about Irene's manner of life. Apellian replied that Irene, like other Christians, lived in strict temperance, devoting herself to constant prayer and reading holy books. Sedecius summoned the saint to him and urged her to stop preaching about Christ. He also attempted to force her to sacrifice to the idols. Saint Irene staunchly confessed her faith before the prefect, not fearing his wrath, and prepared to undergo suffering for Christ. By order of Sedecius she was thrown into a pit filled with vipers and serpents. The saint spent ten days in the pit and remained unharmed, for an angel of the Lord protected her and brought her food. Sedecius ascribed this miracle to sorcery, and he subjected Saint Irene to many other tortures, but she remained unharmed. Under the influence of her preaching and miracles even more people were converted to Christ, and turned away from the worship of inanimate idols.

Sedecius was deposed by his son Savorus, who persecuted Christians with an even greater zeal than his father had done. Saint Irene went to her home town of Magedon in Persia to meet Savorus and his army, and ask him to end the persecution. When he refused, Saint Irene prayed and his entire army was blinded. She prayed again and they received their sight once more. In spite of this, Savorus refused to recognize the power of God. Because of his insolence, he was struck and killed by a bolt of lightning.

After this, Saint Irene walked into the city and performed many miracles. She returned to the tower built by her father, accompanied by the priest Timothy. Through her teaching, she converted five thousand people to Christ.

Next, the saint went to the city of Callinicus, or Callinicum (possibly on the Euphrates River in Syria). The ruler of that place was King Numerian, the son of Sebastian. When she began to teach about Christ, she was arrested and tortured by the pagan authorities. She was placed into three bronze oxen which were heated by fire. She was transferred from one to another, but miraculously she remained uninjured. Thousands of idolaters embraced Christianity as a result of this wondrous event.

Sensing the approach of death, Numerian instructed his eparch Babdonus to continue torturing the saint in order to force her to sacrifice to idols. Once again, the tortures were ineffective, and many people turned to Christ.

Christ's holy martyr then traveled to the city of Constantina, forty miles northeast of Edessa. By 330, the Persian king Sapor II (309-379) had heard of Saint Irene's great miracles. To prevent her from winning more people to Christ, she was arrested, beheaded, and then buried. However, God sent an angel to raise her up again, and she went into the city of Mesembria. After seeing her alive and hearing her preach, the local king was baptized with many of his subjects.

Wishing to convert even more pagans to Christianity, Saint Irene went to Ephesus, where she taught the people and performed many miracles. The Lord revealed to her that the end of her life was approaching. Then Saint Irene left the city accompanied by six people, including her former teacher Apellian. On the

outskirts of the town, she found a new tomb in which no one had ever been buried. After making the Sign of the Cross, she went inside, directing her companions to close the entrance to the cave with a large stone, which they did. When Christians visited the cave four days later, they did not find the body of the saint.

Apollian returned after only two days, and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Thus did God glorify Saint Irene, who loved Him and devoted her life to serving Him. Although many of these miracles may seem improbable to those who are skeptical, nothing is impossible with God.

Saint Irene led thousands of people to Christ through her preaching, and by her example. The Church continues to honor her memory and to seek her heavenly intercession.