


**Leader Guide**



**BREAK  
THROUGH!**

**THE BIBLE FOR  
YOUNG CATHOLICS**



saint mary's press

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# Chapter 1

## Welcome!

Welcome to the Saint Mary's Press® *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics Leader Guide*. We hope this guide will be your faithful companion as you lead your middle schoolers toward a deeper understanding of God's Word in Scripture.

Throughout this leader guide, you will find practical ideas to enhance your teaching of Scripture. But, before we explore the many options of this program, it might be helpful to present the philosophy behind the teaching of Scripture as outlined in this guide, an overview of the chapters in this guide, and a simple and basic lesson plan that can be used with the Bible character interviews strategically placed throughout *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*.

## Bible Character Interviews

"Interviews" with important people of the Bible, from Adam and Eve in the Old Testament to the Apostle Timothy in the New Testament, can be found throughout *Breakthrough!* These interviews provide a simple way to introduce the main themes of a particular book. They are provided in order to give teachers and young people an opportunity to become familiar with Scripture through the eyes of a particular and significant person. These interviews, while fictional, are based on sound Scripture scholarship and fulfill the first letter of a simple acronym for the teaching of Scripture, PREP: **P**repare, **R**ead, **E**ducate, **P**actice.

### **1. Prepare: In order to read and understand Scripture, middle schoolers need preparation.**

We educators have heard many Scripture stories over and over. Sometimes this familiarity can impede our understanding, if we are not open to new insights. But often our familiarity means that by knowing the elements of a particular story, we can delve more deeply into its meaning.

Yet middle schoolers often are hearing much of Scripture for the very first time. Even if they have heard some Scripture stories during Mass or other liturgical celebrations, much of Scripture is literally a

closed book to them. They are coming to the story of salvation history, as told in Scripture, “cold.” And one reading, with no preparation at all, does not suffice to allow the message to sink in. Preparing middle schoolers to read Scripture requires preparation on your part.

### *Preparation for the Teacher*

This leader guide—and the following chapters in particular—can help you prepare to guide your middle schoolers in reading and understanding Scripture:

- Chapter 2: Why Read the Bible?—essential background for understanding the Sacred Scripture in God’s plan
- Chapter 3: Biblical Literacy and the Teaching of Scripture—an exploration of the goals of biblical literacy and how to work on them with young adolescents
- Chapter 4: Looking through the Saint Mary’s Press® *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*—an explanation of each feature of *Breakthrough!*
- Chapter 5: Helping Young People to Navigate the Saint Mary’s Press® *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*—an explanation of the special features of *Breakthrough!* designed to help young people become comfortable with finding and reading passages from Scripture
- Chapter 6: Characteristics of Middle Schoolers—information on the characteristics of preteens and young adolescents and implications for their understanding of Scripture
- Chapter 7: Teaching Scripture to Middle Schoolers—practical teaching tips for the classroom session

### *Preparation for the Young People*

Ideas for directly preparing middle schoolers to hear and understand Scripture are included in the following chapters:

- Chapter 8: Scriptural Prayer with Middle Schoolers—practical ideas for using Scripture in prayer with middle schoolers
- Chapter 9: Breaking Open the Word—a section with practical strategies for teaching Scripture and a section with reproducible masters outlining methods for using *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* in teaching popular Scripture stories

Chapter 10: Connecting with the Liturgical Year—a seasonal approach to Scripture, with handouts for major seasons and feasts of the Church as highlighted in the Lectionary, each with a prayer and ritual guide and each followed by a hands-on activity

## **2. Read: Middle schoolers can read Scripture.**

*Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* has been developed with the thought that middle schoolers, with the proper preparation, can read and understand much of Scripture. As you teach a Scripture story or passage, draw the young people's attention to the interview (if one has been given). The list of interviews for the entire Bible can be found on page 4 in *Breakthrough!*

## **3. Educate: Education is needed for understanding.**

Education is the purpose of the Study It! and Catholic Connections articles found throughout this Bible. These features help to highlight and explain the message and importance of various Scripture passages in a particular book. In a classroom setting, these features can be read aloud and discussed. Encourage your middle schoolers to read and think about these on their own when they are reading Scripture privately.

## **4. Practice: Practice means living out the message of Scripture in Christian life.**

The word *practice* in this sense means "doing." In fact, this word comes from *praxis*, a Greek word that monks in the early Church used to describe their rule of life. "What is your praxis?" they would ask one another. In other words, "How are you living your life?" The Pray It! and Live It! articles on the pages of the *Breakthrough!* Bible are particularly geared to bringing Scripture into the lives of middle schoolers.

The last two chapters in this leader guide relate specifically to Christian life and practice:

- Chapter 11: Word and Sacrament: Scriptural Preparation for the Sacraments—a compendium of popular Scripture stories presented in popular basal texts for the Sacraments
- Chapter 12: From Here to Home: Sharing Scripture with the Family—practical ideas for encouraging family participation and family education in reading and understanding Scripture

## A Short Lesson Plan

A sample lesson plan using all of the elements noted thus far (the interview, as well as the Pray It!, Study It!, and Live It! articles), as well as other supplementary materials and ideas from this leader guide, might look like this:

- Scripture to be considered today: The Call of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4–10)
- Opening Song (based on the theme of answering God’s call)
- Opening Prayer (asking that we be open to hearing God’s Word today)
- Introduce Jeremiah by asking the group to look at the art on page 1250. Ask the group to describe the time of day, why Jeremiah is looking up, and what the scattering of light around him might mean. (Usually, in religious art, any kind of light refers to the presence of God.)
- Reading aloud the interview given in the Book of Jeremiah on page 1307 (two middle schoolers)
- Reading aloud the Scripture (Jeremiah 1:4–10; catechist or middle schooler)
- Silent pause and group reflection: What words or passages struck you? What was Jeremiah feeling? What was Jeremiah’s first response to God? What was his “second response”? Do our “first response” and “second response” to something asked of us sometimes differ? Why?

- Compare the reading from Jeremiah to Jesus' Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28–31). Ask the group to find this passage in their Bibles. Read the passage aloud and explain that the older son said no at first, but then changed his mind and went to work in the vineyard. So he did what his father wanted after all. Sometimes we are like Jeremiah and the older son. We might say no, but then we change our minds and do God's will.
- Discussion of Live It! article on page 1249
- Discussion of introductory material on page 1248
- Hands-on activity (See the handout "The Call of Jeremiah" [Document #: TX005864] in chapter 9 of this *Breakthrough!* Leader Guide and the *Breakthrough!* Activity Booklet, which has three pages of activities for Jeremiah's call.)
- Closing Prayer (Reread last line of Live It! article and ask for help in understanding and following our individual calls from God.)
- Within this simple structure, which follows the PREP formula, you will be offering your students the riches of Scripture that meet their needs for preparation, reading, education, and practice in Christian living.



# Chapter 2

## Why Read the Bible?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that the Church “forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful . . . to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (Philippians 3:8), by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures”<sup>1</sup> (133). But why is it important to be a frequent reader of the Bible? The answer to this question must take into account the divine nature of the Bible. The Bible is not just any book; it is unique among all books. So to answer the question “Why read the Bible?” we must also answer the question “What is the Bible?” We have several ways of describing the Bible’s uniqueness, and each description gives us some insight into why it is important to read its pages.

## The Word of God

We often call the Bible the Word of God. But the Word of God is not limited to Sacred Scripture. In Pope Benedict XVI’s apostolic exhortation *The Word of the Lord* (*Verbum Domini*), he describes the Word of God as a divine symphony, “a single word expressed in multiple ways” (7). We hear God’s Word through the wonder and majesty of creation, we hear it through human reason and conscience, we hear it through the prophets of the Old Testament, we hear it through the teaching of the Apostles and their successors, and we hear it through the words of Scripture. And what is the Word expressed through these multiple voices? It is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the full manifestation of the Word of God (see John 1:1–14). Jesus said at the Last Supper, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9). We can only know the fullness of God’s love and his saving plan by coming to know Jesus Christ. So one important reason for reading the Bible is that it helps us get to know Jesus. “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” (Saint Jerome).

## One Mode of Divine Revelation

We also describe the Bible as one of the privileged modes of Divine Revelation. Christ charged the Apostles to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have

commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles taught others the fullness of the divine truth that had been revealed to them, both orally and in writing. Today, through the popes and the bishops of the Church, this truth is passed on to us in two modes: Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture.

Because of this, we have confidence that through the words of Scripture God reveals himself to us in a unique and special way. This Revelation is not abstract or theoretical. When we read the Bible in faith, God touches our minds and our hearts. When we approach the words of Scripture prayerfully, the Holy Spirit gives us an intimate connection with our loving Creator. So another important reason for reading the Bible is that it leads to intimate communion with God.

## **Divinely Inspired**

Finally, we believe the Bible is divinely inspired. This means that ultimately God is the author of the Bible. The human authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to put down in words the truth God wished to reveal for the sake of our salvation—that is, so that we might be restored to full communion with him. Most Christians understand this dimension of divine inspiration, but there is another dimension to divine inspiration that is frequently overlooked. The same Holy Spirit that inspired the original authors of the Bible’s books also works within us when we read their words. Saint Jerome tells us, “We cannot come to an understanding of Scripture without the assistance of the Holy Spirit who inspired it” (*The Word of the Lord*, 16).

So another reason to read the Bible is to give the Holy Spirit a chance to work in our lives. When we read Scripture, the Holy Spirit comforts us in our difficulties, challenges us to grow in holiness, and calls us to become more perfect disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. All the saints testify to this power of Scripture in their lives.

So why read the Bible? We do it in order to know Jesus Christ, to have an intimate relationship with God, and to allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. These are three pretty good reasons for being a frequent Bible reader! A love for Scripture, expressed in frequent reading of God’s Word, is the legacy we are privileged to hand on to our young people.

# Chapter 3

## Biblical Literacy and the Teaching of Scripture

As a teacher or catechist of Catholic youth, you know the power that Scripture has to touch young people's hearts and inspire their moral and spiritual lives. To remind us to draw upon this power in catechesis, the Church's teaching documents always call us to make the Bible an integral part of our ministry:

Catechesis should take Sacred Scripture as its inspiration, its fundamental curriculum, and its end because it strengthens faith, nourishes the soul, and nurtures the spiritual life. (*National Directory for Catechesis*, p. 70)

Likewise, the holy synod forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful, especially those who live the religious life, to learn "the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine scriptures. (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* [*Dei Verbum*, 1965], 25)

Through your catechetical ministry with young adolescents, you equip them with the essential knowledge and skills required for their lifelong journey of faith. When it comes to the Bible, you want to begin teaching the knowledge and skills that will help them to ultimately become biblically literate adults. So let's start by describing biblically literate adults.

Biblically literate adults are comfortable reading and using the Bible. They know how the books of the Bible are arranged and how to quickly and easily locate a specific book or passage. They have a solid understanding of the biblical story of salvation history. They are familiar with key people and events of salvation history and can tell how God's saving power worked through those people and events. These biblically literate adults understand that any book or passage from Scripture must be understood in its proper context. When reading the Bible, they consider things like the literary genre, the culture of the time, the original author's intended message, how the passage fits into the bigger picture of salvation history, and how the passage is understood in the Church's Tradition.

Thus it follows that we can help young people to become such biblically literate adults by working on these three catechetical goals:

- A. Our ministry with young people should help them to become knowledgeable and comfortable in using the Bible.
- B. Our ministry with young people should help them to know and understand the biblical story of salvation history.
- C. Our ministry with young people should help them to understand how to interpret Bible books and passages in their proper contexts.

Goal A is the **Access** goal. Goal B is the **Big-Picture** goal. Goal C is the **Context** goal. Taken together, these can be called the ABCs of biblical literacy.

## The ABCs of Biblical Literacy

The three goals of biblical literacy follow a certain progression. The **Access** goal is the most basic goal; its competencies create a foundation for working on the **Big-Picture** and **Context** goals. The **Big Picture** builds on the **Access** competencies and creates greater knowledge that the **Context** competencies can build on. All three goals are closely related; working on any one goal usually reinforces the others.

As a general guideline, with middle school youth, your primary focus should be on the **Big-Picture** competencies and reinforcing **Access** competencies. You should also introduce some **Context** knowledge. You will probably not focus primarily on the **Context** competencies because middle schoolers first need to become more familiar with the main characters and important stories of Scripture. They are also still developing the more abstract reasoning required for mastery of **Context** skills and knowledge. However, you will use specific **Context** skills and knowledge competencies as you teach them about the meaning of specific Bible stories.

Let's take a closer look at these three goals and how you can help young people to develop the competencies needed to become proficient in them. (For a more detailed look at these three goals, read *Biblical Literacy Made Easy: A Practical Guide for Catechists, Teachers, and Youth Ministers*, Saint Mary's Press, 2008.)

## Implementing the Access Goal: Helping Young People to Become Comfortable Using the Bible

When you first meet with a new group of young people, informally check out their **Access** skills. After giving them Bibles, ask them to locate several familiar verses of Scripture. Ask them to name the four Gospels. See if they know if the books of the Prophets are in the Old or New Testaments. If they are able to accomplish these tasks, they probably have good mastery of **Access** skills and knowledge. If not, you will quickly want to help them develop these competencies. By reinforcing the competencies of the **Access** goal, we can help the young people we teach to become more familiar and comfortable with the Bible.

The most critical practice for achieving the **Access** goal—a practice so basic that many people overlook it—is simply having young people *use* the Bible. Too often they have read Scripture passages as quotations in their textbooks. There may be only one Bible in the classroom, so the catechist looks up the passage and then hands the opened Bible to a young person to read. These practices do not encourage middle schoolers to learn basic biblical literacy skills. If young Catholics are to become comfortable in accessing the Bible, they must use it regularly in our programs. Every classroom or meeting space must have enough Bibles for each young person to use. When a Scripture story is referred to in a textbook, we can then have all the young people look it up and read it from the Bible. What we *model* as important has a much greater impact than what we *say* is important!

To help middle schoolers become comfortable in accessing the Bible, we can teach them the two other important competencies: Big-Picture and Context.

### Know the Bible's Structure

The Bible is not one book; rather it is a collection, or even a small library, of books and letters. These books are organized in a specific and intentional structure, sort of like books might be grouped in sections on a bookshelf. The table of contents in *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* shows this organization. Here is a slightly more detailed explanation of those sections:

- **The Old Testament** is the first major section of the Bible. Its books are primarily about God's relationship with his Chosen People, the Israelites (or the Jews). The first part of the Old Testament is called

the **Pentateuch**. The stories in these books are the heart of the Old Testament.

- o The second part of the Old Testament is called the Historical Books. These books recount how the Chosen People settled in the Promised Land and how they eventually became a kingdom ruled by great and not-so-great kings.
- o The third part of the Old Testament is called the Wisdom Books. These books teach some of the collected wisdom of the Israelites.
- o The fourth part of the Old Testament is called the Books of the Prophets. These contain the warnings and consolations of some of Israel's prophets.
- **The New Testament** is the second major section of the Bible. Its books tell how God fulfilled the Old Testament promises by sending us the Savior, Jesus Christ.
  - o The first part of the New Testament is the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The Gospels have the stories about Christ's life and teaching, and the Book of Acts tells us about how the Church spread after Christ's Ascension.
  - o The second part of the New Testament is the Letters. Early Church leaders sent these letters, some to specific individuals and others to specific Christian communities.
  - o The last book of the New Testament is the Book of Revelation. It is a unique collection of prophecies and symbolic visions.

Refer to these sections when the young people look up passages in the Bible. Say things like, "This Bible story is from the Book of Exodus, which is in the Old Testament of the Bible," or "This Bible story is from the Gospel of Mark. The Gospels have stories about the life of Jesus and the things he taught."

### **Locating a Passage in the Bible**

The system for finding a particular passage in the Bible is simple and explained in the beginning of *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* in the section called "About This Bible." After explaining this system, help the young people to develop the skill of locating Bible passages through practice, practice, practice! This skill will take time to master, but it is a crucial skill for lifelong Bible reading. You will find help in teaching navigation skills to young people, including practice exercises, in chapter 5 of this guide, "Helping Young People to Navigate the Saint Mary's Press® *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*."

## **Implementing the Big-Picture Goal: Helping Young People to Know and Understand the Biblical Story of Salvation History**

Because of our lectionary-based liturgies, Catholics are often familiar with most of the important people and stories of history. But if liturgies are a person's only contact with Scripture, she or he may not see how those individual stories fit into the overarching biblical story of God's covenantal relationship with the human race, which we also call salvation history. Much of Catholic theology is based on the presumption that we know and understand the overarching story of salvation history.

Salvation history is often organized into different periods to help us understand God's saving work. These periods of time are described on pages 8–11 in *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*. Also illustrated there are portraits of "Bible people" associated with these periods. You may want to draw attention to these explanatory pages as an introduction to a particular Scripture passage. Following is a brief summary of these eight periods:

### **Primeval History**

The Bible begins with figurative stories—Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, and the Tower of Babel—that tell how God created everything that exists and how sin and evil entered God's good Creation.

### **Patriarchs**

In this period of salvation history, God began to form a special relationship with a chosen race of people. He made a special promise, called a covenant, with a patriarch (leader of a tribe) named Abraham. God promised that Abraham and Sarah's descendants would be numerous, that they would inherit a Promised Land, and that their descendants would be a blessing for all nations.

### **Egypt and the Exodus**

In this period of salvation history, Abraham and Sarah's descendants, now called Israelites, are led out of slavery in Egypt through God's power and the leadership of a prophet named Moses. On their journey, God extended the covenant he made with Abraham and Sarah to all the Israelites, giving them the Ten Commandments to obey as part of their Covenant promises.

## **Settling the Promised Land**

After the death of Moses, God called a new leader, Joshua, to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. After many battles, they eventually gained control of the land, and each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel was given its own section to live on.

## **Kingdoms of Judah and Israel**

When the Israelites wanted their own king, God reluctantly answered their plea. The first three kings—Saul, David, and Solomon—united the Twelve Tribes as one nation. After Solomon's death, there was disagreement between the tribes, and the kingdom split in two. Israel was the name of the northern kingdom, and Judah was the name of the southern kingdom. When the kings and people of these two kingdoms disobeyed their covenant with God, God sent prophets to warn them.

## **Exile and Return**

Despite the prophets' warnings, the people of Israel and Judah continued to turn away from God's covenant with them. So God let their kingdoms be conquered; the Assyrians conquered Israel in 721 BC, and the Babylonians conquered Judah in 587 BC. Because many of the people were taken into captivity, this time period was called the Exile. After fifty years, a new king allowed the people, now called Judeans or Jews, to return to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.

## **Life of Jesus Christ**

God never abandoned his Chosen People. When the time was right, God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus preached love, justice, and forgiveness, healed many people, and worked miracles as signs of God's power. When he was killed by the Romans—with the approval of the Jewish leaders—his followers thought all was lost. Instead, after three days, God raised Jesus from the dead!

## **Early Christian Church**

After his Resurrection, Jesus instructed his closest followers, the Apostles, to go and spread the Good News of salvation to all people. The Holy Spirit gave Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles the courage to tell others about Jesus Christ. They started new Christian communities with the help of newly converted Christians. Soon Christianity spread throughout the whole Roman Empire—even to the capital, Rome.



Understanding how each biblical book's story fits into this bigger history is the mark of a truly biblically literate person. This kind of knowledge grows with repetition and review. You can best help young adolescents to develop this knowledge by exposing them to key people and events in Scripture. *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* does this in several ways. Here are some of the supplemental features in *Breakthrough!* that you can use to build Big-Picture competencies:

1. **Salvation History Time Line** Found on pages 8–11, this time line offers a youth-friendly look at the eight periods of salvation history. It identifies the major biblical characters in that period and the biblical books that period of salvation history is based on. Plus, it contains connections to two other Big-Picture features, the Bible People Encounters and a continuous Bible reading plan for key periods in salvation history.
2. **Bible People Encounters** Throughout *Breakthrough!* there are forty, one-page illustrated “encounters” with key biblical people. These pages contain imaginary conversations with these biblical people, exploring the roles they played in God’s plan. Use these pages to introduce your youth to these important people. You can do this by unpacking the art and reading and discussing the conversations.
3. **Salvation History Reading Plan** This continuous Bible reading plan guides young people on a “salvation history journey” through the Bible. The reading plan begins at Genesis but can begin at any period of salvation history (as shown in the eight periods of salvation history illustrated by the time line on pages 8–11), enabling a Bible study of that particular period. For example, starting with the first chapter of Genesis (page 17) middle schoolers will find a small box in the upper corner of the page. The box directs them to read a specific passage and reflect on a question related to the passage, and also provides a citation to the next passage in the plan. Use this feature to provide a guided exploration through each period of salvation history.
4. **Bible Story Index** Near the end of *Breakthrough!*, on pages 2086–2088, is an index to key biblical stories in salvation history. It contains alphabetical listings of Old Testament People and Events, New Testament People and Events, the Miracles of Jesus, the Parables of Jesus, and the Teachings of Jesus. Direct the young people to this index to quickly find the location of a particular story.

## Other Big-Picture Activities

There are many other activities you can use to help young adolescents master the Big-Picture competencies. Have them create paper plate Bible people icons and use those icons to create your own salvation history time line. This is explained in the resource *Biblical Literacy Made Easy* (Saint Mary's Press, 2008). You can also have them act out some of the most important events of salvation history. See the two volumes of *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits* (also from Saint Mary's Press) to help you with this. For reproducible journal pages, puzzle pages, and activity pages connected to key biblical people and events, check out the *Breakthrough! Activity Booklet* (Saint Mary's Press, 2017).

## Implementing the Context Goal: Helping Young People to Understand How to Interpret Bible Books and Passages in Their Proper Contexts

The **Context** goal is subtler and more complex than the **Access** and **Big-Picture** goals. Catechists would typically not make this goal their primary focus with middle schoolers. However, catechists need to understand this goal in order to teach young people the correct interpretation of the biblical stories they read together.

This excerpt from the Second Vatican Council document *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* describes how to correctly interpret the Bible:

Seeing that, in Sacred Scripture, God speaks through human beings in human fashion, it follows that the interpreters of sacred Scripture, if they are to ascertain what God has wished to communicate to us, should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words (12).

