

Fourth Sunday of Lent

God Never Gives Up on Us

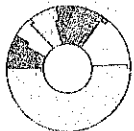
Focus: To turn from sin.

Catechist's Context

John 3:16 is, perhaps, the most familiar verse in all Scripture. We see it everywhere, even at sporting events. It is so profound, yet we often don't stop to think about the depth of God's love expressed in it. God did not spare his Son Jesus, who came to save us, not condemn us. Despite our human frailty and sin, God truly did not give up on us. Jesus' willing sacrifice brings us eternal salvation.

Focus on Church Teaching

God called human beings into relationship again and again, but they continued to turn away (FYH, p. 6). The Word of God became a human being and dwelled with us, revealing that "God is love" (GS, 38). The Word of God, the Son, showed the fullness of God's love on the cross and was glorified by the Father in the Resurrection (FYH, p. 6). Encountering this person, who is love, we come to believe and to live in God's love. In other words, this encounter makes us Christians (DCE, 1).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi-viii for more information about the saints). How did this saint live his or her

life according to Christ's example? How was this saint's life a testimony of God's love for humanity?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Verse before the Gospel

John 3:16

R/. Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

God loved the world so much, he gave his only Son, that all who believe in him might have eternal life.

R/. Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel

John 3:16-17

Refer to page x for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus told Nicodemus: "God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never die. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them!"

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

How Much God Loves Us!

Think about how you feel when you love. It's very easy to love someone who is always kind, who always obeys, who never gets angry, who always shares.

© Wouldn't you like to have a friend like that? Wouldn't you always want to visit that friend and play with him or her?

Now think about someone who is mean. Someone who disobeys or someone who doesn't share. Someone who gets angry and doesn't want to play.

© Would you like a friend like that? Would this person be easy to love?

But we all do those things sometimes. We all choose to do wrong things sometimes.

© Have you ever disobeyed your mom or dad?

© Have you ever decided not to share a toy?

© Have you ever said or done mean things to one of your friends?

Jesus knows we act like that sometimes. But he wanted to tell us something important about God. God doesn't just love the ones who are easy to love. God also loves the ones who can act mean or don't share. That means God loves all of us equally. When God looks at the things we do, he has to tell us that what we did was wrong, but because he loves us, he gives us a chance to change for the better and seek forgiveness. God wanted to give us an example of how we should behave and live. And so he sent us his Son Jesus. Before we disobey, try to remember that Jesus always did what God wanted him to do. Before we act mean, try to remember that Jesus was always kind, even to people who treated him badly. Before you keep something to yourself and don't share, try to remember that Jesus shared everything he had with those who needed him. He always thought of others first. Do you see how much God loves us? Even though we sometimes do things that are wrong, he will encourage us to change and come back to him. He helped people figure out how to do that when he sent Jesus to show us how to live. God shared his most special gift with us. We should thank God and try to follow Jesus. Today, we continue teaching and learning all that Jesus taught!

How Much Does God Love Us?

Have the children sit on the floor in a circle. Begin by asking, "How much do you think God loves us? God loves us more than ____." [Examples might be: "God loves us more than I love ice cream," "God loves us more than I love my pet," "God loves us more than I like to swing on the swings in the park."] Whatever examples the children offer, explain that God loves us more than anything we can think of. Stretch out your arms to replicate Jesus' arms stretched out on the cross to indicate how much God loves us. Point to a crucifix and show the children Jesus' arms spread on the cross. Now ask the children to stand with some space between them. Tell them to stretch out their arms. Ask the children to show others how much they love them, just like Jesus showed us how much God loves us.

Look to Jesus

Show the children how to make "binoculars" of their hands by curling their thumbs and fingers and holding these to their eyes. Teach them the following rhyme, and instruct them to hold their "binoculars" to their eyes every time the rhyme says: "Look."

Look to Jesus. Look, I say.

Look to Jesus every day.

Look to see what he would do.

Look and learn that he loves you.

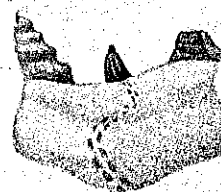
Remind the children that Jesus does love us, and we should always look at how he lived and what he taught to learn how we should live. Living like Jesus is a great joy!

Eucharistic Adoration

If your parish has adoration during the week, take the children to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for a few minutes. Before going to the church, explain briefly that Jesus is present in the form of the host within the monstrance. People come to the church, looking to Jesus to teach them, heal them, and strengthen them to do God's work in the world. Teach the children to genuflect as they enter and leave the church. Afterward, discuss how it feels to look toward Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus is the light of the world, the Son of God, the one who loves and saves us. Wherever we are, we can look to Jesus in our minds and hearts.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Fourth Sunday of Lent



Scripture Readings

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

Psalm 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6 (6ab)

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

Prayer before a Crucifix

Lord our God,
during this holy season of Lent,
renew in each of us
the grace of our Baptism.
May we realize that we are your sons
and daughters
and that, just as Christ lived a life
obedient to your will,
we too are called to a life of holiness,
love, and service.
Through prayer, fasting, and
works of mercy
transform our lives and renew
our hearts.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

?? Did You Know?

... that the Fourth Sunday of Lent is called Laetare Sunday? *Laetare* is a Latin word that comes from the entrance antiphon. The opening lines are "Laetare, Jerusalem," meaning "Rejoice, O Jerusalem." The color rose may be used as the liturgical color today. We are joyful and hopeful because Easter is near.

Conversation Questions

☉ God loves us so much he gave us Jesus. No matter how far we might stray from him, God won't give up on us. How should we live? Is it easy to live up to this kind of love?

☉ What is it about verse 3:16 that resonates with people? Why do you think it's so cherished and beloved?

Faith in Action

In the Gospel from the standard Lectionary, Jesus refers to the serpent that Moses lifted up in the desert. To better understand this reference, read Numbers 21:4-9. Like the bronze serpent, Jesus is lifted up, that when we look to him, we may be saved from the consequences of our own sin. If you don't already have one, place a crucifix in a prominent place in your home. Gather around it, and pray together. Discuss times in your family life when you most need to look to Jesus. By sharing your faith with your child, you provide a firm foundation for his or her own faith, something to which your child can cling throughout life.