This quotation states that we must do two things when interpreting a Bible story or teaching. First, we must seek to understand what the original human author intended to communicate. The Church Fathers called this the "literal sense" of Scripture. Second, we must seek to understand what God is revealing through the story or passage. The Church Fathers called this the fuller sense or the "spiritual sense" of Scripture. Often the literal sense and the spiritual sense of a passage are closely related. But in some Scripture passages, God reveals

through the spiritual sense a deeper and more universal truth than the human author originally understood or intended.

Paragraphs 109–119 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further explain how to apply these principles. These paragraphs describe the contexts we must consider when interpreting any particular passage of the Bible, which is why we describe this as the **Context** goal.

- **Historical context** To understand the full importance or meaning of a certain event, we need to know the larger historical situation within which the event occurred.
- **Cultural context** Sometimes the true meaning of certain actions or words makes sense only when we understand the cultural practices or beliefs of the time.
- **Literary genre** The Bible is composed of many different types of literature. We must know which type we are reading and realize that each genre has its own rules for interpretation.
- **Unity of the whole Bible** When taken as a whole, God’s revealed truth is presented in the Bible without error. This is the case in many Old Testament passages, whose Christian meaning can be completely and accurately understood only in light of the New Testament Revelation.
- **Living Tradition of the Church** To fully understand some Bible passages, we must take into account how the Magisterium—the official teaching authority of the Church—has interpreted the meaning of those passages.
- **Coherence of the truths of faith** When it comes to religious or moral truth, the Bible cannot contradict itself or any other revealed truth of our Tradition.

If we do not interpret the Bible using these contexts, we could easily misinterpret God’s Revelation. This is the danger of biblical fundamentalism, an approach to biblical interpretation that Catholics are cautioned to avoid. In its extreme forms, biblical fundamentalism leads people to false beliefs, such as the belief that God created the universe in six, twenty-four-hour days.

Even though you will not necessarily mention these different contexts when working with young adolescents, the short activities in *Breakthrough!* provide trustworthy interpretations to help young people and their leaders correctly understand the context of many biblical stories. The Study It! articles focus on the historical and cultural contexts and the literary genres used. The Catholic Connections activities

explain the living tradition of the Church and the unity of Scripture. The Pray It! articles often make connections with the liturgy, part of the living tradition of the Church. And the Live It! articles often draw on one or more of these contexts in showing the Bible's application to real life.

## The Dark Passages of Scripture

In helping young people to read and understand the Bible, catechists and teachers must be aware that some Bible stories are not child-friendly. The accounts of incest, rape, genocide, and holy war in the sacred pages of Scripture can come as a surprise for many beginning Bible readers. In his apostolic exhortation *The Word of the Lord*, published in November 2010, Pope Benedict XVI called these stories the “dark” passages of the Bible. Here is what the Holy Father said regarding these passages:

In discussing the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, the Synod also considered those passages in the Bible which, due to the violence and immorality they occasionally contain, prove obscure and difficult. Here it must be remembered first and foremost that *biblical revelation is deeply rooted in history*. God's plan is manifested *progressively* and it is accomplished slowly, *in successive stages* and despite human resistance. God chose a people and patiently worked to guide and educate them. Revelation is suited to the cultural and moral level of distant times and thus describes facts and customs, such as cheating and trickery, and acts of violence and massacre, without explicitly denouncing the immorality of such things. This can be explained by the historical context, yet it can cause the modern reader to be taken aback, especially if he or she fails to take account of the many “dark” deeds carried out down the centuries, and also in our own day. In the Old Testament, the preaching of the prophets vigorously challenged every kind of injustice and violence, whether collective or individual, and thus became God's way of training his people in preparation for the Gospel. So it would be a mistake to neglect those passages of Scripture that strike us as problematic. Rather, we should be aware that the correct interpretation of these passages requires a degree of expertise, acquired through a

training that interprets the texts in their historical-literary context and within the Christian perspective which has as its ultimate hermeneutical key “the Gospel and the new commandment of Jesus Christ brought about in the paschal mystery.”<sup>1</sup> I encourage scholars and pastors to help all the faithful to approach these passages through an interpretation which enables their meaning to emerge in the light of the mystery of Christ. (42)

In this teaching, Pope Benedict emphasized the following points:

- The Bible does not shy away from telling about the worst things that humans do to one another—these are the very things that Jesus Christ came to save us from. Unfortunately, these evil acts continue even into our time.
- The biblical author does not always explicitly say that a particular action is immoral; at the time he was writing, these actions might not have yet been seen as immoral (such as the killing of whole groups of people) or the biblical author presumed the reader knew that these were immoral actions (such as Lot’s daughters having sexual relations with their drunken father). Because God’s Revelation is “manifested progressively” and “is accomplished slowly, in successive stages” the preaching of the prophets and ultimately the teaching of Jesus Christ help us to see the true moral meaning of these actions.
- To properly understand these passages requires the help of people trained in biblical interpretation, such as pastors and biblical scholars.
- So what does this mean for you as a catechist or teacher of young people when it comes to these dark passages of Scripture? The best advice is to be sure to review all the Bible passages you intend to use before you meet with your group. If it is a “dark passage” that contains stories of sexual immorality or violence, consider consulting with other leaders as to whether your group is ready for this content. If you have any doubts, it is probably best to not use the passage. If you do believe your group has the maturity to understand the passage, be sure you are able to present the context and the Church’s teaching clearly and understandably.

# Chapter 4

## Looking through *Breakthrough!* *The Bible for Young Catholics*

*Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* is no ordinary Bible! Developed especially for young adolescents and those who are eager to introduce middle schoolers to the treasures of Scripture, *Breakthrough!* provides many helps to the reader and teacher. These are listed in the table of contents, both before and after the main body of the Bible itself.

### At the Front of *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*

Let's take a look at the sections in the front of the Bible:

Bible People Encounters . . . . .	4
Bible Events . . . . .	5
About This Bible . . . . .	6
Salvation History Time Line . . . . .	8

#### Bible People Encounters

This page lists and illustrates forty biblical people with whom and through whom God communicated his plan throughout salvation history. Also listed is the page number on which a fictionalized interview with this significant biblical person can be found.

The "Bible People Encounters" consist of both art (a portrait of a biblical person) and an interview. The two elements can be connected so that the art illumines the interview, and the interview expands the art. (For some ideas on ways to make this connection, see the paragraph about the art in this Bible in the "Bible Events" section.)

#### Bible Events

This page lists forty biblical events (nineteen from the Old Testament and twenty-one from the New Testament) and the page numbers on which artwork illustrating these events can be found. Sometimes the event is historical ("Rebuilding the Wall of Jerusalem"); sometimes it

is an illustration of a prophet or a special person in the Old or New Testaments; sometimes it is an illustration of one of the parables of Jesus.

## Art

The art in this Bible for young people deserves special mention. The artist, Odessa Sawyer, was particularly chosen for her realistic, almost photographic style—a style that embraces the people and events of the Sacred Scriptures yet gives them a contemporary aspect relatable to middle schoolers. One reason for listing the “Bible People Encounters” and the “Bible Events” on separate pages was to make the art on these special pages more accessible to readers of this Bible and to encourage catechists and teachers to include the art in their lessons. One way to do this is to begin the lesson by finding the art associated with that particular book or Scripture passage and discussing it. Some questions to consider in this discussion might be:

- What is going on in this scene?
- What objects or patterns are in the background of the image?  
What could these things symbolize?
- What do you think the person (or persons) portrayed is thinking?  
What might that person be feeling?
- Do you identify in any way with these kinds of thoughts or feelings?  
When have you experienced similar thoughts or feelings in your life?

You might conclude by saying, “Let’s look at our Scripture passage and see how God worked in this person’s life, and also how God might be working now in your life!”

## About This Bible

These two pages illustrate the special features of *Breakthrough!* (Pray It!, Live It!, Study It! Catholic Connections, and Key Passages) as well as what might be called “Frequently asked questions” on biblical topics: “Who wrote the Bible?” “How do I find Bible passages?” and other questions that inquiring minds want to know about the Bible.

## Salvation History Time Line

These four pages orient the reader and illustrate the connection between historical time, as we know it, and God's action before, within, and beyond time itself. The time line identifies the main biblical people connected with each period of historical time. It also identifies the particular biblical books that are associated with this period of history. A careful reading of this time line will help both teacher and middle schooler to understand that God works with and through his people in every age, preparing them to receive the greatest gift of all, the Son of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

This time line helps us to realize that God's work in our world is not finished. It is up to us to appreciate salvation history and to continue to live it in our own lives through discipleship and service.

## **At the Back of *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics***

In the flurry of preparation, sometimes the information found at the back of a book can be neglected. Be sure to look at the back of *Breakthrough!* You will find the following helpful sections there, under the heading "Study and Prayer Helps":

Bible Story Index . . . . .	2086
Article Index . . . . .	2089
Glossary . . . . .	2098
Catholic Prayers . . . . .	2111
Catholic Teachings . . . . .	2115
Maps . . . . .	2117
Make It Stick! . . . . .	2124
Go Forth! . . . . .	2125
Bible Names and Abbreviations . . . . .	2126

*Note:* The feature Make It Stick! is a selection of reading plans based on particular needs: "When You Feel Tempted," "When You Are Happy," etc. The feature Go Forth! presents important Scripture quotations to encourage middle schoolers to get involved in serving others, being supportive, rejoicing in their faith, and making a difference in their world.



## The Books of the Bible

This brings us to the main section of *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*: Scripture itself. You will see that each part of the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament, has an introduction. On pages 14–15, the sections of the Old Testament are presented, each one color-coded to one of the five smaller sections discussed on page 15:

- Pentateuch or Torah
- Historical Books
- Biblical Novellas
- Wisdom and Poetry Books
- Books of the Prophets

The sections of the New Testament are introduced on pages 1554–1555. The New Testament consists of two main sections: The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and The Letters and Revelation.

In addition to these overall introductory pages, each book of the Bible has its own one-page introduction. In this introduction, a brief contextual summary is presented, to help middle schoolers understand the cultural dimensions of the particular book and to help them understand why this book is important for us in our own time.

The “Headlines” section translates biblical language and topics into more contemporary language in order to spark interest in the events depicted in the book. This is followed by “Did You Know?” which concisely notes the basic facts concerning the book—its characters, author, the reason for its being written, and its literary style.

The last section of this introductory page, “Important themes,” highlights the main messages of this book in easy-to-understand terms.

A book such as the Bible, with so many parts, can be overwhelming to both teachers and middle schoolers. The next chapter, “Helping Young People to Navigate *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*,” explains the color coding of *Breakthrough!* and also provides handouts for practice exercises in locating Scripture passages. These simple exercises will help you to “clear a path” (see Isaiah 40:3 and Matthew 3:3) for the Word of the Lord to enter into the lives of your young adolescent Bible readers.

# Chapter 5

## **Helping Young People to Navigate *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics***

### **Introducing the Bible to Young People**

For many middle schoolers, although the Bible is not a “new” book, it remains largely unfamiliar, brought out occasionally and then put back on the shelf. Even when the Bible is read at Mass or on other occasions, it is read in small segments. Middle schoolers may not grasp that these readings from Sacred Scripture are actually from the Bible and are only a part of a much bigger whole.

The *Breakthrough!* Bible was created especially to capture the minds and hearts of middle schoolers. Yet, even this special Bible may need a “formal introduction” so that these young people can become acquainted with God’s plan for us that we call “salvation history.”

We recommend a three-part introduction: (1) explain that the Bible is the Word of God, and perhaps have a Bible enthronement ceremony to emphasize the sacredness of God’s Word; (2) use a “hands-on” approach to explain and explore the color coding of *Breakthrough!*; and (3) use the handouts included with this chapter as practice exercises in navigating *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*.

### **The Bible Is the Word of God**

This is the primary message to communicate when teaching young people about the Bible. The Bible was written by people who listened to God and were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down important truths we need to know to follow God’s way, to know and love his Son, Jesus, and to love one another. In the Bible, God speaks to us in many different ways—through stories, poems, and even sometimes songs, such as in the Book of Psalms. We still sing these songs today at the Eucharist.

As actions speak louder than words, you may want to have a short Bible enthronement at the beginning of a class session. An outline for such a ceremony can be found in chapter 7 of this guide.

# Exploring *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*, Live and in Color

## Bottom Bands of Color

When you open *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*, you will notice bands of color along the bottoms of the pages. These color bands are not mere decoration! They delineate the major divisions of the Bible as follows:

Section of the Bible	Books of the Bible (see Bible Table of Contents)	Color of Bottom Band
The Pentateuch (or Torah)	Genesis through Deuteronomy	grey
The Historical Books	Joshua through Nehemiah	red
Biblical Novellas	Tobit through 2 Maccabees	purple
Wisdom and Poetry Books	Job through Ben Sira	orange
Prophets	Isaiah through Malachi	blue
Gospels and Acts of the Apostles	Matthew through Acts of the Apostles	green
Letters and Revelation	Romans through Revelation	brown
Study and Prayer Helps	back of the book	yellow

## Colored Tabs

You will also notice that *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* is tabbed along the sides. Each book of the Bible is tabbed with its own distinctive color, and each tab is labeled with the name of that book. Young people can use the tabs to easily find a particular book.

## *Finding Specific Passages in Breakthrough!* The Bible for Young Catholics

Some middle schoolers may already know how to find specific passages in the Bible. For those who don't, you may direct them to a boxed article in *Breakthrough!* (page 7) headed, "How do I find Bible passages?"

For further practice, a group exercise in finding Bible passages follows. The color-coded system of *Breakthrough!* is used in this exercise to give middle schoolers an extra tool in using this Bible.

Three handouts, "Bible Search Challenge 1" (Document #: TX005858), "Bible Search Challenge 2" (Document #: TX005859), and "Bible Search Challenge 3" (Document #: TX005860), follow this group exercise. These handouts can be used for individual practice in finding Bible passages using *Breakthrough!*'s color-coded pages.

### **Group Exercise: Finding Scripture Passages and Identifying Categories of Books by Color**

**Objective:** To help middle schoolers find the various books of the Bible and identify them by color, as coded in *Breakthrough!* This exercise can be extended into finding chapters and verses of particular books.

1. Explain that we will begin exploring the Bible by finding various books and then identifying their categories:
  - I will say the name of the book and write it on the board. When you find this book in your Bible, quietly raise your hand. When all hands are raised, I will ask: What is the color band at the bottom of the page? I will ask a volunteer to answer. I will then ask what that particular color band means and ask for a volunteer to respond.
  - Here we go. Find the Book of Joshua. All hands up? What is the color band at the bottom of the pages of the Book of Joshua? (Volunteer responds: Red.)
  - Why is this color-coded red? (Because the Book of Joshua belongs to the Historical Books as given on page 2, the Table of Contents.)

- What is the color of the tabs at the side of the pages in the Book of Joshua? (Red.) In this book, the tab at the side matches the bottom band. That is not true of all the books. The side tab for each book is a different color. The side tabs are used to identify each book.
- 2. Continue in this way, using both the Old and the New Testaments, until you are confident that the middle schoolers can find the books of the Bible.
- 3. After the young people have mastered finding books, continue in this way, asking them to find first a book and then a particular chapter of that book. Once they have found various chapters, ask them to find particular verses. Then choose a book and write a Scripture citation on the board (for example, Exodus 20:8). Ask the young people to find this Scripture verse in their Bibles.

## **Bible Search Challenges (Handouts)**

In the following pages are three Bible search challenge handouts of graduated difficulty. The first, "Bible Search Challenge 1" (Document #: TX005858), is the easiest; the last, "Bible Search Challenge 3" (Document #: TX005860), is the most difficult. Categories of biblical books are searched in this challenge only. You may want to ask the middle schoolers to work in pairs to help and encourage each other.

## **Answers to Bible Search Challenges**

### **Challenge 1**

*Matching:* Column I: 4, 6, 5, 7, 1, 2, 1; Column II: 7, 4, 5, 7, 2, 6

*Sentence completion:* lights, Lord, people, salt, depth, people, soon

### **Challenge 2**

*Matching:* 6, 5, 7, 8, 2, 4, 1, 3

*A Bible prayer:* Lord, teach us to follow your paths, each and every day!

### **Challenge 3**

Amos (Prophets, blue)  
1 Corinthians (Letters and Revelation, brown)  
Deuteronomy (Pentateuch, grey)  
Hebrews (Letters and Revelation, brown)  
Jeremiah (Prophets, blue)  
John (Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, green)  
1 Kings (Historical, red)  
Leviticus (Pentateuch, grey)  
Mark (Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, green)  
Proverbs (Wisdom and Poetry, orange)  
Ben Sira (Wisdom and Poetry, orange)  
Tobit (Biblical Novellas, purple)

# Bible Search Challenge 1

1. Match each book of the Bible with the color of its bottom band by writing the number of the color on the line next to the name of the book: (1) grey, (2) red, (3) purple, (4) orange, (5) blue, (6) green, (7) brown.

\_\_\_\_\_ Psalms

\_\_\_\_\_ Acts of the Apostles

\_\_\_\_\_ Isaiah

\_\_\_\_\_ Galatians

\_\_\_\_\_ Genesis

\_\_\_\_\_ Ruth

\_\_\_\_\_ Numbers

\_\_\_\_\_ Revelation

\_\_\_\_\_ Wisdom

\_\_\_\_\_ Micah

\_\_\_\_\_ Hebrews

\_\_\_\_\_ Judges

\_\_\_\_\_ Luke

2. Complete the following sentences by finding the missing word in each Scripture verse:

- ☐ **Genesis 1:16:** "God made the two great \_\_\_\_\_, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars."
- ☐ **Psalms 23:1:** "The \_\_\_\_\_ is my shepherd."
- ☐ **Isaiah 9:1:** "The \_\_\_\_\_ who walked in darkness have seen a great light."
- ☐ **Matthew 5:13:** "You are the \_\_\_\_\_ of the earth."
- ☐ **Romans 11:33:** "Oh, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!"
- ☐ **Titus 3:14:** "Let our \_\_\_\_\_, too, learn to devote themselves to good works."
- ☐ **Revelation 22:7:** "Behold, I am coming \_\_\_\_\_."

(The scriptural quotations on this handout are from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owners.)



## Bible Search Challenge 2

1. Match the words with the verses below. Find the verse in column 1, and then match it to one of the words in that verse found in column 2. Write the number of the matching word in the blank provided.

<u>Column 1</u>	<u>Column 2</u>
___ Exodus 33:14	1. spirit
___ 1 Samuel 17:20	2. righteousness
___ Ezra 7:27	3. love
___ Psalm 136:1	4. servant
___ Wisdom 1:1	5. morning
___ Isaiah 49:5	6. rest
___ Joel 3:1	7. Blessed
___ Malachi 1:2	8. good

2. Each of the Scripture verses below contains a certain word (first word, second word, third word, and so on). Find the specific word for each passage and write it in the blank. When you finish, you will have a new prayer made up of words you have found.

Psalm 135:1 (sixth word) \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 5:2 (fourth word) \_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 4:8 (third word) \_\_\_\_\_

Leviticus 18:4 (fourteenth and fifteenth words) \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 17:5 (sixth and seventh words) \_\_\_\_\_

Joshua 21:42 (second, third, and fourth words) \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 1:23 (eighth word) \_\_\_\_\_!





## Bible Search Challenge 3

1. For each book of the Bible below, first try to identify its category without looking at your Bible. Then consult *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* for the correct category as well as the color band.

**Categories:** Pentateuch, Historical Books, Biblical Novellas, Wisdom and Poetry Books, Prophets, Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, Letters and Revelation.

Book of the Bible	Category	Color Band
Amos		
1 Corinthians		
Deuteronomy		
Hebrews		
Jeremiah		
John		
1 Kings		
Leviticus		
Mark		
Proverbs		
Ben Sira		
Tobit		

2. Take this mind-bending challenge! Memorize the books of the Bible, category by category. Start with the Pentateuch and the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, and then move on to the other categories. You will amaze your teachers and astound your friends!



# Chapter 6

## Characteristics of Middle Schoolers

Young adolescence is a time of major physical and social changes. Each young person is growing, changing, and maturing at different speeds. Every individual brings a unique personality and set of needs to the classroom or group. Having a clear understanding of the traits of middle schoolers will help you draw them in and bring them to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church. In this article, we will discuss some of the common traits of middle schoolers and how they affect the learning environment.

Because middle schoolers are developing at such different rates, getting to know the specific young people you are working with is important. Middle schoolers want to have meaningful relationships with the people in their lives—friends, family members, and nonparent adults. When young people know they are valued and cared about, they are better able to engage with the material being presented. We have all heard the saying, “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Take time in your classes just to get to know the special individuals gathered there. Begin your classes with ice breakers, silly questions about likes and dislikes, “Would you rather?” questions, or snacks and conversation. Be open to going “off-topic,” within reason, when discussions bring up valuable teaching points. As one veteran teacher pointed out, “You can teach them anything as long as they think you’re off the subject!”

### Sixth Grade

The transition from the elementary grades to middle school is a big moment for sixth graders. They are gaining independence and beginning to form their own beliefs about the world and their place in it. Physically, their bodies are changing—sometimes rapidly—and they can be uncoordinated. Sixth graders prefer active, hands-on learning to passive listening, and they learn best when they can be up and moving. Standing up when they know an answer or moving to a specific corner of the room to indicate their choice for a survey or quiz response keeps them fully connected. In this way they can demonstrate their knowledge while activating their physical senses.

Sixth graders are also intensely interested in the world because they want to know how it will influence them. They typically ask, "When will I use this information?" or "Why do I have to learn this?" Designing lessons that answer these questions clearly will have the greatest impact. Sharing a personal story of a time when the lesson material mattered to your life can also be powerful. For example, in a class on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, share a time when you felt the Lord's mercy and love after receiving this Sacrament. As questions arise, take time to answer them, even if they do not relate directly to the lesson plan. The young people will appreciate the fact that you answered exactly what they wanted to know and as a result can see how their faith will impact their lives.

Like all middle schoolers, sixth graders are primarily social creatures. They are most concerned with what their friends and classmates are doing. To make this preoccupation productive, help them develop positive social skills. Design opportunities for them to work in small groups or pairs. Activities such as Mix-Pair-Share, where young people mingle for 10 seconds (Mix), find a partner (Pair), and discuss the instructor's question together (Share), can build relationships among young adolescents and allow them to discuss the lesson concepts in a smaller setting.

## **Seventh Grade**

Seventh grade can be a tricky year because this is when the young people are most diverse in their physical, mental, and emotional maturity. They may be anxious or uncomfortable about physical and hormonal changes. They have high energy, but also need more rest for their bodies to grow. As an instructor or leader, you can mix physical activities with learning. Play review games where they can shoot a basket in order to answer a question, or play catch while reviewing concepts. Every so often, stop the "action" and give them a chance to regroup by allowing them to put their heads down on their arms and just "chill" for a few moments. Allow them to experience comfortable silence in a relaxing way within the group.

As their bodies are growing, so are their minds. Young people in seventh grade are ready to consider ideas contrary to their own. They are tremendously influenced by the media and are learning to examine those sources to find ones that are trustworthy. They are starting to make decisions for themselves, so it is important that they

continue to be well-formed and supported in making prudent moral choices. Show them how to search for truth in reliable media sources so that they learn to distinguish between good and evil in the world around them.

The need for peer approval is, at this stage, taking precedence over all else. Seventh graders are passionately loyal to their friends. They will imitate the behaviors of their peers, which means that the same seventh graders who will willingly chat about sports, music, or popular culture may clam up when presented with religious topics in class. Use pop culture references and sports analogies to start the conversation about deeper realities. For example, choose a popular song and explore what it teaches, or fails to teach, about relationships with one another and with God.

## **Eighth Grade**

In terms of physical characteristics, eighth graders are similar to their seventh-grade counterparts. They enjoy both high-energy activities and relaxed discussions in a casual setting.

Eighth graders are starting to feel more like adults and to explore the idea of identity. They are exploring who they are, and this can lead them to challenge authority, both socially and intellectually. Eighth graders want to know *why* they have to do something, so explain the reasons behind common Catholic practices and devotions. Explain the purpose of the Sacraments and sacramentals, and the support we find in the Body of Christ through the Communion of Saints, including our devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. Explain the origin of our customs of reverence, such as the genuflection, and why we bow during the Creed and just before we receive Communion.

As eighth graders develop their own sense of identity, they are also choosing their friends carefully. They crave social acceptance and may compromise in order to please others. Model and teach about healthy friendships using examples from your own life. Point out that God works through the friendships in our lives, and that Jesus called his Apostles and disciples not “slaves” but “friends” (John 15:15). Explore the stories of saintly friendships that led to the growth of the

Kingdom of God on Earth: Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, Saints Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal, Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. Point out that in the history of the Church, groups of friends have made a commitment to Christ together, as did Saint Ignatius Loyola and his college friends when they founded the Society of Jesus. Emphasize that our friends can influence us for good or can lead us to do wrong, and introduce this saying: "Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are."

### **Classroom Tips**

Considering what we know about middle schoolers here are a few ideas that may benefit you as you work with them:

- **Technology** Middle schoolers are rarely seen without some form of technology. They are used to being able to get an answer for anything in the blink of an eye. Use technology to your advantage by:
  - Holding a photo-scavenger hunt where young people use their phone cameras or tablets to document places in the church or school such as the altar, statues, holy images, baptismal font, the Stations of the Cross, and so on. Use YouTube to "invite" guest speakers into your lessons. Search for short videos featuring Catholic speakers, musicians, priests, or sisters that fit into your lesson. This can open up new channels of discussion and allows middle schoolers to encounter a larger worldview.
  - Start an Instagram, Twitter, or even Snapchat account for your parish youth group. Post biblical quotes, links to meditations, invitations to local parish events, reminders, or anything else you can think of! Be sure to follow parish and diocesan guidelines for social media use.
- **Small Groups** Middle schoolers can feel heightened social pressure when asked to share in a large group. Therefore, it can be helpful to incorporate a variety of small-group formations when encouraging reflection and input. You might also invite a reporter from each small group to share what they heard without mentioning names. This is a way to surface insights without calling attention to individuals.

- **Snacks** Food is important to middle schoolers! The middle school years are usually accompanied by a growth spurt, and these young people are almost always hungry. Snacks also create a welcoming atmosphere that puts middle schoolers at ease and makes them feel connected and safe. When they are welcomed and comfortable, they are more willing to discuss and invest in the material.
- **Care** Most importantly, middle schoolers need to know that you care—about God, about the material you’re presenting, and about them as individuals. When they see that you are passionate about them and about sharing the love and truth of the faith with them, they are more inclined to be open as well. Pray for them and with them often. Show middle schoolers that you care. Even if they don’t always respond with appreciation, know that you are planting seeds that will flourish as they continue to grow in their lives of faith.

# Chapter 7

## Teaching Scripture to Middle Schoolers

According to the Gospels, Jesus clearly wants children and young people to come to him. We can fulfill his desire by leading them to Scripture. Jesus, the Word, is present in the words of Sacred Scripture. Through them he speaks to the hearts of middle schoolers just as he speaks to ours. There are ways to facilitate this encounter for his young disciples.

### Creating a Christian Environment

As you begin Bible study, impress on the middle schoolers the holiness of what you are doing. Explain that you and they are the Church in miniature. You are gathered to hear the Good News about Jesus that Scripture contains, to think about what he is saying to you, and to grow in your friendship with him. Remind the young people of these facts periodically.

The room where you meet is holy space. As such, it should be neat, attractive, quiet, and free from distractions. Religious pictures and statues help to set the tone, and a Christian song playing softly before the session helps middle schoolers to focus on God. Praying before and after the sessions sends the message that this is special time.

### Creating a Loving Atmosphere

Christians are one with Jesus and one another. Our gatherings with young people should be characterized by love, the hallmark of Christians. As instructors or leaders our bearing, our tone of voice, the way we move, and even how we dress convey our love for Jesus and the young people as much as the words we speak. As soon as possible, learn the young people's names and something about each individual. Play icebreaker games to help the young people get to know one another. Be quick to praise the group as a whole and individually. Point out the gifts of each young person and show appreciation for them.

## **Create a Loving and Respectful Community**

To build a loving and respectful community, plan opportunities for each young person to contribute to the group. Sometimes arrange for the young people to work together on projects. Make kindness a rule, and encourage the middle schoolers to help one another. Above all, treat the young people equally, fairly, and respectfully. When they know you care about them, and when they care about one another, they are less likely to misbehave. They will not want to disappoint you! To forestall discipline problems, prepare lessons that keep the middle schoolers active and engaged. (If you sense restlessness in the group, interrupt your lesson by having the group listen to a scriptural song. Have one prepared for each gathering ahead of time. You can always use it as part of the closing prayer.) If a student does disrupt the session, speak to him or her privately. If necessary, enlist the aid of the parents.

## **Shaping Attitudes toward the Bible**

Teach the middle schoolers that the Bible is the Word of God. Because God is its author, the Bible is holy. It should not be placed on the floor. To instill awe for the Bible, create a Bible corner by keeping a large, beautiful Bible on a table or shelf covered with a lovely cloth. Set a candle near it and (if fire laws allow) sometimes light the candle when the Bible is read. (For an outline of a simple Bible enthronement ceremony, see the suggestions in the next paragraph. Also see chapter 5, "Helping Young People to Navigate *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*," in this guide.) Add, or let the young people add, flowers, a plant, or colored leaves to the display. When reading from the Bible, hold it reverently, turn pages carefully, and use a dignified voice.

Hold at least one prayer service honoring the Bible. Sing a song about God's Word, read verses about it (choose a few verses from Psalm 119, or see Matthew 7:24–29, Matthew 13:1–9, Hebrews 4:12), and process with the Bible held high. Conclude by setting the Bible in its special place and having everyone bow to it, one by one. You might burn incense near the Bible.



## Preparing to Teach a Bible Story

Read a Bible commentary beforehand to get insights into the story and to understand its context. This will also enable you to more knowledgeably answer your group's questions. Prepare the young people for a Bible story by defining unfamiliar words and explaining new concepts. Then invoke the Holy Spirit in a brief prayer such as, "Holy Spirit, open our ears, our minds, and our hearts to receive the message you have for us today."

Variety is the spice of life. It also prevents boring lessons. You can read the story to the group or call on volunteers to read it, but occasionally try these methods:

1. Ask a question or make a comment that leads into the story. Then have the young people read the story independently and discuss it.
2. Record a dramatic reading. Change your voice for different characters. Add sound effects. When you play the recording, invite the group to close their eyes.
3. If the story has speaking parts, appoint a narrator and other young people to read the parts.
4. Have each young person in the group read one sentence or verse.
5. Call on a young person to read a few sentences and then to choose another in the group to continue. Continue in this way throughout the entire story.
6. Have the group read the story in unison.
7. Write the story's verses on slips of paper and number them. Put them in a bag or box and let the middle schoolers choose one. Arrange the young people in order and have them read their verses in turn.

*Note:* In all of the above, be sensitive to those young people who may not feel comfortable reading aloud due to a disability. Find ways for them to participate without calling attention to their disability.

## **Telling a Bible Story**

You may wish to tell a Bible story before the young people read it or for review. Check the list below for a few storytelling techniques that will delight the group and make the story more memorable.

### **What You Can Do to Tell the Story**

1. Use gestures, other movement, and expression. Vary the speed and volume of your voice. You might even dress like a character.
2. Ask questions as you tell the story to maintain interest and stimulate thinking. Keep questions simple so they do not distract.
3. Add sensory words to bring the story to life. Let the middle schoolers see, hear, smell, taste, and feel the story as if they were there.
4. Make comments that link the story to the middle schoolers' world. Refer to current news, famous people, and what the young people know and experience. Give short explanations of words or situations as you go along.
5. Use action figures to represent of biblical characters. These can be found online, and they are especially helpful in parables and other stories told to make a point.
6. Do a chalk talk, preferably with colored chalk—even if you aren't a good artist. Stand at the board and draw stick figures of the story as you tell it.
7. Tear or fold paper to form a shape as you talk— for example, a whale for Jonah, a star for the nativity, and a lily for the Resurrection. Craft books can provide ideas for these models.
8. Tell the story by interviewing someone posing as a person in the story or as a witness to it.
9. Think of colors that match parts of the story. Show construction paper of those colors at the appropriate times.
10. Post or project one or more pictures of the story as you tell it. You might glue them to the sides of a box, and then turn the box as you talk through the story.

## What the Young People Can Do As the Story Is Told

1. Distribute pictures of people and objects from the story. When the person or object is mentioned, the person holding that image or artifact stands and raises it high or posts it to a sheet of newsprint.
2. Have the young people draw on paper or work with clay as the Spirit moves them.
3. Direct the middle schoolers to respond with a word or action when they hear a certain word. For example, in the story of the Fall, they could hiss at the word *snake*.
4. After reading the story aloud, gather the middle schoolers into small groups. Challenge them to retell or act out a modern version of the story.

## Reinforcing the Bible Stories

Middle schoolers are usually eager to tell and retell familiar stories. They often repeat and even “act out” stories they see on television and roles they experience in their families. Acting out Bible stories, as well as enjoying related poems and songs, are ways middle schoolers can use their natural gifts for role-play, music, and rhyme.

### Plays

Help the middle schoolers act out the story using symbols, labeled headbands or signs, costumes, props, scenery drawn on the board, and sound effects. The books *Ready to Go Scripture Skits* and *Ready to Go Scripture Skits, The Sequel* (Saint Mary's Press, 2004 and 2005) provide simple scripts for all the Gospel stories. The young people can present the skits to another class or to their families.

*Veggie Tales* (Big Idea Entertainment) presents animated Bible stories and humorous songs and videos with faith-based values on DVD and VHS. These are available through the Veggie Tales website and through online booksellers.

### Songs

Have a Scripture-related song available for listening. You may want to print out the words to aid in discussion. Some hymns are based on Scripture. Songs in a religious context geared to preteens and teens and sung by Catholic artists can be found through Oregon Catholic Press and online under the genre “Christian rock.”

## Scriptural Poems and Books

A favorite of teachers and children for decades is the Arch Book series (Concordia Publishing House). Each book tells a Bible story in rhyme. Other children's classics are *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein, and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis. (This is the first book in the Chronicles of Narnia series.) If you find a children's book you would like to use, introduce it to the middle schoolers by explaining that it was written for a younger audience but that it still has a message for us today.

In recent times, rap has become popular. You might challenge your group to create a rap to present a parable or biblical event.

## Memorizing God's Word

In Psalm 119:11, we pray, "In my heart I treasure your promise." By memorizing Scripture verses, the young people create a storehouse of God's words to draw on for guidance and for prayer. It is important that the middle schoolers understand the verses before committing them to memory. Here are three ideas for helping young people to memorize Scripture verses:

1. Write a verse on the board. Erase one word or phrase and have the group recite the verse. Continue like this until all the words are erased.
2. Create a jigsaw puzzle with words from the verse on each piece. Time the group as they assemble the puzzle, then challenge them to beat their time. You might make several sets and let groups race to assemble them.
3. Have the young people toss something soft to one another, such as a beanbag or tennis ball. Each person who catches the item must recite a chosen verse or add a word to it.

## A Legacy of Love for Scripture

The key factor in teaching Scripture to middle schoolers is your own love for it. When you treasure God's Word, it will show and the young people will catch your attitude. Then the time spent reading and studying the Bible will be a joy for you and your group. You will be handing on a legacy of love for Scripture that will stay with the young people for the rest of their lives.

# Chapter 8

## Scriptural Prayer with Middle Schoolers

### Strategies

Among the many ways to pray, scriptural prayer is one of the best for middle schoolers. The stories, images, characters, and words of the Bible are an excellent point of departure for a young person's prayer. What better way to begin praying than to start with God's own Word? Using Scripture as a foundation for prayer helps young people to engage their imagination and, in turn, express their hopes, thoughts, and concerns.

Before we turn to the various methods used when we pray with Scripture, let's consider a few general recommendations for praying with middle schoolers.

#### **Tip 1: Don't Presume They Know How to Pray**

Although some middle schoolers are comfortable with prayer, many young people are inexperienced with prayer and therefore need to be taught to pray. Don't assume that all middle schoolers know how to pray or even know what prayer is. When you first start praying with your group, explain that praying is talking and listening to God.

#### **Talking to God**

When we "talk" to God in prayer, we can speak aloud, ponder silently in our hearts, or connect with God through writing or other artistic expression such as music, drawing, sculpting, and so on. God's gift of imagination can be an excellent tool for talking with God.

#### **Listening to God**

When we "listen" to God in prayer, we do not usually hear spoken words; rather, God communicates to us in a variety of ways. When we pray, sometimes our thoughts and feelings are from God. Furthermore, when we use scriptural prayer, we hear God's own Word.

In scriptural prayer, we listen to God's voice by doing the following:

- listening to the readings from the Bible (Did something in the reading catch my attention? Did God or Jesus or one of the other characters seem to be talking to me?)
- being aware of thoughts that come to mind when we reflect on the Scripture readings (Did the Scripture story give me an idea or make me think about a particular person or situation in my life?)
- being aware of our feelings and emotions (Did the reading make me feel warm and cozy? Did it make me uncomfortable or curious? What do my feelings tell me?)

### **Tip 2: Keep It Simple**

The best way to teach prayer to middle schoolers is to model it. Keep explanations to a minimum and simply model various methods of scriptural prayer. We want young people to know that we can pray anywhere and anytime. Prayer does not need to be a complicated production. Let it come from your heart.

### **Tip 3: Teach Various Forms of Prayer**

Many young people will be familiar with prayer in which we ask God for something, including asking for help. Middle schoolers are very good at asking God to heal a sick grandparent or to help them on a test. Lead them to understand that there are many other forms of prayer:

- Prayers of petition: We ask God for what we need or want.
- Prayers of thanksgiving: We thank God for all that we have.
- Prayers of praise: We give glory to God for all that God is.
- Prayers of contrition: We express sorrow for our sin.

All these forms of prayer can be scriptural prayer. Young people can give God thanks and praise using scriptural prayer. Or they can make a special request of God using the words of Scripture.

# Ways to Pray the Scriptures with Middle Schoolers

## Vocal Prayer

One of the most natural and comfortable ways of praying is to pray a familiar prayer aloud with the young people. Of course, the Lord's Prayer is one of our most beloved scriptural prayers (see Matthew 6:9–13). In addition, *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* provides other written prayers that middle schoolers can pray together. For example, in Luke 14:7–14, Jesus tells us a parable about humility. The Pray It! article on the next page has a written prayer, related to that exact Scripture passage, that middle schoolers can read and pray aloud together. Throughout *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*, particularly in the Pray It! articles, both traditional prayers (like the Hail Mary found in the Pray It! article opposite Luke 1:41–42) and prayers rooted in Scripture are provided for middle schoolers to pray, alone or with others.

## Spontaneous Prayer

Another type of vocal prayer is spontaneous prayer. In spontaneous prayer, the young people are free to choose their own words when addressing God. Often it is helpful to give middle schoolers a simple prompt or a few words to help them get started.

For example, in Acts 8:9–25, the young people hear about Simon the Magician and learn that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not for sale! In the Pray It! article on the first page of the Scripture passage, the middle schoolers are encouraged to pray for more trust in God, whether miracles happen or not. This is a good time to lead spontaneous prayer asking for the Holy Spirit's power to help and guide them and those they love.

## Written Prayer

Writing a response to God's Word can be especially effective for those middle schoolers who are more introverted and timid about speaking in front of others. Writing and drawing also give young people a vehicle for processing their thoughts about what God is saying to them in Scripture. Middle schoolers can pray through their writing and drawing in a variety of ways: they can write a letter to God, write their own prayer, write a poem, or draw a picture. (Use the handout "A Letter

to God” [Document #: TX005861] at the end of this chapter for the young people to write letters to God. Using this page as a sample, you can make your own handout to work with any Scripture passage you might choose.)

Assure the young people that their letters and pictures are considered “private correspondence” and will not be posted anywhere. Explain that writing and drawing as prayer is not a talent contest, but simply personal expression. No one has to be considered “a good writer” or “a talented artist” to share their thoughts and feelings with God through writing and art.

You may even encourage the young people to put their creative writing and drawing into a prayer journal or portfolio. A journal can be a middle schooler’s collection of various expressions and communications with God. When you ask young people to write a prayer or journal entry, it helps to be clear and direct about what they are to write.

For example, in the story of Samson, Samson gets into trouble, and his anger often gets the better of him. In the Live It! article connected to those verses (Judges 14:15–15:8), the young people are encouraged to remember, the next time they get angry, that God is their strength. The middle schoolers could be asked to write a prayer including this phrase and asking God for strength when they are tempted to act on their anger. Similarly, in the Book of Ruth, the story about Ruth and Naomi’s friendship is highlighted in the Live It! article in the first chapter. The middle schoolers might be asked to expand on this topic by writing a prayer of thanksgiving for a good friend or a helpful relative.

## **Meditation on Scripture**

In meditation, young people are invited to use their imagination to reflect on God’s Word. This type of prayer is particularly effective with middle schoolers, as it often includes more abstract thinking. For example, many prayer leaders ask participants to relax the body, clear the mind, and breathe deeply before moving into meditation. Then young people might be guided into a meditation where they are asked to imagine Moses and the burning bush, Jesus walking on water, or another of many stories that lend themselves to imaginative prayer. Through guided meditation, middle schoolers have the opportunity not only to use their imaginations but also to be more attuned to God’s message in stillness and quiet.



## ***Lectio Divina***

*Lectio divina* is an ancient and special type of scriptural prayer. Translated from Latin, it means “holy reading” or “spiritual reading.” Here is a simplified version of the four steps of *lectio divina* that you can do with middle schoolers.

1. ***Lectio (Reading)*** Proclaim the Scripture reading. Read a portion of the reading, or a particular phrase, a second and maybe even a third time.  
*Example:* Read John 10:11–15 in *Breakthrough!* Then slowly repeat the phrase “I am the Good Shepherd” two more times.
2. ***Meditatio (Meditation)*** Give the young people a particular word or phrase to think about. Also, give a brief explanation as to why the chosen word or phrase is so important.  
*Example:* Explain what a shepherd is and show a picture of a shepherd. Then ask the middle schoolers to close their eyes and imagine Jesus as a good shepherd. Ask them to silently reflect on the following question: How is Jesus like a shepherd in your life?
3. ***Oratio (Prayer)*** Ask the young people to silently talk to God about the Word they have heard.  
*Example:* “In the quiet of your heart, thank Jesus for being your Good Shepherd and talk to him about your family or your friends.”
4. ***Contemplatio (Contemplation)*** Invite the middle schoolers to be silent and rest in God’s love.  
*Example:* “Be still for one more minute and rest in the love and protection of the Good Shepherd.”

## **Silence and Scriptural Prayer**

Young people of any age are capable of silence and can greatly benefit from it. Of course, the amount of silent time must be in proportion to their age (typically about 2 to 3 minutes for a middle schooler). Allowing time for silence helps young people to develop the habit of listening to God. It gives space and time for God’s Word to take root and grow. Even though nothing “special” or out of the ordinary happens when young people are silent, they do learn that silence is part of prayer. Thus, even the proclamation of the Word followed by a minute of silence can be a prayer.

All in all, scriptural prayer happens anytime we respond to God's Word. Having these various responses in your repertoire of prayer with Scripture can help you to introduce God's Word into the lives of the young people you work with and will no doubt enrich your own experience of Scripture as well!

# A Letter to God

One way to talk to God is to write a letter. Letters have a long tradition in Christianity, beginning with the letters of Saint Paul. In one of them he wrote to his early converts, "You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all, shown to be a letter of Christ" (2 Corinthians 3:2). A letter represents and expresses the person who wrote it. May all of our spoken and written messages represent and express Christ to others!

Spend a few minutes in quiet prayer and thought, then express your needs and hopes to God.

Dear God,

Love,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(write your name here)

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Document #: TX005861

# Chapter 9

## Breaking Open the Word

### Understanding and Teaching Readings from Scripture

Helping middle schoolers to understand God's Word is a vital part of the instructor's and catechist's role. This chapter provides you with a simple, surefire, time-tested method for helping young people, and adults for that matter, to understand the Word of God.

We call this method breaking open Scripture or breaking open the Word. The "breaking open" means that we delve into, reflect on, and unpack the meaning of Scripture. Then we apply that meaning to our lives and respond in faith.

This method for breaking open Scripture is most often used with the Sunday Scripture readings. But it can also be used with the weekday readings, with *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*, or in any situation where we hear and reflect on the Word of God. As you lead the middle schoolers in the methods outlined here, you will also find breaking open Scripture helpful to you personally. As you prepare to help your students better understand Scripture, you will no doubt experience a deepening of your own understanding of God's Word.

We begin this section by clarifying a few of the terms that we will be using in this discussion.

#### **The Bible, Scripture, the Word of God, and the Lectionary**

Without going into the nuances of the various terms, for our purposes, we must state that all three—the Bible, Scripture, and the Word of God—refer to God's inspired Word as recorded in the Bible. A term that is slightly less familiar is *Lectionary*.

#### **The Lectionary**

The Lectionary is the Church's liturgical book of Scripture readings. It contains the readings from the Bible that we hear at Mass on Sunday, weekdays, holy days, and at other liturgies. The lector and the presider use this book when proclaiming the readings at Mass. The Scripture

readings are arranged in a very precise and particular order. The Church has chosen certain readings for the assembly to hear at certain times of the year, so we hear specific readings during Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. We hear the same readings every three years, because they are arranged in a three-year cycle: Year A, Year B, and Year C.

When we talk about breaking open Scripture, we are often referring to the breaking open of the Sunday Scripture readings, because the readings we hear on Sunday have a definite prominence in the Church's life. That's why they were chosen to be heard on Sunday by the whole assembly.

Furthermore, because the Sunday Scripture readings are especially significant and formative for our lives of faith, it is particularly important that we understand these holy texts, and that we help middle schoolers to understand them as well. Thus, breaking open Sunday Scripture frequently occurs after Mass in a religious education setting. Or, for catechumens (the unbaptized who are preparing for the Sacraments), the breaking open of the Word occurs after they are dismissed after the homily.

## **The Proclamation**

An important aspect to breaking open Scripture is the proclamation of the Word. There is something sacred about the actual proclamation of God's Word. Hearing God's Word proclaimed in the midst of the community of the faithful has a formative element not found when we read the Bible by ourselves. And we have the added benefit of the homily to help us understand the proclamation. In addition to discussing the readings themselves, there may be discussion of, or questions about, the homily. The purpose of the homily is also to illuminate Scripture as it affects our daily lives. Indeed, the homily is part of the Liturgy of the Word, and thereby part of the breaking open process.

## **Context and Time**

There are several different contexts or settings in which to break open Sunday Scripture.

## **On Sunday**

Religious educators and liturgists alike tell us that reflecting on and discussing the Scripture we hear proclaimed at Mass is a faith-enriching process. A religious education class might meet right after Mass on a Sunday, in which case some of the middle schoolers may have the reading fresh in their minds. However, some middle schoolers may not yet have been to Mass and thus another proclamation of the Word is needed.

## **On a Weekday**

Instead of meeting on Sunday, your middle schoolers may meet for religious education on a weekday. Or, you may be a Catholic school teacher who also meets with her or his middle schoolers during the week rather than on Sunday. In these cases, you will also need to proclaim the Sunday reading before you begin to break open Scripture.

## **Dismissal with Catechumens**

Another context for breaking open Sunday Scripture is during the dismissal catechesis for catechumens who are preparing for Baptism according to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. In many parishes, children and young people who participate in the RCIA are kindly dismissed after the homily to break open Scripture with a catechist.

## **Other Occasions**

There may be occasions when you simply gather your middle schoolers and break open the Scripture readings you heard on Sunday. Or, you may want to “break open” a Scripture reading that was not part of Sunday liturgy. Maybe you just want to read a Bible story and talk about it in your Catholic school classroom, in your religious education setting, in your home, or anywhere else. You can use the process we provide here for that purpose too! In other words, breaking open Scripture does not have to be part of a larger religious education setting. It can stand alone.

## **The Amount of Time It Takes**

The amount of time you spend breaking open Scripture depends on the setting. If you are breaking open Sunday Scripture as part of a religious education class or a Catholic school religion class, you may

spend only 10 to 15 minutes breaking open the Word before you move on to other topics. If, however, you are breaking open Sunday Scripture with young catechumens, you would spend 30 minutes or more. If you are doing this at home or in another setting, you could spend 10 to 30 minutes breaking open the readings.

The amount of time you have also affects how many of the readings you can break open. If you have 10 or 15 minutes, you will want to concentrate solely on the Gospel. We talk about the preeminence of the Gospel later. If you have more time, you may want to bring in the other readings as well as the homily.

Now that we have discussed the general notion of breaking open Sunday Scripture, we will move to the specific steps in the process.

## **Breaking Open Sunday Scripture**

Take a look at the following list of steps for breaking open Sunday Scripture and get a feel for the flow. Then read the specific directions for each step. This process, in a formal setting, is called the Liturgy of the Word. However, this does not mean that it takes place in church. The Liturgy of the Word can be celebrated wherever we gather in the name of Jesus, because he is present with us in his Word.

### **The Liturgy of the Word**

- Opening comments
- Proclamation of the Word
- Silence
- Initial question
- Initial response from middle schoolers
- Brief exegesis (interpretation of Scripture as in the Pray It! or Live It! articles in *Breakthrough!*)
- Deeper question
- Second response from middle schoolers
- Pointing outward / Live It! (as in the article in *Breakthrough!*)
- Closing prayer

The list of steps for the Liturgy of the Word provides you with an easy reference point, or template, to use anytime you break open Scripture. At the end of this section, you will find a reproducible template to use as you prepare to introduce a Scripture passage to the middle schoolers (see the resource "Breaking Open the Word" [Document #: TX005862]).

Now we will explain how to do each step and give you some examples.

**Liturgy of the Word.** The proclamation of the Word is the all-important first step. God is present in the Word and in the midst of the faithfully listening assembly. If you are breaking open a Scripture reading that was not part of the Sunday liturgy, begin with the next step.

**Opening comments.** As you begin the session, whether it's right after Mass or at another time, help the middle schoolers to focus on the Word. Some initial remarks help young people to "tune in" to breaking open the Word. Depending on the setting, you may want to include an opening prayer or a gathering ritual.

For instance, let's say you are breaking open Sunday Scripture at the beginning of a religious education class that happens right after Mass on Sunday morning. Many, but not all, of the young people heard the Gospel for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, Luke 19:1–10, the story of Zacchaeus. You might begin your session with opening remarks like the following: "The reading for Mass today is the story of a short, little man named Zacchaeus. He was a rich, important man and also a tax collector. Tax collectors were not very popular and were sometimes even hated by the Israelites of Jesus' time, because they collected the people's money for the Romans, a foreign government. Notice what Zacchaeus does in the story."

**Proclamation of the Word.** Proclaim the reading from *Breakthrough!* (or from the Lectionary). You may invite the group to read along with you in their Bibles. *Breakthrough!* provides extra helps to understanding, which will prove useful during the session. Allow for an extended period of silence (about a minute) following the reading.

**Initial question.** The first question prompts the young people to share their initial response to the reading. The question connects with your opening remarks but is open-ended enough for various responses. Here are some examples:

- What did you notice about Zacchaeus in this story?
- What happened between Zacchaeus and Jesus?
- What was going on in this story?

**Initial response from the middle schoolers.** Give the young people an opportunity to talk about what they found interesting in the story.



**Brief exegesis (interpretation of Scripture).** Give the middle schoolers some age-appropriate background information on Scripture to help them understand the reading. By doing this, you are teaching the young people scriptural interpretation from the Catholic perspective. The Pray It! and Live It! articles in *Breakthrough!* provide age-appropriate interpretations of the reading. For further information and personal growth, you may want to look deeper into the readings by consulting any number of popular Scripture commentaries. Ask a parish staff person what is available at your parish.

One way you might use the Live It! article of this story to offer an age-appropriate exegesis to the group: is by introducing only the first paragraph of this commentary: "In Jesus' day, much like today, it is an honor to have an important visitor in your home. So, the people in the story were probably shocked when a good person like Jesus said he would go to Zacchaeus's home. People probably wondered why Jesus would go to this sinner's house. Jesus was trying to make a point by going to Zacchaeus's home. Maybe Jesus admired Zacchaeus's determination and creative thinking!"

**Deeper question.** After you have guided the young people to a better understanding of what is happening in the reading, ask them to think about the reading in light of this new information. You might ask some questions like these:

- Why do you think Jesus went to Zacchaeus's house?
- What message was Jesus giving Zacchaeus by going to his house?  
What message is Jesus giving us?

**Second response from the middle schoolers.** Encourage the young people to share their responses.

**Pointing outward / Live It!** Wrap up the group's responses and then direct them to look beyond themselves to how Jesus is calling us to live differently. Use the second paragraph of the Live It! article to assist you with this step. It emphasizes our personal response to Jesus, no matter what others may think.

**Closing prayer.** If the breaking open of Sunday Scripture is part of a larger session, you may want to save the closing prayer for the end of the session. If your session is concluding, repeat words and images from the Scripture reading for your closing prayer. You might say something like this: "Lord, Jesus, you called Zacchaeus to come down

from the tree, and you call each of us too. Help us to answer your call and to follow you every day of our lives. We ask this in your name, for you live and reign forever and ever.”

## **How to Prepare for Breaking Open Sunday Scripture**

Now that you have an idea of how to break open the Word with middle schoolers, let’s back up a step and discuss how you, the leader, prepare for this catechetical experience.

## **Understanding the Liturgical Context**

First, we must recognize that although breaking open Sunday Scripture may be a catechetical exercise, it is intimately connected to the Sunday liturgy, more specifically, to the Sunday Liturgy of the Word. Thus, as you begin to prepare, it is important to establish from the outset where we are in the liturgical year and how the readings fit within the Church’s liturgical cycle.

For instance, John 21:1–14 is a marvelous story about Jesus’ helping the disciples catch a boatload of fish. When unpacking the meaning of this story, it is imperative to present it in the context of the Easter season and the Church’s mission. That’s part of the beauty and power of breaking open Sunday Scripture: the whole process begins with the Word as it is proclaimed in the Church’s liturgy.

The Church’s liturgy is the source and summit of our Catholic Christian life. Thus, when we break open Sunday Scripture, we are helping young people to better understand the Word of God, the liturgy, and the life of the Church.

In order for you to help middle schoolers better understand the Word as proclaimed in the liturgy, you must adequately prepare yourself with a prayerful heart and the right resources. We will give you the preparation steps and will name some of those helpful resources in the following section.

## **Preparation Steps for the Leader**

**Identify the Sunday readings.** You can find the Scripture readings for a particular Sunday in a number of places. Many parish bulletins list the Scripture readings for Sunday and for the weekdays. You can also find a listing of Lectionary readings for every day of the year at

the USCCB Web site. A parish staff member could also help you to locate a paperback copy of the Lectionary, or even better, a resource that contains the Lectionary readings plus a reputable commentary on those readings, such as *At Home with the Word* (Liturgy Training Publications, 2010).

**Pray.** When you sit down to prepare for breaking open Sunday Scripture with middle schoolers, begin with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you reflect on the Word of God. Pray for the young people with whom you will break open God's Word. Pray for openness to the Spirit and for wisdom in your preparations.

**Read the three Lectionary readings and the psalm.** Slowly and deliberately read each of the readings.

**Be silent.** Sit silently and let the Word resonate in your heart.

**Read the readings a second time.** As you read the second time, jot down the images, phrases, or words that stand out for you. Note what most strikes you in these readings.

**Name the insights.** Name any insights, messages, or questions that emerge for you.

**Read a commentary on the passage.** Broaden your personal interpretation of the passage by reading what Scripture scholars have to say. Better understanding the historical-cultural context of the reading will give you a good foundation from which to discuss the passage with the young people. Growing in knowledge of God's Word benefits the faith life of the middle schoolers and yours as well. Then, once again, see what is available at your parish or use a source like *At Home with the Word*.

**Combine insights.** Meld your insights with what Scripture experts say about the reading. Does a theme, notion, or question emerge? Are you drawn to a particular image? What stands out now about the reading?

**Summarize.** Conclude the process by naming what God is saying to you and to the community. What is God's message? Being clear on God's message for you will help you as you now turn your attention to the middle schoolers.

## Preparing for the Middle Schoolers

**Review the readings with young people in mind.** Now that you have spent time with the readings, read the passages with an eye and ear for the young people you teach. Imagine what characters, words, images, or phrases would stand out for a middle schooler. Determine what questions a middle schooler might have about a particular reading. What might be curious or difficult for a middle school student?

For example, the Beatitudes (see Matthew 5:1–12) that we hear on the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, can be difficult for middle schoolers to understand. Although they may have heard the words before, middle schoolers may be unfamiliar with the real meaning of words and phrases like *poor in spirit*, *meek*, *mourn*, *merciful*, and *righteousness*. Keep this in mind, or write yourself a note as a reminder to review the terms with the middle schoolers. Then move to the next step.

**Read the story from *Breakthrough!*** Read not only the Scripture passage itself but also the Pray It! and Live It! articles that refer to the story. Look for the Catholic Connections article and the Study It! article that may be featured in the particular book of the Bible you are reading. These will help you to view the readings from the middle schooler's perspective.

**Highlight the art and interview in *Breakthrough!*** You may also want to comment on a particular piece of art, if it helps to illumine the Scripture passage. Returning to the example of the Beatitudes, you may want to draw the group's attention to page 1564, in which "Jesus the Teacher" is pictured. This is an artist's conception of what Jesus might have looked like as he taught the people the Beatitudes. In addition, the interview with the evangelist, or Gospel writer, Matthew makes the meaning of the Beatitudes even more accessible. Matthew explains that the Beatitudes help us to experience God in a new way.

**Focus on the Gospel.** The Gospel is the preeminent reading among the three readings. Thus, when breaking open the Scripture readings, you usually focus first on the Gospel and then bring in the other readings as time allows. There may be times, however, when you choose to focus primarily or exclusively on the first or second reading rather than the Gospel.

**Decide what to discuss with the middle schoolers.** You have studied the readings and the commentaries. By now images and themes have emerged for you. Decide where the Spirit is leading you and what you will discuss with the young people.

Returning to our example of the Beatitudes on the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, you probably noticed that God's love for the poor and the lowly is a main theme throughout all the readings, including the psalm. Thus, God's love for the poor will likely be a theme you explore with the group when you break open the Scripture for this particular Sunday.

As you determine how you want to lead the middle schoolers, you may find it helpful to use the resource, "Breaking Open the Word," (Document #: TX005862), a reproducible master provided at the end of this chapter, to put in writing the questions you will ask.

**Close with a prayer.** Close your preparations with a prayer for the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit. Also think of the images and words you could use in a closing prayer with middle schoolers. The following is an example of a prayer to end the breaking open of Sunday Scripture:

Let us pray. (*Pause*)  
Lord Jesus,  
You teach us the ways to happiness.  
Help us to remember your Beatitudes  
and to live them every day.  
Help us to remember that, however we feel,  
Or whatever our situation, God is always with us.  
We ask this in your name, for you live and reign forever and ever.  
Amen.

## Summary

Again, you may wish to refer to the resource "Breaking Open the Word," (Document #: TX005862) at the end of this chapter, for an outline of the "breaking open of the Word" method. You may use this resource over and over as you prepare various Scripture passages for the middle schoolers to read and understand.

In the next section, we offer some other activities that will help young people to engage with Scripture in both prayer and action.

# Breaking Open the Word

*Note to the teacher:* This resource is for your use in preparing for breaking open the Word with middle schoolers.

## The Liturgy of the Word

Opening comments

Proclamation of the Word (*Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* or Lectionary)

Silence

Initial question

Initial response from middle schoolers

Brief exegesis (see commentary articles in *Breakthrough!*)

Deeper question

Second response from middle schoolers

Pointing outward (Live It! article in *Breakthrough!*)

Closing Prayer



## Scripture Prayer and Activities Based on the Featured Stories

What follows is a hands-on section of handouts that can be used for specific Scripture passages. However, these handouts can also be used as templates for other passages from Scripture. The following chart identifies each Scripture handout and the Scripture passage or passages each is based on and offers a brief description of the activity or method of “breaking open the Word” used on the handout. Some of the activities include reflections on the art in *Breakthrough!* related to the Scripture passages, as well as reflections or activities based on one or more of the articles in *Breakthrough!* related to the Scripture passages.

Handout	Scripture Reference	Activity
“David Challenges Goliath” (Document #:TX005863)	1 Samuel 17:32–37 1 Samuel 17:38–40 1 Samuel 17:41–51	Reflection on related art and thought questions <b>Something to consider:</b> How do I meet God?
“The Call of Jeremiah” (Document #:TX005864)	Jeremiah 1:4–10	Outline of “breaking open the Word” for this story <b>Something to consider:</b> Reflection on related art and thought questions
“A Kingdom Search” (Document #:TX005865)	Isaiah 11:6–9 Matthew 13:1–9 and 18–23 Luke 23:33–43	A Bible search of Kingdom references <b>Something to consider:</b> Thought questions related to Scripture passages

Handout	Scripture Reference	Activity
"Jesus and Me" (Document #:TX005866)	Luke 2:41-52	A Venn diagram comparing Jesus and middle schooler  <b>Something to consider:</b> Reflection on related art and thought questions
"On the Road with Jesus" (Document #:TX005867)	Luke 24:13-35	A guided meditation on the Emmaus story  <b>Something to consider:</b> Reflection on related art and thought questions
"God's Armor" (Document #:TX005868)	Ephesians 5:10-17	Filling in pieces of armor: How is God with me?  <b>Something to consider:</b> Pray It! p. 1937



# David Challenges Goliath

There are many stories about King David in the Bible. God helped him to do many great things for the kingdom of Israel. Read the story of David in *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*. You will find it in three sections in the First Book of Samuel:

- ☐ David Challenges Goliath (1 Samuel 17:32–37)
- ☐ Preparation for the Encounter (1 Samuel 17:38–40)
- ☐ David's Victory (1 Samuel 17:41–51)

Look at the art on page 419. How can you tell that the man in the foreground is a professional warrior? What is he wearing? What is he carrying? How tall is he compared to David? What else do you notice about him that might make you hesitate to engage in battle with him? Notice David's clothing. What weapon does he carry? What is "missing" from his warrior's gear?

When have you felt that nobody believed in you?

How did you find strength?

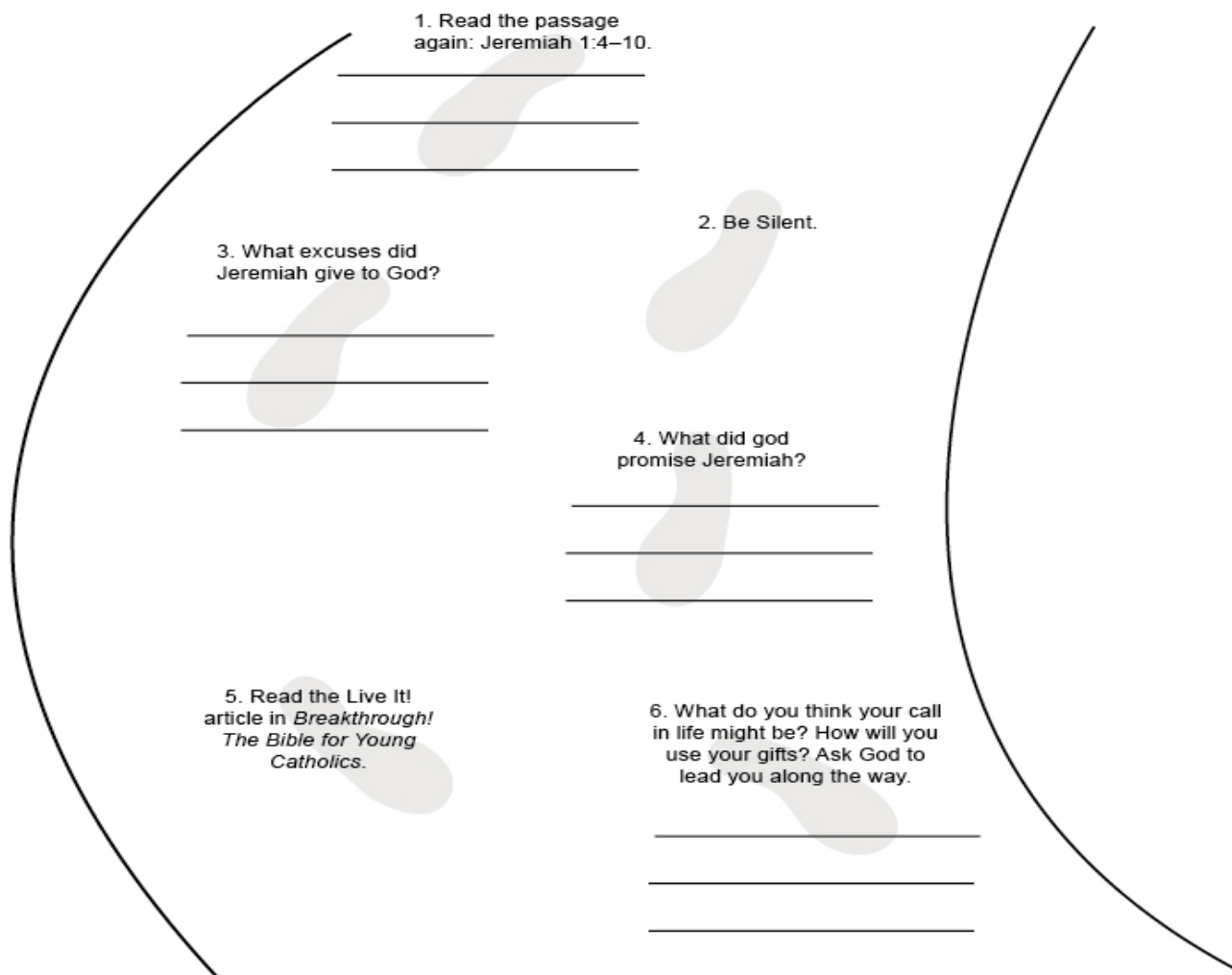
## Something to consider:

Where do you meet God? How does God help you? Remember, God often uses people and situations to help us. Sometimes God uses nature and animals to help us. Take some time to think about where and how God meets you and helps you. Write your reflections here.



# The Call of Jeremiah

Prophets are people who speak for God and communicate God's message. Sometimes people listen to God's message and sometimes they do not. Being a prophet is not an easy job! Read the section "Call of Jeremiah" in *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* (Jeremiah 1:4–10). Use the following steps to help you think about this passage more deeply.



1. Read the passage again: Jeremiah 1:4–10.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Be Silent.
3. What excuses did Jeremiah give to God?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What did god promise Jeremiah?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read the Live It! article in *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*.
6. What do you think your call in life might be? How will you use your gifts? Ask God to lead you along the way.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Something to consider:

Look at the art on page 1250. Think about what you see there and consider these questions:

Why is Jeremiah looking up? Look at his facial expression. How do you think he feels?

Jeremiah is surrounded by twinkling lights. Why do you think that is? What could these twinkling lights tell us about God calling Jeremiah?

Look at the reflection questions and answer them here:



# A Kingdom Search

Go on a Bible search in *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* and find out what the Kingdom of God is like. You can find clues in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Read these passages:

- **Isaiah 11:6–9**

*Hint:* The Book of Isaiah is in the Books of the Prophets section of *Breakthrough!* Look for the blue band on the bottom of the page. Then look for the purple color tab to find the Book of Isaiah.

For extra information, read the Study It! panel on page 1158 to learn more about the prophets. You may also want to look at the art on page 1206. This is a portrait of the Prophet Isaiah. The interview below (with three Isaiahs!) explains the two shadowy figures on Isaiah's right and left.

- **Matthew 13:1–9 and 18–23**

*Hint:* Find the “Gospels” color band (green) at the bottom of the page and then look for the dark grey color tab to find Matthew.

The Parable of the Sower illustrates how the Kingdom of God comes about. Look at the art on page 1580. Here Jesus is depicted as the sower. In the explanation of the parable in Matthew 13:18–23, the seed is the Word of the Kingdom, and we are the soil. The sower can sow, but there are no guarantees about the growth! It depends on the kind of soil the seed finds waiting. Consider the question on page 1580: Based on this story, what kind of “soil” is your faith growing in? Then read the Pray It! panel on page 1581 and reflect on it quietly.

- **Luke 23:33–43**

*Hint:* Find the color band of the “Gospels” and then the color tab of the Gospel of Luke (green).

The dialogue on the cross between Jesus and the man we now call “the Good Thief” gives us another and very important picture of the Kingdom of God. Read the Pray It! panel on this page. Quietly pray the prayer in the panel.

## Something to consider:

- How can I bring the peace of the Kingdom, as pictured in Isaiah, into my life?
- How can I be ready to welcome God's Word, the Word that gives growth to the Kingdom of God, into my life?
- How can I be open to God's forgiveness, the forgiveness of the Kingdom of God, in my life?
- How can I bring that Kingdom to others through my forgiveness of them?
- Use the other side of this paper to reflect on these questions.

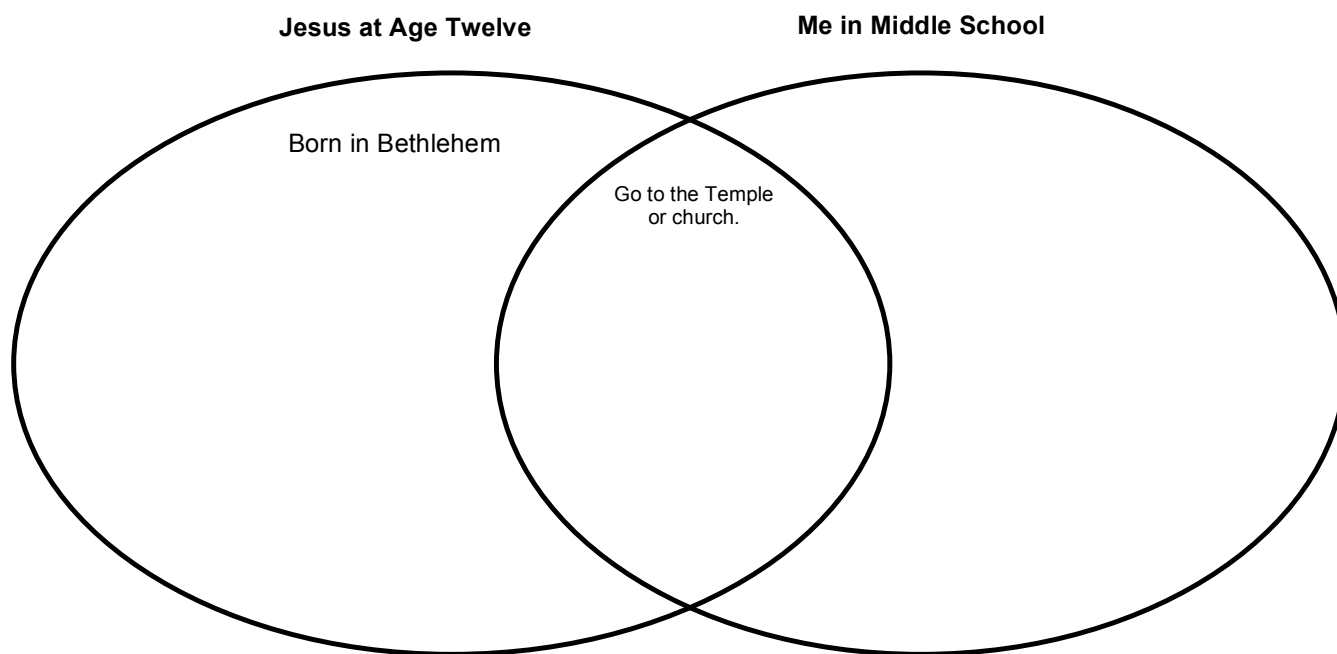


# Jesus and Me

At the time of Jesus, age twelve was the time of decision. At that age, boys began to learn a trade from their fathers or began to study to serve the community as rabbis or scholars. Girls prepared to marry and keep house, learning from their mothers. Even in the Jewish community today, the bar mitzvah (meaning “son of the Law,” for boys at age thirteen) or the bat mitzvah (“daughter of the Law,” for girls at age twelve or thirteen) marks entry into official Jewish adulthood.

In Luke 2:41–52, we see Jesus as a boy of twelve, nearing the time when he will become an official adult. In that, he is very much like you. He wants to use his gifts and follow his interests, yet he obeys his parents and follows their guidance. Follow these steps to go deeper into this event in Jesus’ life:

1. Read Luke 2:41–52, The Boy Jesus in the Temple.
2. Read the Live It! article on page 1680 of *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*.
3. Fill in the Venn diagram below by writing in ways (in the spaces on the left and the right) that you and Jesus are alike and different. In the middle, write ways that you and Jesus are the same. A few examples have been started for you.



## Something to consider:

Look at the art on page 1679. We know how people are feeling by their body language—the expressions on their faces or how they hold their hands and arms. Pay special attention to the expressions on the faces of Joseph and Mary. What are they doing with their hands and arms? How do you think Joseph and Mary are feeling?

Look at the face of Jesus. How would you describe it? What do you think he is saying? How do you think he is feeling?

How do you stay in touch with your parents? If Jesus had been able to text, what do you think he would have written to his parents?



## On the Road with Jesus

Try this meditation on the Gospel. Your teacher or group leader can lead you through it, or you may do it by yourself. First read Luke 24:13–35, the section “The Appearance on the Road to Emmaus,” in *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*. Think over the story, and imagine yourself with Jesus and the two disciples. Read each line, and then close your eyes a moment to imagine the scene. Then read the next line. If you like, write down your thoughts or draw what you imagine.

And now, let’s hit the road!

Picture the path that you and a friend are walking along as you talk. . . .

Imagine that someone joins you and walks along with you. . . .

Imagine that it's getting dark outside. . . .

So, the three of you go into a house. Picture the house. . . .

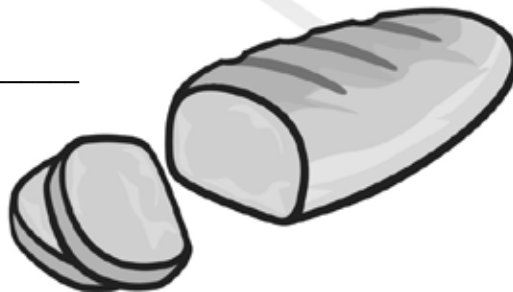
Picture the three of you sitting down together. . . .

The “stranger” takes some bread and breaks it. . . .

Aha! You recognize that this person is Jesus! He disappears. . . .

Imagine what you say to your friend about Jesus. . . .

Now, in your heart, what would you like to tell Jesus yourself?



### Something to consider:

You might like to look at the art on page 1730. Can you imagine yourself sitting at the table with Jesus and the two disciples? How is Jesus feeling as he breaks the bread? What do the two disciples feel? Look at their faces and hands. How would you feel, if you were there? (Remember, “you are there” every time you participate in the Mass and receive the Eucharist!)

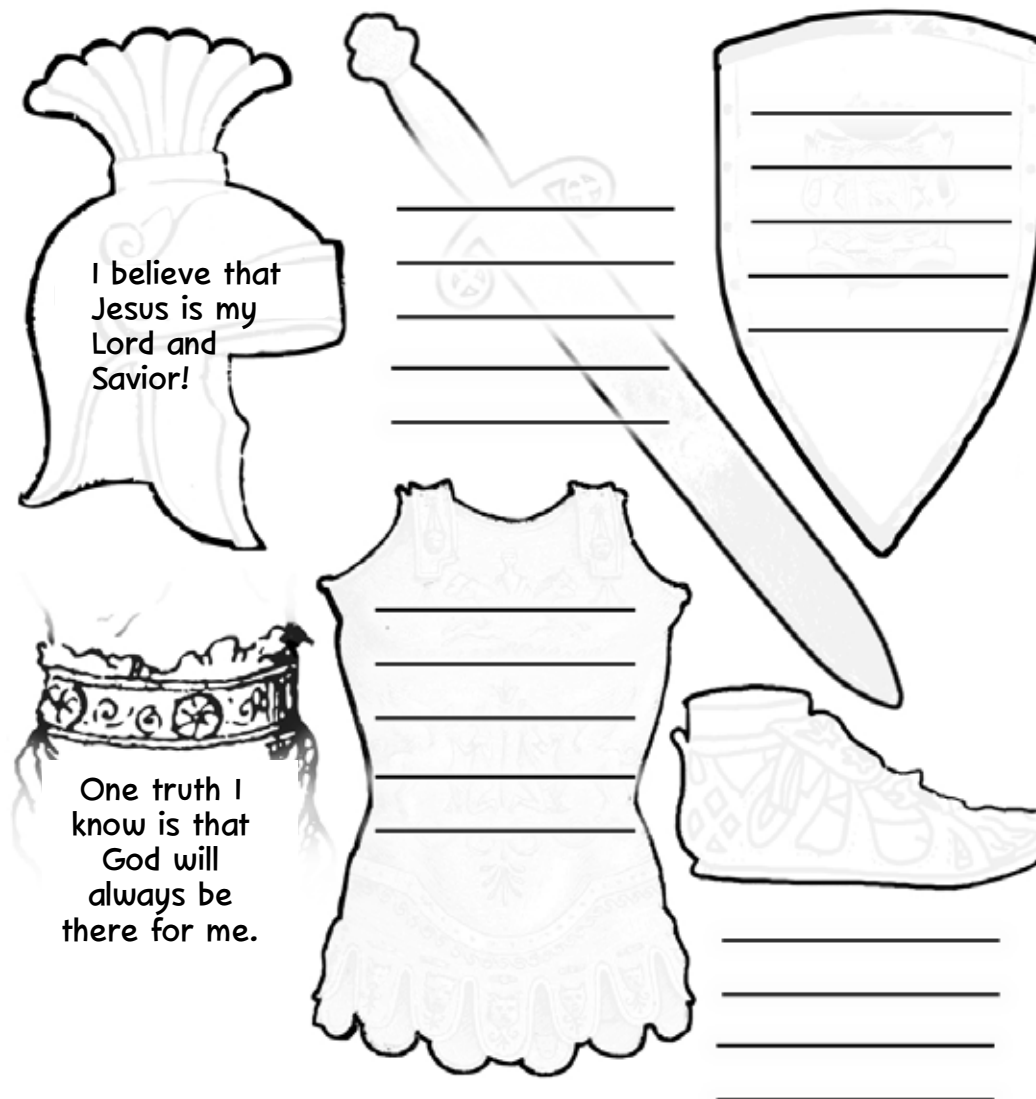
Read the Pray It! article on page 1729. Remember that Jesus walks with you always!



# God's Armor

In the Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul tells us to put on God's armor to protect ourselves from evil. Saint Paul used the armor and other gear of the Roman army of his time to explain God's armor of strength, truth, peace, and faith.

Read Ephesians 6:10–17. Then look at each piece of armor pictured here, and give an example of how you use that piece of armor in your own life. To help get you started, we have given two examples.



## Something to consider:

Read the Pray It! article on page 1937. This prayer refers to chapter 3 of Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, but it is a good prayer to pray anytime. You might like to copy it on a small piece of paper or index card and keep it where you will see it often.



# Prayers for All Saints' Day

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 5:1–12 (The Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** In this Gospel passage, Jesus teaches us about true blessedness, or happiness. It is the opposite of what we might think! Listen for some of the “opposite thinking” of Jesus.

**Reader:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** As we pray, let us respond by saying together: “Amen! May it be so! Amen!”

**All:** Amen! May it be so! Amen!

**Leader:** Jesus, help us to follow you in righteousness and mercy.

**All:** Amen! May it be so! Amen!

**Leader:** Jesus, help us to follow you in all our joys and sorrows.

**All:** Amen! May it be so! Amen!

**Leader:** Jesus, help us to follow you wholeheartedly, in peace, as children of God.

**All:** Amen! May it be so! Amen!

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we learned to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, as the saints did. When we pray, we pray with all the saints in Heaven—the famous saints, and all the unknown saints, all the good people who are now rejoicing with God in Heaven. Let us pray a prayer of praise with all the saints by repeating after me:

**Leader:** Holy, holy, holy!

**All:** Holy, holy, holy!

**Leader:** Jesus, you are the Holy One.

**All:** Jesus, you are the Holy One.

**Leader:** Help us to walk with you and with one another in peace.

**All:** Help us to walk with you and with one another in peace.

**Leader:** We ask in your name. Amen!

**All:** We ask in your name. Amen!



# Chapter 10

## Connecting to the Liturgical Year through Prayer and Activities

For Catholics, the year revolves around the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. From Advent to Easter, we journey with the liturgy through the events of the life of Christ, and through our participation in Word and Sacrament, we unite with him in the here-and-now.

In the liturgy, both the past and the future are present, because in the liturgy we participate in the timelessness and eternity of God. The Scripture readings for each season and each feast help us to understand the particular grace that this season or this day brings to us.

In this chapter, the Scripture readings for some of the most important seasons and feasts are presented in two ways. First, the readings are presented in the context of an opening and closing prayer for a celebratory group session for a particular season or feast. The Scripture readings are, in most cases, based on the actual readings found in the Lectionary. This opening and closing prayer is offered in a handout format to facilitate the participation of your middle schoolers. In addition, a Ritual Guide on the back of the handout can guide you in preparing for these prayers and in leading your middle schoolers through them. Second, following each handout, a hands-on activity based on the season or feast is also presented. Taken together, these two resources (prayer and activity) provide ample material for a religious education session.



Prayers and activities are provided for the following seasons and feasts:

- All Saints' Day (November 1)
- Advent
- Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12)
- Christmas
- Epiphany
- The Baptism of Jesus
- Ordinary Time
- Lent
- The Annunciation of Mary (March 25)
- Palm Sunday and the Events of the Triduum
- The Easter Season
- Pentecost

Look through these scriptural prayer sessions and activities as you plan your year. You may find something that will help you to communicate and celebrate the meaning of a particular season or feast with your middle schoolers.

# Prayers for All Saints' Day

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 5:1–12 (The Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** In this Gospel passage, Jesus teaches us about true blessedness, or happiness. It is the opposite of what we might think! Listen for some of the “opposite thinking” of Jesus.

**Reader:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** As we pray, let us respond by saying together: “Amen! May it be so! Amen!”

**All:** Amen! May it be so! Amen!

**Leader:** Jesus, help us to follow you in righteousness and mercy.

**All:** Amen! May it be so! Amen!

**Leader:** Jesus, help us to follow you in all our joys and sorrows.

**All:** Amen! May it be so! Amen!

**Leader:** Jesus, help us to follow you wholeheartedly, in peace, as children of God.

**All:** Amen! May it be so! Amen!

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we learned to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, as the saints did. When we pray, we pray with all the saints in Heaven—the famous saints, and all the unknown saints, all the good people who are now rejoicing with God in Heaven. Let us pray a prayer of praise with all the saints by repeating after me:

**Leader:** Holy, holy, holy!

**All:** Holy, holy, holy!

**Leader:** Jesus, you are the Holy One.

**All:** Jesus, you are the Holy One.

**Leader:** Help us to walk with you and with one another in peace.

**All:** Help us to walk with you and with one another in peace.

**Leader:** We ask in your name. Amen!

**All:** We ask in your name. Amen!



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose one or two young people to read the passage from the Gospel of Matthew. (You may want two readers to alternate the verses.)

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. If necessary, briefly rehearse the prayer response, noting that *Amen* means “May it be so” or “I agree.”

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the reading with the words given for the Leader or in your own words. After the prayer, collect the prayer handouts. They will not be needed for the closing prayer.

(An activity for All Saints' Day can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Preparation

This prayer is based on the activity offered for All Saints' Day. However, if you did not offer this activity, you can adapt the introduction to summarize the main point of the day's lesson.

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner. Explain that the closing prayer is a prayer asking Jesus to help us to follow him. (Because this is a repetitive prayer, the students will not need their handouts.) Tell the group that you will be the leader and that they should repeat each line after you.

### Pray

Lead the group in prayer.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



## Activity for All Saints' Day

### *In the Footsteps of Jesus*

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 5:1–12 (The Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes).

The middle schoolers learn that saints were those who followed Jesus. We are like the saints when we follow Jesus, show mercy, and work for peace.

**Gather the Following Items:** varicolored construction paper (two sheets for each student), markers, scissors

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the middle schoolers open their Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 5, verses 1–12. Explain that this is the Gospel passage we hear at Mass today. In this passage, Jesus teaches us that blessedness, or happiness, is the opposite of selfishness, greed, revenge, and violence. It takes courage to reject these tendencies. It takes courage to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

1. Give each middle schooler two sheets of construction paper. If possible, allow the young people to choose their own colors. Make markers available. Direct the young people to be seated and to trace around each of their feet with a marker, one foot on each piece of paper. (Direct them either to leave their shoes on, or allow them to remove their shoes.) Instruct them to cut out their two paper feet and place the paper feet on their desks.
2. Have the middle schoolers gather into pairs. Ask them to help each other write a short prayer on one of their paper feet. The prayer should be unique to each young person and express their desire to follow Jesus by embracing his message of mercy and peace and rejecting selfishness, greed, revenge, and violence. Suggest that they look at the Beatitudes in their Bibles to find words that resonate with them. Remind the young people that Jesus is suggesting a practical way of life: How can we be merciful in our lives? How can we make peace? For example: "Jesus, help me to find ways to comfort others"; "Jesus, help me to make peace by listening to others"; etc. Circulate among the middle schoolers to offer help as needed.

On the other paper foot, the young people should write the names of their favorite or special saints. These names can be their patron saint, a saint their family honors, or, especially, those who have died and who “walked in the footsteps of Jesus” during their lifetimes (grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.).

3. When the prayers and names have been written, ask the middle schoolers to arrange their paper feet in a line of footprints extending from one corner of the room to a designated significant spot (like the prayer corner, a crucifix, a statue of Jesus, etc.). Ask the young people to stand next to their paper feet and, in order or at random, pray their prayer and name their special names. (If time and the size of the group permit, you might ask the students to explain why they chose to write these particular names.)
4. When all prayers and names are completed, ask the middle schoolers: “What is the best way to follow Jesus?” Then give the answer: “Jump in with both feet!” (Explain that to “jump in with both feet” means to be “all in.”) Ask: “How will you jump in with both feet in following Jesus this week?”
5. End the session with the suggested Closing Prayer. You might want to play the song “When the Saints Go Marching In.” Allow the young people to take their paper feet home, or collect them to make a display titled “When the Saints Go Marching In” for the parish to see.

# Prayers for Advent

**Scripture Focus:** Zephaniah 3:14–18 (Jerusalem Restored)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** This passage is read at Mass on the Wednesday before Christmas. In this passage, we, God's People, the Church, are Jerusalem. The prophet Zephaniah prepares us to greet Jesus, the King of Israel, when he comes to us as at Christmas. We can prepare to welcome Jesus with joy and gladness!

**Reader:** A reading from the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** As we ask Jesus for what we need, let us prayer together: "We rejoice and are glad!"

**All:** We rejoice and are glad!

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, with thankful hearts we ask for your peace during this Advent season.

**All:** We rejoice and are glad!

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, we ask to have a gentle attitude toward everyone as we prepare for your coming at Christmas.

**All:** We rejoice and are glad!

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, we pray for our needs, and for the needs of those we know and love, especially for . . . [Invite the middle schoolers to name people or situations they wish to pray for.]

**All:** We rejoice and are glad!

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we realized that Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us, all the time, and we are preparing to celebrate his coming among us. Because the Lord is in our midst, as the prophet Zephaniah told us, let us pray for the needs of all God's people, especially those who feel lonely and forgotten. Let us pray together:

**All:** Lord Jesus,

As we prepare to celebrate your coming to the world at Christmas, we pray for the needs of all people.

Give peace to the world. Give food to the hungry. Give shelter to those who are homeless. Help mothers, fathers, and newborn children. Help all children everywhere, especially those most in need.

Help us to find ways to help others.

We ask this in your name, Lord Jesus, who came to us as a little child.

Amen.



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose a reader (or two readers, and have the second begin at verse 16) to read the passage from the Book of Zephaniah.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate Advent song to begin and end the prayer. (Suggestion: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.")

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response, pointing out that this response echoes the theme of the reading.

### Pray

If you are using an Advent wreath, you may light the appropriate candle(s) on the wreath at this time. Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the reading with the words given, or in your own words. At the close of this prayer, collect the prayer handouts and set them aside, as they will be needed for the closing prayer.

(An activity for Advent can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Preparation

This prayer is based on the activity offered for Advent. However, if you did not offer this activity, you can adapt the introduction to summarize the main point of the day's lesson.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Explain that in the closing prayer, we will remember, as the prophet Zephaniah told us, that the Lord is in our midst always. He is Emmanuel, God-with-us, and so we can ask him for what we need. Explain that at "All," we will read the prayer together.

### Pray

Lead the group in prayer.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer, or another Advent song.



## Activity for Advent

### *Emmanuel, God-with-Us*

**Scripture Focus:** Zephaniah 3:14–18 (Jerusalem Restored).

The middle schoolers will be glad and rejoice that the Lord is always in our midst (verse 15) by linking the objects of ordinary life to the presence of God.

**Gather the Following Items:** Have one each of several items laid out on a table or tray at the front or in the center of the room. There should be one item per person, and, to give ample choice, have a few more items available than there are young people in the group. Suggested items: pencil, pen, eraser, paper clip, birthday candle, star sticker, crayon, plastic glass or cup, piece of hard candy, pair of glasses, etc.

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the middle schoolers open their Bibles to the Book of Zephaniah in the Old Testament. Direct them to find chapter 3, verses 14 through 18. Explain that this is the reading chosen for the Wednesday before Christmas. Draw their attention to verse 15, the last two lines. These words assure us that Jesus is with us, and is always with us. He is the great Gift that we celebrate at Christmas, but he is with us now, even before we celebrate his coming among us.

1. Invite the middle schoolers to gather around the table of ordinary things you have prepared. Introduce the activity by explaining the concept of icons as images that reveal a quality of God to us. Comment as follows:
  - Often we look for God's presence and message in great people, amazing things, and supernatural events. Many times we fail to notice that God can speak to us in simple and quiet ways through the things, events, and people we experience every day. After all, when God came to us as Emmanuel, God-with-us, in Jesus, he came as a little baby.



2. Invite the middle schoolers to come forward one by one to select an object from the table. After everyone has selected an item, tell them to hold and examine it as they reflect on the following questions:
  - What attracted you to this object?
  - Is there one thing about it that you particularly like?
  - What is your object called, and what is its function?
  - How would you use this object?
  - Is there something about this object that reminds you of who God is or what God is like?
3. Ask the middle schoolers to think quietly about the object they chose and to complete this sentence in their minds: "God is like . . . [name object] because . . . " Ask them to be prepared to share their sentence with the group. Give some examples:
  - God is like a paper clip because he holds everything together.
  - God is like an eraser because he forgives us and gives us a second chance.
  - God is like a crayon because crayons make beautiful pictures and God has made a beautiful world.
4. Invite the middle schoolers to share their reflections. Remind them that although we celebrate the coming of Emmanuel, God-with-Us, in Jesus at Christmas, Jesus is risen now and has never gone away. He is always with us in our everyday lives.
5. Invite the middle schoolers to return their items to the tray. Conclude with these or similar words:
  - During Advent, we wait for God's presence in our lives, and we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas. But when we pray "O Come Emmanuel," we realize that Jesus is "God -with-Us" always, and the simplest things can remind us that God is always present with us.

# Prayers for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

**Scripture Focus:** Zechariah 2:14–17 (Rejoice, Daughter Zion), Luke 1:26–38 (Announcement of the Birth of Jesus), or Luke 1:39–47 (Mary Visits Elizabeth)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross. In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** Today we honor Mary under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In this reading, God tells us that Mary is especially blessed because she brought Jesus into the world.

**Reader:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke.

*Reader then reads one of the Scripture passages above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** We ask Mary to pray for us because she is so close to Jesus. Let's honor Mary by telling her, over and over, "Blessed are you, Mary."

**All:** Blessed are you, Mary.

**Leader:** Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, you are the mother of Jesus.

**All:** Blessed are you, Mary.

**Leader:** Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, you are our mother too!

**All:** Blessed are you, Mary.

**Leader:** Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, you are the patroness of all the Americas: North America, Central America, and South America!

**All:** Blessed are you, Mary.

**Leader:** We love you and honor you as the Mother of God and as our mother always.

**All:** Blessed are you, Mary.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we honored Mary under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Let us thank her for all her love and care for us.

**All:** Thank you, Mary, for loving us as your children, the brothers and sisters of Jesus. Thank you for your appearance to Juan Diego, and for the beautiful picture you left on his *tilma* (cloak). Thank you for the December roses that you left as a sign of your presence. Pray for all of us, your children of the Americas.

Amen.



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Find a picture, even a small holy card, of Our Lady of Guadalupe to place in the Bible corner. You may also want to have a map or globe available to point out North America, Central America, and South America. Choose a reader to read one of the passages given in the Scripture Focus for today.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate Marian hymn or song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather your group in the Bible corner. Point out the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and explain that we are honoring her especially today. Using the map or globe, if possible, ask volunteers to point out North America, Central America, and South America. Ask the middle schoolers if they have family members living in any of these countries. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the reading with the words given, or in your own words. Collect the prayer handouts and set them aside for the closing prayer.

(An activity for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Preparation

This prayer is based on the story of the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego. Briefly tell the story, or ask volunteers to tell the story.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Explain that in this prayer we are thanking Mary for her love and concern for the people of the Americas. Point out the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe. If you have not already done so, ask volunteers to point out North America, Central America, and South America on a map or globe.

### Pray

Lead the group in prayer.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



## Activity for Our Lady of Guadalupe

### *Honoring Mary with Roses*

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 1:41–42. The middle schoolers will deepen their knowledge and appreciation of Mary, Mother of God, under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

**Gather the Following Items:** a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe (placed prominently in the prayer corner); two or more empty vases, placed in the prayer corner near the picture; scissors; four large sheets of red tissue paper for each young person; a stapler; green pipe cleaners, two for each young person.

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the middle schoolers open their Bibles to the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 1, verses 41–42. Remind the middle schoolers that one of our most familiar prayers, the Hail Mary, is based on these verses in Scripture.

1. Review the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe. When Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego, she told him to go to the bishop and ask that a church be built. When Juan Diego went to the bishop, the bishop asked for a sign. Juan Diego reported this to Our Lady, who told him to find the roses blooming alongside the road, even in the midst of a cold December. Juan Diego picked the roses and put them in his *tilma*, or cloak. He returned to the bishop and told him that he was given a sign. When he opened his *tilma*, out fell the roses! In addition, a beautiful portrait of Our Lady was painted inside his *tilma*. The painting still exists in Mexico City, near the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This is why we celebrate this feast of Our Lady with roses.
2. Distribute four sheets of red tissue paper to each middle schooler. Have the young people fold the sheets in half and cut to make eight sheets of 10-x-13-inch paper. (You may want to prepare by cutting the sheets prior to distribution.) Explain that they are to stack all eight sheets of tissue paper in a neat pile.

3. to fold the tissue paper back and forth, forming a 1-inch accordion. When the sheets are folded, have the middle schoolers trim the corners slightly to form a rounded shape.
4. Show the group how to pinch the accordion-folded paper in the middle and wrap one green pipe cleaner securely around the middle of the folded tissue paper. Bend the two ends of the pipe cleaner together after attaching it. You might want to use a staple to hold the folds of the two sides upright and together. Attach an additional green pipe cleaner to the tissue flower to make a stem.
5. Explain to the group that now they are to carefully separate and fluff the tissue paper sheets, layer by layer. This will make a large, fluffy rose.
6. Gather the group, holding their roses, for a procession to the Bible corner. You may want to play a recording of a hymn to Mary.
7. As the group gathers in the prayer corner, invite young person to place his or her rose in one of the vases placed there. Arrange the flowers so that they are distributed evenly in the vases. When every rose is placed, together pray a Hail Mary.

# Prayers for Christmas

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 2:1–14 (Midnight Mass, The Birth of Jesus), Luke 2:15–20 (Mass at Dawn, The Visit of the Shepherds), John 1:1–18 (Mass During the Day, Prologue to the Gospel of John)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the coming of God among us. *(Briefly summarize the reading you have chosen. The reader then reads the Scripture passage chosen from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.)*

**Leader:** This Christmas, let us make room for Jesus in our hearts. Let us pray, “Come to our hearts, Lord Jesus.”

**All:** Come to our hearts, Lord Jesus.

**Leader:** When we prepare for your coming by our respect for our parents, guardians, and teachers,

**All:** Come to our hearts, Lord Jesus.

**Leader:** When we show kindness to others, especially to members of our own families,

**All:** Come to our hearts, Lord Jesus.

**Leader:** When we celebrate Christmas with our families and friends,

**All:** Come to our hearts, Lord Jesus.

**Leader:** When we remember those who are poor and in need this Christmas,

**All:** Come to our hearts, Lord Jesus.

**Leader:** When we participate in Holy Mass this Christmas,

**All:** Come to our hearts, Lord Jesus.

## Closing Prayer

Gather the group in the Bible corner where a Christmas stable has been set up. All the figures should be placed there except for the Infant Jesus. Choose one person, by drawing names, to carry the Infant Jesus and to place this figure in the manger. If possible, play an appropriate Christmas carol at this time.

**Leader:** When we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate that Jesus came to us as a poor little baby. Help us to remember that of all the gifts we receive at Christmas, Jesus is the best gift of all. Let us thank him for all that he has given to us by responding, “Thank you, Jesus.”

For family and friends,

For the joy of Christmas,

For the peace that comes from helping others,

For showing us how to live in peace and love,

For dying and rising for us,

For giving us eternal life,

*Suggest that the group offer their own statements of gratitude.*

**Leader:** Let us all say Amen and Merry Christmas!

**All:** Amen! Merry Christmas!



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose a reader to read the passage from the Gospel of Luke.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer. (Suggestion: “Silent Night” or another Christmas carol.)

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the reading with the words given for the teacher or in your own words. As the closing prayer is a repetitive prayer, the group will not need to use the prayer handouts again, so they may be collected.

(An activity for Christmas can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Preparation

This prayer, while based on the activity offered for Christmas, is suitable for any activity or celebration of Christmas.

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner. Explain that our closing prayer reminds us that Jesus wants us to love him, ourselves, and others. (Because this is a repetitive prayer, the handouts sheets will not be needed.) Tell the group that you will be the reader, and that they should repeat each line after you.

### Pray

Lead the group in prayer.

*Optional:* End with the Christmas carol you chose for the opening prayer, or a different one.



## Activity for Christmas

*Come, Lord Jesus!*

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 2:1–14 (Midnight Mass), Luke 2:15–20 (Mass at Dawn), John 1:1–18 (Mass During the Day).

The middle schoolers will come to appreciate the Christmas story by making a diorama of the Christmas crib to take home with them.

**Gather the Following Items:** Christmas manger cutouts (found on the Internet; they may be either precolored or a black-and-white outline, to be colored in), one sheet for each young person; shoeboxes\*, one for each young person; brown construction paper, two sheets for each young person; scissors; glue or paste; markers and crayons. *Optional:* light cardboard for backing the figures.

**Breaking Open the Word:** Ask the middle schoolers to open their Bibles to the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 2, verses 6–7. Explain that in this passage we learn that Jesus was born in a manger—a large wooden box that holds food for animals. This reminds us not only that Jesus was born in poverty, but that he would one day nourish us as food in the Eucharist. When we receive Holy Communion, we become the manger for Jesus!

1. Gather your group in front of the manger scene and ask them to look at it carefully. Ask volunteers to tell what they know about the figures in the scene.
2. Explain that each young person will be making a manger scene to take home, in the form of a diorama. Give each middle schooler a shoebox for the stable, some straw for the floor, two sheets of brown construction paper, a sheet of Christmas manger cutouts, scissors, and crayons or markers if needed. (As an option, you may distribute light cardboard sheets to use as backing for the figures.)
3. Instruct the middle schoolers to cut out the brown paper and paste it to the walls and ceiling of the stable. They can do this by tracing the outline of the outside of the back and sides of the box onto the brown paper, then cutting it out and pasting it inside the box. They may also want to draw windows (or cut them out) at the back of the stable.



4. Ask them to color in the figures of the manger scene (if needed) and cut them out. Have them add a tab to the bottom of each figure, so that it can be pasted to the floor of the stable to stand the figure. (You may want to illustrate how to add this bottom tab on the board.) If you use light cardboard, instruct the middle schoolers to trace and cut the light cardboard for each figure and paste it to the back of each one to add strength. When they have pasted their figures to the manger floor, they may add straw to the floor.
5. When all have finished, have a "room tour" so that everyone can see and admire the manger scenes. Close the session by gathering the group in the Bible corner or around the manger scenes to sing "Silent Night."

*\*If you are planning to do the activity for the Baptism of Jesus after Christmas, you may want to save the shoebox lids.*

# Prayers for Epiphany

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 2:1–12 (The Visit of the Magi)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** In this Gospel, we hear about some people who saw a star that led them to a special child. Today we call these people “the Three Kings,” although the Gospel never says there were three of them! They did offer three famous gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

*(Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.)*

**Leader:** Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, the Three Kings, who found Jesus and worshipped him. The word *epiphany* means “showing” or “manifestation.” At the visit of the Three Kings, the Savior, Jesus, was shown to the entire world.

The Gospel makes a point of saying, “They *prostrated themselves* and did him homage.” A *prostration* is a special and humble gesture that we sometimes use at important times in the liturgy. It is a gesture of full surrender to God. For example, deacons prostrate themselves before they become priests. A prostration is a full-out lie-down-on-the-floor in humble worship.

Let’s try it for our prayer today. First, space yourselves so that you have room to lie down. Next, kneel in your place. Next, put your hands on the floor and slowly lower yourself to the floor. Put your two hands together under your forehead. Now, let’s stand and begin our prayer.

After each petition, the response is, “We worship you and give you our whole selves.” Then do a prostration for a minute, and rise for the next prayer. We will do three prostrations in all.

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, thank you for coming among us as God and man. Thank you for becoming a little child, for dying and rising for us. Thank you for showing yourself today to the world.

**All:** We worship you and give you our whole selves.

*All prostrate themselves for a moment until the Leader says, “Please rise.”*

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, thank you for choosing Mary and Joseph as your human family to help you to learn and grow. Thank you for everyone in our lives who helps us to learn and grow.

**All:** We worship you and give you our whole selves.

*All prostrate as before, then rise.*

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, thank you for the star that guided the Three Kings. Thank you for our Church, our Pope and bishops, our priests, deacons, leaders and teachers, all who guide us to you.

**All:** We worship you and give you our whole selves.

*All prostrate as before, then rise.*

**Leader:** Let us conclude our prayer with a joyful “Amen!” and “Alleluia!”

**All:** Amen! Alleluia!

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we learned that the Three Kings found Jesus, and that Jesus came for everyone in the world. Let’s ask the Three Kings to lead us in prayer.

**King 1:** Jesus is our King. I brought him gold, my most precious possession.

**All:** Jesus, we give you our hearts.

**King 2:** Jesus is our God. I brought him incense, a sign of my heartfelt worship.

**All:** Jesus, we worship you as God and man.

**King 3:** Jesus died and is now risen. I brought him myrrh, to anoint his body. And now he lives forever!

**All:** Jesus, you died and rose for us. You are with us now. Alleluia!



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose a reader to read the verses from the Gospel of Matthew.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the group before the Christmas crib. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response and the prostration. Remind the group to get down to the floor and up again quietly.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the reading with the words given, or in your own words.

(An activity for Epiphany can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Preparation

Choose three young people (or ask for volunteers) to be the Three Kings. You may have paper crowns for them to wear, or large name tags labeled “King 1,” “King 2,” and “King 3” to identify them as kings. (The kings may be either boys or girls, as this is a representation of the story.) You may give them small boxes to carry as gifts, or ask them to pretend to carry a gift. Gather the kings, standing, in one spot and have each step forward separately to read his or her line. Remind them to lay their gifts (either boxes or “pretend gifts”) at the feet of Jesus in the Christmas Nativity scene after they speak. They may then join the group.

### Gather

Gather the group at the Christmas crib, or allow them to stay at their desks or tables. Ask them to sit down, and then distribute the prayer handouts. Explain that the Three Kings will lead us in our prayer today.

### Pray

Motion each king forward to speak his or her line.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



## Activity for Epiphany

### *Gift for a King from a King*

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 2:1–12. The middle schoolers will make a mural to illustrate the Epiphany story.

**Gather the Following Items:** four sheets of poster board, four sets of markers or crayons, drawing paper, three camel templates and three king templates, three pairs of scissors, and three bottles of glue (*Optional:* paints, paintbrushes).

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the middle schoolers open their Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 2, verses 9–12. Explain that this is part of the Gospel story about the three kings traveling with gifts for the Child Jesus.

1. You may wish to do this activity over two sessions. In the first session, the middle schoolers will draw and color the background scenes. In the second session, each of three groups will draw a king, a camel, and a gift. (If time permits, the entire mural can be drawn and painted in one session.)
2. In the first session, divide the class into three groups of four to eight young people and distribute a sheet of poster board and markers or crayons (or paints) to each group. Explain that each group will be drawing a panel of a mural based on the Epiphany story as follows, with color suggestions: (Group 1) the desert (sand color with green cactus), (Group 2) hills in the background (purple), and (Group 3) the final destination (brown stable with a yellow star over it). When the scene is completed, hang it in the prayer corner. (If you have a larger group, more desert scenes and hill scenes can be added to make a longer mural.)
3. In the second session, divide the class into three groups and distribute drawing paper, a king and camel template, a scissors, and crayons or markers to each. Assign one group to be the “gold” group, one the “frankincense” group, and one the “myrrh” group. Brainstorm with each group what they need to draw and which colors to use to complete the scene of the visit of the kings, including camels (brown), saddles and reins (red), and their

- individual gifts. Have the kings represent different ethnicities—white, black, and brown skin tones. Suggest that each king be dressed in different royalty colors (such as purple, red, gold/yellow). Distribute the camel and king templates for the middle schoolers to use to aid their drawing.
4. Distribute a pair of scissors and a bottle of glue to each group. Explain to the groups that after they have drawn and colored their part of the scene, they should carefully cut out the king, camel, and gift. When all have finished, direct each group to attach its king and camel to part of the three-panel scene.
  5. When the three groups have attached their parts to the scene, ask a representative from each group to hold the drawn gift box. Gather the groups together and ask: What would *you* like to bring to the Child Jesus? On each of the gift boxes, have each young person in each group write what gift he or she would give to Jesus.
  6. Invite the “gold” group to process around the room to the stable. Then invite the representative to attach the gift at the stable. Continue in the same way for the frankincense and myrrh groups. As the groups process, invite them to join in singing “We Three Kings,” or have this hymn playing in the background. Ask each group to listen for the lyrics describing its gift, and to hold the gift high when that verse is sung.

# Prayers for the Baptism of Jesus

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 3:13–17 (The Baptism of Jesus)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** When Jesus was baptized, something very special happened. The Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus, and God the Father said that he was very pleased with his Son, Jesus.

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** When we were baptized, we became children of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus. The Holy Spirit came to live in us. Let us respond in prayer with thanks to God our Father, to Jesus our Lord and Brother, and to the Holy Spirit:

God our Father, thank you for making us your children in Baptism, and making us brothers and sisters of Jesus. Help us to please you in all that we do.

**All:** Thank you, God our Father.

**Leader:** Jesus our Lord and Brother, thank you for coming to live among us as God and man. Help us to love one another as you have commanded.

**All:** Thank you, Jesus, our Lord and Brother.

**Leader:** Holy Spirit of God, thank you for coming to live in us through Baptism and again, in a stronger way, in Confirmation. Be with us to lead us and guide us in right paths.

**All:** Thank you, Holy Spirit.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we learned to pray with Jesus in the desert. Sometimes we can pray better when all is quiet and still. Let us be quiet and still for a moment, and pray to Jesus in our hearts.

*Allow a few moments for the group to sit in stillness.*

**Leader:** When Jesus was baptized, God our Father said that he was pleased. When God sees that we try to be the best we can be, to do good, and to care for others, he is pleased with us too. Let us stay quiet and listen as I go to each of you. Everyone should say “Amen” after I say the prayer each time.

*Go to each student, put one hand on the student’s head, and say, “This is (name), with whom God our Father is pleased.” All respond each time: “Amen.”*



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose a reader to read the passage from the Gospel of Matthew.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer responses, noting that each one is different because each is directed to a different member of the Holy Trinity.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated.

Introduce the reading with the words given, or in your own words.

An activity for the Baptism of Jesus can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.

## Closing Prayer

This prayer continues in the spirit of the activity offered for the Baptism of Jesus. However, if you did not offer this activity, you can adapt the introduction to summarize the main points of the lesson.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner and ask them to sit down. Explain that this closing prayer is a time of quiet prayer and will end with a blessing prayer.

### Pray

Follow the directions for the leader given on the prayer handouts.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



## Activity for the Baptism of Jesus

### *Preparing the Way*

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 3:13–17. The middle schoolers celebrate the Baptism of Jesus by making a desert scene. John the Baptist lived in the desert before he came forward to preach, and Jesus spent forty days in the desert before his Baptism by John.

**Gather the Following Items:** shoebox lids, one for each young person; a bag of play sand; a bag of small stones; jar lids, one for each young person; a pitcher of water; a cactus or aloe plant; small paper plates, one for each young person; a tray of fruit slices with a large bowl of honey for dip, enough for each middle schooler to have a slice of fruit and a plate of dip; small plastic bags, one for each middle schooler.

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the group open their Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 3, verses 13–17. Explain that this passage recounts the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. Remind the middle schoolers that John the Baptist lived and prayed in the desert before he began preaching, and that Jesus spent forty days in the desert, praying and getting ready for his mission of salvation, following his Baptism.

1. Explain that today we will be making a miniature desert. Because the desert is so sparse and without distractions, it makes a good place for prayer. Both John the Baptist and Jesus spent time in the desert because it helped them to pray. Our miniature deserts will help us to pray.
2. Give each middle schooler a shoebox lid to use as a tray. Put on each tray, separately and in the following order, a small pile of sand, some stones, and a jar lid filled with water. Also set out a cactus or aloe plant to be passed around among the young people. As you distribute each material, explain it (see bullet list) and use it as a Scripture meditation with the citations given. (You may want to write the citations on the board and challenge volunteers to find them in *Breakthrough!*)
  - **Sand** Suggest that the group feel how dry the sand is. Explain that the desert does not get much rain, so it is often dry and hot. After you distribute the sand, ask the young people to repeat after you in prayer: “O God, . . . / like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land, / my soul thirsts for you” (Psalm 63:1).



- **Jar lid filled with water** Distribute the jar lids and fill each with water. As you pour the water, suggest that the middle schoolers dip their fingers carefully into it. Explain that there are some water holes in the desert, and animals come to drink at them. After you have distributed the lids and water, ask the group to repeat after you, “As a deer longs for a stream of cool water, /so I long for you, O God” (Psalm 42:1).
- **Stones** As you give a few stones to each young person, ask them to arrange the stones in their desert scene. Explain that the desert is full of stones. Remind the middle schoolers that when Jesus went to the desert to pray and to fast, the devil met him there and tempted him. Satan told Jesus to turn some of the stones into bread! Jesus refused. Jesus told Satan (and this can be the prayer to repeat), “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).
- **Cactus or aloe plant** You will need just one. The middle schoolers can come up and carefully feel it (watch the needles!), or you can carry it to each young person. Desert plants store water in their leaves, so they can have water even if it doesn’t rain. Ask the group to feel the thick leaves and bodies of the cactus or aloe. Ask the young people to repeat after you: “Like plants filled with water, fill us with your Holy Spirit, O Lord!”
- **Fruit and honey** Pass around a tray of fruit slices with a large bowl of honey dip. Be sure to arrange a substitute, like jelly, for those allergic to honey. (You may also distribute small paper plates so the young people can spoon out some honey.) Encourage the middle schoolers to try a slice of fruit with honey. Not much food can grow in the desert, but bees live there and make honey, which John the Baptist found and ate. Honey is nourishing and also very sweet. Ask the group to repeat after you: “O Lord, your commandments are sweeter than honey!” (see Psalm 19:10–11).

Give the middle schoolers time to look at their desert scenes and to imagine themselves in the desert. Ask them to be very still for a moment and to make up their own prayers to God.

3. At the end of the session, have the middle schoolers pour the water from their jar lids back into the pitcher. To arrange for taking the desert scenes home, give each young person a small plastic sandwich bag in which to carry the sand and the stones. The lid can then be carried separately.

# Prayers for Ordinary Time

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 10:25–37 (The Greatest Commandment and the Parable of the Good Samaritan)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** In this Gospel, Jesus tells us the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan was good because he helped someone in need.

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** Let us pray that we can all be Good Samaritans! Our response is, “Help us to be Good Samaritans, O Lord.”

**All:** Help us to be Good Samaritans, O Lord.

**Leader:** When we are tempted to use mean words against others . . .

**All:** Help us to be Good Samaritans, O Lord.

**Leader:** When we are tempted to leave others out . . .

**All:** Help us to be Good Samaritans, O Lord.

**Leader:** When we are tempted to bully others just because we can . . .

**All:** Help us to be Good Samaritans, O Lord.

**Leader:** When we are inspired to help someone who needs our help . . .

**All:** Help us to be Good Samaritans, O Lord.

**Leader:** When we are inspired to give something away to someone who needs it more than we do . . .

**All:** Help us to be Good Samaritans, O Lord.

**Leader:** When we are inspired to pray for all those who are hurting or in need . . .

**All:** Help us to be Good Samaritans, O Lord.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we learned that loving God, ourselves, and others is the meaning of the Gospel. Let us pray to live the Gospel each and every day:

Lord Jesus,

Thank you for telling us the story of the Good Samaritan. Help us to be Good Samaritans in our families, our schools, and with our friends and neighbors. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for showing us the way. Amen.



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose several readers to take turns reading this Gospel passage. You may want to take the part of Jesus in verses 10 through 36, the story of the Good Samaritan.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response, noting that we will be hearing more about what it means to be a Good Samaritan in the Gospel reading.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated.

Introduce the reading with the words given, or in your own words.

At the close of this prayer, collect the handouts and set them aside for the closing prayer.

(An activity for Ordinary Time, featuring the Parable of the Good Samaritan, can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Preparation

This closing prayer is based on the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner and distribute the handouts. Explain that in this prayer we ask Jesus to help us to do good to others, to be Good Samaritans, each and every day.

### Pray

Invite the group to pray the prayer together.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



## Activity for Ordinary Time

### *Loving the “Unlovable”*

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 10:25–37. The middle schoolers will uncover Jesus’ message about showing love for God and neighbor, even those we consider unlovable.

**Gather the Following Items:** No items needed for this activity.

**Breaking Open the Word:** Ask the group to open their Bibles to the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 10, verses 25–37. Explain that this Gospel story is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Explain that Jesus told this story to teach us about loving God and our neighbor. Remind them that during Jesus’ time, under ordinary circumstances, the Samaritans and the Jews would have nothing to do with one another. In this parable, Jesus answers the question, “Who is my neighbor?” What is the answer?

1. Arrange the young people into small groups of five. (This can be done at random, by having the middle schoolers count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or by your arranging groups to have a balance of personalities and talents.) Explain that they will be acting out a modern version of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Brainstorm ideas as a large group by asking questions like the following:
  - The Samaritans and the Jews were on opposite sides. Who in our time is on opposite sides? Think of a situation where a person on one side would need help from a person on the other side.
  - The Jewish man was abandoned on the side of the road. Who in our time is abandoned by friends, family, classmates, society, etc.? Think of a situation where someone abandoned by others could be helped.
  - The priest and the Levite had “good reasons” to pass by someone in need. What “good reasons” do we have for passing someone by who might need our help? What do we need to think, say, or do to overcome our “good reasons”?

2. Assign each group a separate area of the room. Give the middle schoolers about 15 to 20 minutes to create their skits and assign roles. Urge them to make up dialogue as well. Circulate among the groups to offer advice and encouragement.
3. Ask the groups to present their skits. Allow time after each one for discussion. Particularly commend the skits that comment on the everyday life of the middle schooler.
4. Arrange, if appropriate, for the groups to present their skits to another group of middle schoolers or to a group of younger people.

# Prayers for Lent

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 15:11–32 (The Parable of the Lost Son)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** In this Gospel, Jesus tells us the Parable of the Lost Son. A father had a son who ran away and spent all his money. When the son had nothing left, he came back to his father and said, “I’m sorry. Please forgive me.”

**Reader:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** Sometimes we have to say, “I’m sorry,” to God our Father. We can say, “I’m sorry, Father. Please forgive me.”

**All:** “I’m sorry, Father. Please forgive me.”

**Leader:** When we have made bad choices and done wrong, we can say,

**All:** “I’m sorry, Father. Please forgive me.”

**Leader:** When we have disobeyed parents, grandparents, or others in charge of us, we can say,

**All:** “I’m sorry, Father. Please forgive me.”

**Leader:** When we have hurt friends with unkind words or actions, we can say,

**All:** “I’m sorry, Father. Please forgive me.”

**Leader:** At one time or another, we are all like the son. We all make bad choices and need forgiveness. God our Father is always waiting for us, hoping we will return and ask forgiveness, especially in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. After we are forgiven, we have every reason to celebrate!

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we heard the Parable of the Lost Son, sometimes called “The Forgiving Father.” When the son asked forgiveness, the father forgave him. This is what God our Father is like. In the Our Father, Jesus taught us to ask forgiveness of God, just as we forgive others. And when we forgive others, we are being just like God! Let us pray the prayer to God our Father that Jesus taught us:

**All:** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose several readers (including yourself) to read the entire Parable of the Lost Son, Luke 15:11–32. Or, choose volunteers to be the Father, the Son, and the Older Son. Instruct them to act out the story as you read it.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response. Ask the middle schoolers to listen for the part of the Gospel story in which the son says similar words to his father.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the reading with the words given, or in your own words.

(An activity for Lent can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Preparation

This prayer is based on the Parable of the Lost Son and includes the Our Father, the prayer Jesus taught us.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Explain that the closing prayer is the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that Jesus taught us. In this prayer we ask God our Father to forgive us, and we promise to forgive others.

### Pray

Lead the middle schoolers in prayer.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



## Activity for Lent

### *What's Up with Lent?*

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 15:20–24. The middle schoolers will choose ways to live and grow in their Catholic faith during Lent.

**Gather the Following Items:** one square sheet of white paper for each young person (the larger the square, the larger the flip game); a felt-tip pen or thin marker for each middle schooler, preferably a purple one (*Note:* The paper must be exactly square for this game to work.)

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the group open their Bibles to the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 15, verses 20–24. Explain that this passage is part of the Parable of the Lost Son—being sorry and choosing to change to be better. This is our challenge during the season of Lent: to be true to our baptismal promises, to follow Jesus into the desert in prayer, and to find ways to help others.

1. Gather the group for a brainstorming session. Ask, (How can we live our faith and grow closer to Jesus during Lent? What special things can we do for someone else?) Make a list of these on the board.
2. Distribute a square sheet of paper to each young person. As you demonstrate the following folds, ask the middle schoolers to do the same with their squares of paper: Placing the square on the desk, fold the paper by taking the two corners that are closest and joining the pointed corners in the center of the square. Explain that pressing down the fold will make a tight fold. Do the same with the other two corners.
3. Now have the middle schoolers turn the paper over so that the folds are face down on their desks. Instruct them to take each pointed corner and make a tight fold towards the center of the square. The young people should have a perfect square. Keeping the folds facing them, instruct the young people to fold the square in half so there are two open flaps facing up. Now have them turn the folded paper over to see the other two open flaps.



4. On the top flaps, ask the middle schoolers to write words associated with Lent (for example: *Lent, Triduum, forty, desert*). For the flip game, they will choose a word and spell it as they move their fingers for each letter. Inside the top flaps, ask the young people to write numbers 1 through 8. In the game, they will choose a number and move their fingers for that amount.
5. Direct the young people to refer to the list of ideas gathered in the brainstorming session. Have them choose eight different ways they want to live and grow in their faith during Lent. (These ideas will include prayer, “giving up” something they like, and helping others.) Instruct them to write these ideas on the eight, inside-hidden triangle flaps.
6. Demonstrate the finger-flip game. Have the middle schoolers place their pointer fingers in the two front flaps and their thumbs in the two back flaps. Direct them to move their fingers together to close the paper square completely. Show them how to stretch their thumbs and pointer fingers at the same time to open and close the folded game. Then, as the young people move their fingers while also keeping a tight hold inside the flaps, tell them to gently pull their hands apart to open the folded game in the other direction. (Allow the group to get familiar with these movements and warn the middle schoolers to be careful not to tear the paper.) After the young people choose and spell a word on the top flap and count a number from the inside flap, ask them to choose another number and lift the flap to reveal the activity they will do for that week of Lent. Encourage the middle schoolers to use this game each week (or daily) during Lent as a reminder of their choices to live and grow in their faith.

# Prayers for the Annunciation of Mary

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 1:26–38 (Announcement of the Birth of Jesus)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** In this Gospel passage, we learn that an angel was sent to Mary to give her a very special message. Mary was going to be the mother of God's Son, and she was to name him Jesus!

**Reader:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** Mary said yes to God, and she can help us when we pray, "Mary, help us to say yes to God."

**All:** Mary, help us to say yes to God.

**Leader:** Saying yes to God means following Jesus and keeping on the right path, no matter what.

**All:** Mary, help us to say yes to God.

**Leader:** Sometimes life is hard. Sometimes we have problems at home, or we have a hard time in school. During hard times, it is more important than ever to follow Jesus and stay on the right path. It is also important to share our problems with our parents or another trusted adult.

**All:** Mary, help us to say yes to God.

**Leader:** Sometimes life brings wonderful surprises. We go on a family vacation, or grandparents come for a visit, or we celebrate a birthday. During happy times, we follow Jesus and stay on the right path.

**All:** Mary, help us to say yes to God.

**Leader:** Each and every day, in each and every way,

**All:** Mary, help us to say yes to God.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** We are happy today, because we share in Mary's happiness at being chosen to be the Mother of God. Let us pray the prayer that especially honors Mary and asks her help:

**All:** Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose one or more readers to read the passage from the Gospel of Luke.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the reading with the words given, or in your own words. At the close of the prayer, collect the prayer handouts. Set them aside for the closing prayer (if the middle schoolers do not yet know the Hail Mary by heart).

(An activity for the Annunciation of Mary can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

This ancient prayer is based on the angel's words to Mary at the Annunciation.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Explain that the closing prayer is a well-known prayer to Mary. Distribute the handouts, but encourage those who know it by heart to set aside their papers. (Allow those who do not yet know the Hail Mary to take the prayer handouts home. You may want to pray this prayer frequently with the group as an aid to learning it by heart.)

### Pray

Lead the group in prayer.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



## Activity for the Annunciation of Mary

### *Message Received!*

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 1:26–38. The middle schoolers recognize the importance of angels, God’s messengers.

**Gather the Following Items:** quiet instrumental music; a large poster on which a large set of wings has been drawn with markers; a camera or smart-phone; 8½-x-11-inch paper; a marker for each young person (The wings on the poster board should be separated so that a middle schooler can stand between them and have a photo taken, holding a scroll with words written on it. The middle schooler will then look like a messenger-angel. The Internet provides examples of drawings of angel wings. Or, a costume store may have a pair of angel wings that the young people can wear for their photos.)

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the young people open their Bibles to the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 1, verses 26–38. Explain that this passage is the announcement of the birth of Jesus. On March 25 (which is nine months before the celebration of the birth of Jesus on December 25), we celebrate the feast of this announcement made to Mary. The feast is called the Annunciation.

1. Explain that the Angel Gabriel was a messenger-angel. He came with a special message to Mary. God still sends messages today. Sometimes we have ideas to do good, or to do something special for someone, or to improve our own lives. These messages could come from the Holy Spirit, but they might also come from our guardian angel or from a messenger-angel that God has sent to us. When we have good ideas, we should pay attention to them.
2. Distribute a sheet of white paper and a marker to each middle schooler. While playing quiet instrumental music, ask the young people to think about their lives and the people they know. Ask them: “If a messenger-angel from God spoke to you today, what do you think the angel would say?” They may think of a message

of their own or use one from the Scripture passage. Remind the middle schoolers that even before he delivered his important message, the Angel Gabriel told Mary, "Don't be afraid." Explain that the message to them might be to do something special for someone, or to help out at home. Other messages from the Scripture event the middle schoolers might choose include:

- "Peace be with you!"
  - "The Lord is with you."
  - "The Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28)
  - "Don't be afraid."
3. Ask the middle schoolers to write their message in large letters on the paper. If they need more paper, ask them to attach a second sheet to the bottom of the first with clear tape. This will make a longer sheet of paper. (The middle schoolers should not write on the back of the first sheet.)
  4. Ask the young people to roll their messages up loosely so that they look like scrolls. Have each young person stand in front of the poster-board wings, holding open their scrolls so that the message can be read. Take a photo of each young person posing as a messenger-angel displaying the personalized message. (If a middle schooler does not want to share the message, it can remain rolled up as a scroll in the photo.)
  5. Ask permission to send the photos to parents. Close the session with three Hail Marys (or pray the closing prayer on the "Prayers for the Annunciation of Mary" handout [Document #: TX005877]). Remind the students that this prayer originated from the message of the Angel Gabriel to Mary.

# Prayers for Palm/Passion Sunday

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 21:1–11 (The Entry into Jerusalem)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** In this Gospel, we read that Jesus was welcomed by the crowds. They were so happy that he had come to them! They cried out their praises.

**Reader:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** We too can welcome Jesus into our hearts. We too can say: “Praise to Jesus! Praise be to God!”

**All:** Praise to Jesus! Praise be to God!

**Leader:** At every Eucharist, we praise Jesus. We thank him for coming to us. We say: “Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest” (*Roman Missal*).

**All:** Praise to Jesus! Praise be to God!

**Leader:** At every Eucharist, we praise Jesus. We pray to the Father in Jesus, with Jesus, and through Jesus. In every Eucharist, we become one with Jesus.

**All:** Praise to Jesus! Praise be to God!

**Leader:** At every Eucharist, Jesus enters into our hearts. We pray, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof” (*Roman Missal*). We pray for healing.

**All:** Praise to Jesus! Praise be to God!

**Leader:** Thank you, Jesus, for coming to Jerusalem. Thank you for coming to us in every Eucharist.

**All:** Praise to Jesus! Praise be to God!

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we gave praise and honor to Jesus. We promised to honor him all during Holy Week. Let us offer this prayer of praise from the Mass, as we pray with the whole Church.

**All:**

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

*(Roman Missal)*

(The quotations on this handout are from the English translation of *The Roman Missal* © 2010, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation [ICEL] [Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011], pages 532, 669, and 532, respectively. Copyright © 2011, USCCB, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright holder. Used with permission of the ICEL.)



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose a reader or several readers to read the passage from the Gospel of Matthew.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response. Explain to the middle schoolers that the word *Hosanna*, which they may hear today, means, "Praise!"

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated.

Introduce the prayer with the words given, or in your own words. At the close of this prayer, collect the prayer handouts and set them aside for the closing prayer.

(An activity for Palm/Passion Sunday can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Preparation

This prayer is an acclamation found at the end of the Preface at every Eucharist. It directly quotes the words of the crowds in Jerusalem as they greeted Jesus.

### Gather

Gather the group in the Bible corner. Explain that the closing prayer is a prayer of praise that we say at every Eucharist. The word *Hosanna* means "Praise!"

### Pray

Invite the middle schoolers to pray the prayer together, or to repeat each line after you.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



# Activity for Palm/Passion Sunday

## *We Honor Jesus*

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 21:1–11. The middle schoolers make a booklet summarizing the events of Holy Week, beginning with Palm/Passion Sunday.

**Gather the Following Items:** 8½-x-11-inch sheets of purple construction paper, one sheet for each middle schooler; green, yellow, brown, and white construction paper for the young people to share glue or clear tape; black pens or thin markers; templates for a palm, a chalice, a Host, a plain cross, and a sunburst or “burst of light” (*Optional:* an appropriate illustration or vector of the resurrected Jesus, which can be found online; the “Holy Week Events” handout [Document #:TX005879])

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the group open their Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 21, verses 1–11.

1. Explain to the middle schoolers that all the people were happy to see Jesus. Even the children were waving palm branches to honor him. Today is the beginning of Holy Week. We will make special booklets to remind ourselves of the important events of this week, especially the events of Palm/Passion Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.
2. Distribute the purple construction paper. Instruct the group to fold it in half horizontally. Explain that the cover (the top half-sheet) will depict Palm Sunday.
3. Distribute the green construction paper. Ask the middle schoolers to trace a palm-shaped template onto the green paper, cut it out, and paste it on the cover (or see option below). Instruct them to write “Palm/Passion Sunday” at the bottom of the page, in black. (Templates can be found online, or you can make your own template.)

*Optional:* To make each template a “3-D pop-up,” fold small pieces of paper back and forth, like an accordion, about ¼-inch in height. Tape or glue one end of this accordion to the page and the other end to the back of the template. Use a balanced number of such accordions so that the template will remain level. The accordions will allow the template to “bounce” on the page.



4. Distribute yellow and white construction paper with a chalice template and a large round circle (the Host template). Ask the middle schoolers to trace the chalice template onto yellow paper and the Host template onto white paper. Ask them to glue these to the inside of the front cover of the booklet (or to use the accordions option from step 3). Instruct them to write, "Holy Thursday" in black, at the bottom.
5. Distribute the brown construction paper with the cross template. Ask the middle schoolers to trace the cross template onto the brown paper, cut it out, and paste it to the next page of the booklet (or use the accordions option). Instruct them to write, "Good Friday" in black, at the bottom.
6. Distribute the yellow construction paper and the sunburst template. (This template could be an actual sun shape, or just a large yellow shape with jagged edges to form a "sunburst" shape.) Ask the middle schoolers to trace this sunburst shape onto the yellow paper, cut it out, and paste it to the back page of the booklet (or use the accordions option). Instruct them to write, "Easter Sunday" in black, at the bottom.

*Optional:* If you find an appropriate image of the risen Jesus online, it can be copied, cut out, and pasted onto the sunburst shape on this page.

7. Discuss the booklets as a group. Go through each page, reminding the middle schoolers of the events of that day.

*Optional:* You may want to distribute a synopsis of the events of Holy Week (see the handout "Holy Week Events" [Document #: TX005879]), which can be folded into the booklet. Have available the times your parish will be gathering for the liturgy on these special days. Ask the middle schoolers to write the times down on the handout page next to the description of the liturgical event. Be sure to include the time designated for the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday! Explain that this is the holiest and most beautiful night of the year, when, all around the world, the entire Church gathers to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. Encourage them to be present there with their families!

8. Instruct the middle schoolers to take the booklets home and show them to their families, along with the optional handout "Holy Week Events" (Document #: TX005879). Encourage them to explain the meaning of each of the symbols they have pasted into their booklets.

# Holy Week Events

## Palm/Passion Sunday

On this Sunday, we participate in welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem and into our lives. We recognize Jesus as our Messiah and Savior, and sing: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” On this Sunday, we also listen to the reading of the Lord’s Passion—his agony, his trial, and his Crucifixion. The same crowd who welcomed him with palm branches are now screaming, “Crucify him!” We pray for the grace to follow Jesus no matter what!

**Times to remember:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Holy Thursday

Today the Chrism Mass is celebrated by the bishop at the cathedral. On this day, the sacramental oil is blessed. This is the holy oil needed for the sacraments in every parish in the diocese. The priest in each parish takes some of the oil back with him to use in the parish.

In our own parish, we will celebrate the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper. At this Mass, we celebrate Jesus’ institution of the Holy Eucharist, when he changed ordinary bread and wine into his Body and Blood. This is a very joyful Mass, because we are so grateful that Jesus left us this great Gift of Himself. Usually all the bells in the church are rung during the Gloria, and then the bells are silent until they are rung again on Easter Sunday.

**Times to remember:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Good Friday

Today we remember the day Christ died for us on the cross. In our homes, we try to be as quiet and as prayerful as possible. This is not a day for TV or video games. It is a day to thank Jesus for his life and his death for us. Some people take time this day to clean the house in preparation for Easter. Others visit several churches in a sort of pilgrimage around their hometown. See if you can help out at home, and then go to afternoon or evening Good Friday services. These services, including the veneration of the cross, are prayerful and powerful. There is no Mass today, because the sacrifice we offer today is Jesus’ death on the cross. Instead, we receive Holy Communion from Hosts consecrated on Holy Thursday.

**Times to remember:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Holy Saturday

This is another day of preparation, as we look forward expectantly to the Easter Vigil tonight. At the Easter Vigil, the new fire is lit, the new water is blessed, the catechumens are baptized and become neophytes (new Catholics), we renew our own baptismal promises, and we celebrate newness of life in the Resurrection of Jesus! It is the most beautiful night of the year! Come and celebrate!

**Times to remember:** \_\_\_\_\_



# Prayers for the Easter Season

**Scripture Focus:** John 10:11–16 (The Good Shepherd)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** Jesus is our Good Shepherd, who died and rose for us. He knows his sheep, and we know him. He calls us by name.

**Reader:** A reading from the Gospel according to John.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passage above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** We want to listen to Jesus and follow him. Let us respond in prayer,

“We will listen and follow. Alleluia!”

**All:** We will listen and follow. Alleluia!

**Leader:** When we face choices to do good or to do wrong, help us, Good Shepherd, and call us by name.

**All:** We will listen and follow. Alleluia!

**Leader:** When we feel alone and are looking for a friend, help us, Good Shepherd, and call us by name.

**All:** We will listen and follow. Alleluia!

**Leader:** When we are concerned for others who are sick or in need, help us, Good Shepherd, and call us by name.

**All:** We will listen and follow. Alleluia!

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we learned that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who cares for us, his sheep. Let us pray to him, who died and rose for us:

**All:** Good Shepherd, you know us and love us.

Help us to stay close to you always.

Help us to listen to your voice and follow wherever you lead us.

We ask this in your name, Good Shepherd. Amen.



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose a reader to read the passage from the Gospel of John.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts. Briefly rehearse the prayer response. Remind the group that *Alleluia* means “Praise God!” and is a special Easter acclamation of praise.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the reading with the words given, or in your own words. Collect the handouts and set them aside for the closing prayer.

(An activity for the Easter Season can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner. Distribute the handouts. Explain that this closing prayer asks Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to take care of us and to help us follow him.

### Pray

Lead the group in prayer. Ask the group to pray the prayer with you.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



# Activity for the Easter Season

## *The Good Shepherd*

**Scripture Focus:** John 10:11–16. The middle schoolers play a game based on the Scripture passage, and then they make sheep with marshmallows. (*Optional:* If you have access to a kitchen, you can make s'mores with the group.)

**Gather the Following Items:** a picture of Jesus, the Good Shepherd; a picture of a sheep, perhaps pasted on cardboard for sturdiness; one or two bags of both large and small marshmallows; toothpicks, several for each middle schooler; if making s'mores, graham crackers and chocolate bars, as needed

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the middle schoolers open their Bibles to the Gospel of John in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 10, verses 11–16.

1. Explain that the passage from Scripture today tells us that Jesus is the Shepherd who died and rose for us, his sheep. Jesus wants us to be with him, now and forever, as part of his flock.
2. Explain that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Show the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Explain that shepherds care for sheep and defend them from wolves and thieves. Explain that in some parts of the world, people are still shepherds.
3. Bring out the cardboard sheep. Explain that this sheep is straying away from the flock and is going to be lost. Ask the group to close their eyes. Quietly tap one middle schooler on the shoulder and give him or her the sheep to hide under books or in his or her desk. Ask the group to open their eyes. Explain that you have hidden the lost sheep in someone's desk. Ask: "Who can find the lost sheep? Who has it?" Give volunteers two guesses. When the sheep is found, hide it again, and repeat as time permits.
4. When the game is over, hand out the marshmallows and toothpicks and have each middle schooler make her or his own sheep. If you have access to a kitchen, consider making s'mores for a treat. Explain that the graham cracker is the field, the chocolate is the ground, and the marshmallow is the sheep.

# Prayers for Pentecost

Scripture Focus: Galatians 5:13–15 and 22–23 (Freedom for Service)

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us begin with the Sign of the Cross.

**All:** In the name of the Father . . .

**Leader:** We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation. Let us listen to hear all the good gifts we are given as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

**Reader:** A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Galatians.

*Reader then reads the Scripture passages above from Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics.*

**Leader:** Let us thank the Holy Spirit for all of his good gifts and fruits as we pray:

“Thank you, Holy Spirit.”

**All:** Thank you, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** For your fruits of love, joy, and peace,

**All:** Thank you, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** For your fruits of patience, kindness, and goodness,

**All:** Thank you, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** For your fruits of faithfulness and humility,

**All:** Thank you, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** For your fruit of self-control,

**All:** Thank you, Holy Spirit.

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Today we celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and to us in Baptism and Confirmation. We each received a special fruit of the Holy Spirit. Let us close with a prayer to the Holy Spirit:

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with your love. Help us to share the fruits of the Spirit with all we meet. We ask this (*make the Sign of the Cross*) in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



# Ritual Guide

## Opening Prayer

### Preparation

Choose a reader to read the passage from Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

*Optional:* Choose an appropriate song to begin and end the prayer.

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner. Distribute the prayer handouts if needed. Briefly rehearse the prayer response. Remind the group that they received the Holy Spirit in Baptism and will be preparing to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. Explain that if they follow Jesus, the fruits of the Holy Spirit will be seen in their actions.

### Pray

Begin with the Sign of the Cross as indicated. Introduce the prayer with the words given, or in your own words. Collect the handouts and set them aside for the closing prayer.

(An activity for Pentecost can be found in chapter 10 of the *Breakthrough! Leader Guide*.)

## Closing Prayer

This prayer is based on and integrated into the activity offered for Pentecost. However, the introduction and prayer can be adapted to summarize the main point of any session about the Holy Spirit.

### Gather

Gather the middle schoolers in the Bible corner. Explain that in the closing prayer we are asking the Holy Spirit to come to each of us and to help us share his fruits of love, peace, and joy, and all the other fruits he gives us.

### Pray

Lead the group in prayer.

*Optional:* End with the song you chose for the opening prayer.



## Activity for Pentecost

*Come, Holy Spirit!*

**Scripture Focus:** Galatians 5:22–23. The middle schoolers review the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and also in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Each middle schooler chooses one of the fruits of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22–23.

**Gather the Following Items:** a tray; index cards, enough for each young person to have one, with one fruit of the Spirit from today's Scripture verse written on it (duplicates are fine); a recording of a Holy Spirit song and the appropriate equipment to play it (Check sacramental records of the middle schoolers in preparation for the discussion of Baptism and Confirmation.)

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the middle schoolers open their Bibles to the Letter to the Galatians in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 5, verses 13–15 and 22–23. Explain that today we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, with each young person receiving a "fruit of the Spirit" as we hear in Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

1. Explain to the group that before Jesus ascended into Heaven, he promised that the Holy Spirit would come down upon the Apostles to help them spread the Good News. (*Optional:* Have the young people find and read Acts of the Apostles 2:1–4 in their Bibles.)
2. Explain that we also have received the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and the strengthening of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. Note that most people are baptized when they are infants. Most of us are confirmed in our teen years. (*Note:* If any middle schoolers were baptized later than infancy and still remember it, you might ask them ahead of time if you can mention this and ask them to recall the experience.)



## Activity for Pentecost

### *Come, Holy Spirit!*

**Scripture Focus:** Galatians 5:22–23. The middle schoolers review the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and also in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Each middle schooler chooses one of the fruits of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22–23.

**Gather the Following Items:** a tray; index cards, enough for each young person to have one, with one fruit of the Spirit from today's Scripture verse written on it (duplicates are fine); a recording of a Holy Spirit song and the appropriate equipment to play it (Check sacramental records of the middle schoolers in preparation for the discussion of Baptism and Confirmation.)

**Breaking Open the Word:** Have the middle schoolers open their Bibles to the Letter to the Galatians in the New Testament. Direct them to find chapter 5, verses 13–15 and 22–23. Explain that today we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, with each young person receiving a "fruit of the Spirit" as we hear in Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

1. Explain to the group that before Jesus ascended into Heaven, he promised that the Holy Spirit would come down upon the Apostles to help them spread the Good News. (*Optional:* Have the young people find and read Acts of the Apostles 2:1–4 in their Bibles.)
2. Explain that we also have received the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and the strengthening of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. Note that most people are baptized when they are infants. Most of us are confirmed in our teen years. (*Note:* If any middle schoolers were baptized later than infancy and still remember it, you might ask them ahead of time if you can mention this and ask them to recall the experience.)

# Chapter 11

## Word and Sacrament: Scriptural Preparation for the Sacraments

Most young adolescents in the middle school years (grades 6–9) have received the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Most have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The next sacramental milestone is the Sacrament of Confirmation and, for most middle schoolers, that Sacrament is scheduled for the high school years.

So why should we include a chapter on sacramental preparation and Scripture in this guide for middle school teachers and catechists? For one reason or another, a few of your middle schoolers may have not yet received the Sacrament of Reconciliation or the Eucharist. Some may be so new to the Church that they have not yet been baptized. Your parish may or may not have a program for preparing young people for the Sacraments of Initiation. Even if such preparation is offered, it may happen that your middle schoolers, are unable to participate.

If you, as an instructor or catechist, are called upon to prepare a middle school student for one of the Sacraments, you will find this chapter helpful. This chapter consists of a simple listing of those Scripture passages that highlight each of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation and also the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These lists can be a great resource. Because the Scripture passages are not, like the usual religious education program, geared to a specific age-group, they will appeal to a middle schooler who might resent learning about the Sacraments from a textbook geared to second graders.

These lists include suggested passages from Scripture relating to Confirmation, the Holy Spirit, and our life in the Church. Even if your middle schoolers will not be receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation for some years, you may want to remind them, through these passages, that they have already received the Holy Spirit in Baptism. The Scripture passages presented in this chapter in the Confirmation list will help them understand the Sacrament of Baptism in a deeper way and will also help them begin to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit, in all fullness, in Confirmation.

If you are using a basal textbook for your catechetical instruction, you may want to check to see if any of the passages listed in this chapter as appropriate for sacramental preparation can be found in your text, even in an abbreviated or paraphrased version. If so, you may want to use the entire Scripture passage as given in these reference lists. Introduce the passage in its fullness by asking your middle schoolers to find that same passage in their Bibles. A textbook mediates the event or passage; *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* enables your students to read the same event or Scripture passage for themselves, directly from the Bible. Linking Scripture to a particular Sacrament deepens understanding of not only the Bible passage but also that particular Sacrament. God communicates to us in both of these sacred gifts: Word and Sacrament.

## The Sacrament of Baptism

Scripture Passage	Description	Beginning Page
Genesis 6:9–9:17	Noah and the Flood	26
Exodus 14:5–29	The Israelites Cross the Red Sea	124 (art and interview, p. 125)
Matthew 3:13–17	The Baptism of Jesus	1561
Matthew 19:13–15	Jesus Blesses the Children	1592
Matthew 28:1–20	The Resurrection and the Great Commission	1610
Mark 1:1–8	The Preaching of John the Baptist	1631 (art and interview, p. 1632)
John 3:1–21	Jesus and Nicodemus: Born Again	1746
John 13:1–17	Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet	1768 (art and interview, p. 1769)
1 Corinthians 12:12–27	One Body, Many Parts	1892
Galatians 3:26–28	Union with Jesus in Baptism	1927

<b>Scripture Passage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Beginning Page</b>
Ephesians 4:1–6	One Faith, One Baptism	1937
Colossians 3:12–17	The New Life of the Christian	1954
1 John 3:11–18	Love for One Another	2036
Revelation 21:1–7	We Are God’s People	2072

## The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

In the Tradition of the Church, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is considered a renewal of Baptism, when our sins are again forgiven and we are restored to our grace-filled relationship with God. Many of the passages listed in the Baptism chart can easily be introduced into catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. However, the chart for Penance and Reconciliation highlights those Scripture passages emphasizing the forgiveness of sins, which are most often cited for preparation sessions in basal texts.

<b>Scripture Passage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Beginning Page</b>
Genesis 3:1–24	Adam and Eve Expelled from Eden	19 (art, p. 19)
Exodus 19:16—20:17	The Ten Commandments	134
Psalms 51	Prayer of Repentance	894
Matthew 3:13–17	The Baptism of Jesus	1561
Matthew 25:31–46	The Last Judgment	1602 (art, p. 1602)
Mark 2:1–12	The Healing of a Paralytic	1634
Mark 12:28–34	The Greatest Commandment	1656
Luke 7:36–50	The Pardon of the Sinful Woman	1596
Luke 10:25–37	The Greatest Commandment (The Good Samaritan)	1699 (art, p. 1699)

<b>Scripture Passage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Beginning Page</b>
Luke 15:11–32	The Parable of the Lost Son (The Prodigal Son)	1710 (art, p. 1711)
Luke 19:1–10	Zacchaeus the Tax Collector	1717
John 14:15–31	The Holy Spirit, the Advocate	1771
John 20:11–18	The Appearance to Mary of Magdala	1780 (art, p. 1781)

## The Sacrament of the Eucharist

The Eucharist is the “sum and summary of our faith” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1327) and the essential Scripture account for preparing candidates for this Sacrament is, of course, the account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. However, there are many other supporting texts associated with the Eucharist. Some emphasize God’s gifts to us throughout salvation history. Others specifically relate to the celebration of the Sacrament in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This chart lists the many accounts most often found in preparatory texts for preparing candidates for First Communion.

<b>Scripture Passage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Beginning Page</b>
Genesis 1:1–2:3	The Story of Creation	17 (art, p. 19)
Exodus 3:1–17	Moses and the Burning Bush	107 (art, p. 108)
2 Samuel 6:12–19	The Ark Brought to Jerusalem (David Dances before the Ark)	448 (art, p. 449)
Matthew 6:5–13	Teaching about Prayer	1566
Mark 10:46–52	The Blind Bartimaeus	1652
Mark 14:12–26	The Last Supper	1659 (art and interview, p. 1660)
Luke 4:16–22	The Rejection at Nazareth	1683
Luke 24:13–35	The Appearance on the Road to Emmaus	1729 (art, p. 1730)

<b>Scripture Passage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Beginning Page</b>
John 6:1–15	Multiplication of the Loaves	1752
John 13:1–17	The Washing of the Disciples' Feet	1768 (art, p. 1769)
Acts of the Apostles 2:1–42	The Coming of the Spirit	1796 (art, p. 1797)

## The Sacrament of Confirmation

The Sacrament of Confirmation completes the Christian initiation begun at Baptism. Although it is the practice in many dioceses to offer this Sacrament to high school adolescents, it may be helpful for some teachers and catechists of middle schoolers to consult the following list, as it highlights the work of the Holy Spirit throughout salvation history, particularly through the symbols of water, fire, breath, and the action of anointing. These symbols are noted in the description column.

<b>Scripture Passage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Beginning Page</b>
Genesis 1:1–2:3	The Story of Creation (vs. 2, wind)	17
Genesis 6:9–9:17	The Story of the Flood (water, sign of the Spirit and of Baptism)	26
Exodus 14:5–29	Crossing the Red Sea (water, Baptism)	124 (art, p. 125)
1 Samuel 16:1–13	Samuel Anoints David (anointing as sign of Spirit)	414
1 Kings 3:4–15	Solomon Asks for Discernment (right judgment, gift of the Holy Spirit)	484
1 Kings 18:16–39	God Answers Elijah with Fire (fire, sign of the Holy Spirit)	510
1 Kings 19:1–18	God Speaks to Elijah in a "Silent Sound" (the whisper of the Holy Spirit)	511

<b>Scripture Passage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Beginning Page</b>
2 Kings 4:8-37	Elisha Raises the Shunammite's Son (the Spirit as new life)	528
Psalms 150	Final Doxology (praise in the Spirit)	968
Matthew 3:13-17	The Baptism of Jesus (the Spirit as dove)	1561
Matthew 28:1-20	Baptism in the Name of the Trinity (v. 19)	1610
Mark 1:1-8	Baptism with the Holy Spirit	1631
Luke 4:16-22	The Spirit of the Lord upon Jesus	1683
John 3:1-21	Born of Water and the Spirit	1746
John 4:5-42	Living Water of the Spirit	1748 (art, p. 1749)
John 14:15-31	The Advocate	1771
Acts of the Apostles 2:1-42	The Coming of the Spirit	1796 (art, p. 1797)
Romans 12:1-8	Many Parts in One Body	1867
1 Corinthians 12:1-31	Spiritual Gifts	1892
Ephesians 4:1-6	Unity in the Body	1937
Revelation 21:1-7	The New Heaven and the New Earth	2072

# Chapter 12

## From Here to Home: Sharing Scripture with the Family

### Here to Home

The Word of God is central in the life of the Church. The Second Vatican Council says that family is the domestic Church (see *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium, 1965]*, 11). Indeed, the family is the first place the Word is received and the first place it is nurtured (see *National Directory for Catechesis*, 29.D.)

Thus it is important for us, as ministers of the Word, to support families and encourage their understanding of Scripture. In this chapter, we provide you with practical suggestions for helping the families of your middle schoolers to deepen their knowledge of the Word.

Here are some ways for you to connect what you do in the religious education session with what the middle schoolers experience in the home.

### Carry It Home

Give the middle schoolers a word, an image, or a question from Scripture that they can “carry” home, either tangibly or in their imagination. A carry-home can be anything that helps the middle schooler to remember the Scripture story or its message. For example, in the Scripture passage from the Gospel of John (1:35–51), Jesus says, “Come, and you will see” (v. 39). After discussing the story and what it is that Jesus wants us to “see,” provide each middle schooler with a 3-x-5-inch card and ask them to write these words of Jesus on it. Then ask that they take the card home and make a note (on the blank side of the card) whenever they “see” Jesus working in their lives. For instance, a middle schooler may write: “Monday at school: Jenna helped me when I didn’t understand my math.” Encourage the middle schoolers to share their cards with their families and to ask family members where they “see” Jesus.

As time and schedule permit, give the middle schoolers a chance to reflect on a Scripture passage or story and make their own choice of a word or phrase to carry home on an index card. Encourage them



to hang the card on a mirror or another special place where they will see it each day and be prompted to reflect on it again.

You can design a carry-home in any way that you choose. It might simply be an image of Jesus that the students “carry home” in their imagination. For instance, you may ask them to carry home an image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd or an image of Jesus feeding the five thousand.

Examples of other carry-homes include a craft, a song, a prayer from the back of *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*, a question to discuss with family, and so on.

### **Post It!**

A post-it is a type of carry-home that you can “post” in the home. Many homes use the refrigerator as a place to post handmade works of art, family photographs, and important reminders. What better place to post the Word of God—right there alongside all the other family information. Posting easy-to-remember phrases can help families, including their middle schoolers, to learn the Word of God, and can also prompt family discussion about Scripture.

Make a simple take-home handout with a word or phrase from the Bible passage you are studying. Or, you can ask the group to make their own flyers, handouts, or posters to be displayed on the refrigerator, on the bathroom mirror, or in the middle schoolers’ own rooms.

Another idea is to make a mini take-home and have the middle schoolers write a word or phrase on a small piece of paper to post at home. Sometimes smaller is better.

Furthermore, you will note that *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* provides you with age-appropriate phrases and words that are good for posting. Here are a few examples of possible post-its:

- “God replied to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’” (Exodus 3:14)
- “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:4–5)
- “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:9)
- “The LORD is my shepherd; / there is nothing I lack.” (Psalm 23:1)
- “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27)
- “I know mine and mine know me.” (John 10:14)

## Break Open Scripture at Home

In essence, whenever we talk about God's Word and what it means in our lives, we are doing a type of "breaking open the Word." We can always deepen our understanding of the Word by discussing it with others. Parents and children can grow in faith by reflecting together on the Word of God.

Help parents to see that talking about Scripture does not have to be a big, formal, complicated process. Encourage parents to use a simplified version of breaking open Scripture by asking middle school students these two questions:

- What did you hear?
- What did it mean?

Let's look at the purpose of these two simple questions, which can be asked anywhere!

**What did you hear?** Another way to ask the question might be, "What was the Scripture passage you heard today? What was the story?" The purpose of this question is to allow the middle schooler to talk about the Scripture passage. It really does not matter what words the adult uses; the point is to have the middle schooler tell the adult what he or she heard. The account of the story or passage may not be totally accurate, but it will tell what he or she *heard*. For example, in the account of Jesus' walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33), the dialogue might go something like this:

Parent: "What was the Scripture story about today?"

Middle schooler: "It was about Jesus walking on the water."

Parent: "What do you think about that?"

The middle schooler may dismiss the story ("Oh, I don't know"), change the subject, or actually offer an insight ("Jesus did that because he was God and he wanted to be with his friends"). The importance of talking about Scripture is not in the results, but the effort. Bringing up a scriptural topic reminds the middle schooler that this is an important topic for all of us.

**What did it mean?** Another way to ask this question is, "What is God's message?" The purpose of the question is to help the middle schooler grasp a message for life. In this example, the parent would try to lead the middle schooler to trust Jesus and turn to Jesus in times of trouble.

## **Build a Bible Corner at Home**

You probably have a Bible corner in the room, where you gather with your middle schoolers to pray and reflect upon the Word of God. Talk to your middle schoolers about the importance of the Bible corner and suggest that they make a simple Bible corner at home. Be sure to tell them to talk this over with a parent first. Remember, a Bible corner can be simple and temporary. In other words, it does not have to be a permanent fixture in the home. You can build it when you need it.

Many Catholics of the Eastern Church have an “icon corner” or “icon wall.” Favorite icons are hung on a wall, with a shelf beneath. On the shelf is placed a small vigil light, and perhaps a prayer book. This is where the family stands and prays morning and evening prayer together. A nearby bookshelf could hold the Bible. Many parishes publish the Scripture readings of the day so that parishioners can find these passages in their Bibles at home. Some families read the Gospel of the day as part of their evening table grace. The Bible corner or icon corner would be a good place to keep this list of daily Scripture readings, and to carry out a practice of daily reading, reflection, and personal as well as family prayer.

## **Live It!**

All in all, the most important thing you can do in sharing Scripture with families is to love and live the Gospel. You are already showing your commitment to the Gospel by being a catechist or instructor. Your middle schoolers and their families look to you as a model of discipleship. Keep up the good work!

# Acknowledgments

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The second excerpt on page 11 and the excerpt on page 18 are from the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum, 1965)*, numbers 25 and 12, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, Austin Flannery, general editor (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996). Copyright © 1996 by Reverend Austin Flannery.

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**Endnote Cited in a Quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition**

Chapter 2

1. *Dei Verbum* 25; cf. *Philippians* 3:8 and St. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri xviii* prol.: J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: 1841–1855) 24, 17B.

**Endnote Cited in a Quotation from *The Word of the Lord*, Number 42**

Chapter 3

1. *Propositio* 29.

