

Presenting GOSPEL REACTIONS at the 10:30 AM REACH Liturgy

A hallmark of our REACH program is the connection between classroom lessons and the REACH liturgy. Our program consists not only of classroom instruction but also of instruction in and active student participation in the celebration of our special children's liturgy. We have both lessons and liturgy whenever we have REACH religious instruction. To increase their participation at Mass our Grades 4 – 6 children compose the Petitions throughout the REACH year and they present Gospel Reactions in the second half of the year, starting in January. Each classroom has a turn to present a Gospel Reaction according to the schedule with each teacher.

Gospel Reactions are a longstanding REACH tradition. A Gospel Reaction is the students' interpretation and expression, with the teacher's help, of the meaning of the Sunday's Gospel. It is an opportunity for the entire class to demonstrate the meaning of God's Word in your personal, everyday lives by acting out the Gospel, interpreting it, or in some concrete fashion illustrating the Gospel. The Gospel Reaction takes place immediately following the celebrant's reading of the Sunday Gospel.

Creating a Gospel Reaction involves important preparation with the class. We start with Grade 6, so that the earlier grades can observe and derive ideas from the Reactions of the older grades.

The following pages provide:

- * **Helpful Tips**
- * **A step-by-step plan for composing a Gospel Reaction**
- * **Specific suggestions for Gospel Reactions.**

The liturgy planners can give suggestions for a Gospel Reaction and help with the planning. Just ask in advance!

Helpful Tips for a Gospel Reaction

- **Limit the time of the Gospel Reaction!**
 - * Limit what is done to about 5 minutes, 8 minutes tops.
 - * Anything longer risks losing the attention of the other grades watching.
- **Keep it active!**
 - * It is ok to have the students read from handwritten or typed pages.
 - * However, interest is very hard to sustain when one student after another simply reads long paragraphs, once, twice, or three times over, with no movement.
 - * Try to design some movement into the Reaction! Make it an acted-out in some way versus mere recitation.

- **Help the students write the Gospel Reaction!**

- * When a teacher does all the writing for the Reaction, or when the Reaction is taken completely from a book or an article, however appropriate or fitting the book or article is, the students in the class may have little personal involvement and the "audience" at Mass may have little interest.
- * The goal is to get the students involved; to get the students to help plan the Reaction and, if at all possible, to help the students compose the Reaction. Make it their Reaction!

A Step-by-Step Plan

- 1.** Begin the Gospel Reaction preparation TWO TO THREE WEEKS BEFORE the scheduled Sunday.
 - a.** Read the Gospel for your Sunday. Read it several times.
 - b.** Consider bringing in or using the First Reading as well as or instead of the Gospel. Examples are: Jonah and the whale, Samuel being awakened to listen to the Lord, or the story of Abraham and Isaac.
 - c.** Begin to develop some ideas for a possible Reaction (see list below).
- 2.** The class session THE WEEK BEFORE the scheduled Gospel Reaction Sunday
 - a.** Explain to the students what a Gospel Reaction is (see explanation at the start of this document).
 - b.** Ask the students to take turns reading the Gospel.
 - c.** Discuss the Gospel as a class.
 - * What is the action in the Gospel? What takes place?
 - * Who speaks in the Gospel? What characters are involved?
 - * What is the Gospel's theme? Its message?
 - d.** Give the students a few suggestions for possible types of Reactions (see following list).
 - * Brainstorm what they would like to do. Make a list.
 - * Develop the Reaction by preparing speaking roles and a written outline of the class' actions.
- 3.** ON THE SCHEDULED SUNDAY practice the Reaction that has been developed.
 - a.** Practice several times so the students feel comfortable in their roles and/or speaking parts.
 - b.** Enjoy the practice! It is as important as the actual Gospel Reaction presentation itself.
 - c.** Bring the class to the church hall at 10:00 AM before Mass for one last practice right at the altar.
 - d.** Students should use the portable microphone on the lector's stand when they present.

(more)

Gospel Reaction Suggestions

ACTING OUT THE GOSPEL

- First of all, be realistic and stick with a simple script. It is easy to get overly detailed and run too long.
- Many Gospels tell a story. Act out the Gospel story as it is written.
 - * Create a Gospel story script and assign speaking parts to students – as Jesus, as disciples, as whatever characters are in the Gospel story, and with one student as narrator.
 - * For instance, simply act out the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, curing the Ten Lepers, chasing the merchants and moneylenders out of the Temple, or forgiving the woman caught in adultery.
- Add a modern day reporter to the scene and interview the characters in the Gospel story.
 - * For instance, for the Gospel story of the Prodigal Son, have a TV news crew interview the father, the Prodigal Son, the pig farmer, and the son who stayed home.
 - * For the Gospel story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, have a TV talk show discuss what happened with Peter and the disciples.
 - * For the Gospel when the Pharisees try to trip up Jesus with impossible questions, have a TV quiz show (“Stump Jesus!”) in which Pharisee narrators ask Jesus silly questions.
- Create an updated, modern version or application of the story.
 - * For instance, for the Gospel of Jesus casting out demons, compose a story about Jesus in today’s time casting out from people contemporary demons such as drug addiction or racism or being a bully.
 - * For the Gospel when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, have Jesus preach that to a TV talk show audience. The audience boos Jesus and says he’s got it all wrong, but other guests on the talk show tell the others to quiet down and listen to the man and the message of compassion.
- Compose a script based on the theme of the Gospel and set to the present time, a modern situation common to the children (school, sports, friends, etc.).
 - * For instance, for the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan, move the story to Wolfpit or Cranbury School where no one will welcome in a new student except for a Good Samaritan student who befriends the new student.
 - * For the Gospel about Jesus tempted by the devil in the desert, move the story to the present where a boy or girl are tempted to steal something, to lie to a friend, or to not do the next day’s homework for school.

INTERVIEWS

- Interview other people based on the theme of the Gospel.
 - * For instance, for the Gospel when Jesus called Peter, James, and John to follow him, have your students invite Fr. Dave or Joe into your classroom and ask how they heard God’s call and then report what they heard for the Reaction. Have your students ask you and another REACH teacher how you came to teach in the REACH program and then report what they heard.

- * For the Gospel when the Risen Jesus talks with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, invite into your classroom an older brother or sister of a student, or any TOTAL teen who has recently experienced the Emmaus Retreat. Have your students ask the older brother and sister the Emmaus weekend and what it meant to them, and report back.

PRAYERS

- Have the students write their own, short individual prayers based on the Gospel and then read them, one by one. These may turn out to be repetitive of each other, but that's ok.
 - * For instance, for the Gospel when Jesus tells the parable of the grain of wheat, coach the students to write short prayers about police or firefighters who are willing to sacrifice their lives so that others might live.
 - * For the Gospel about "You are the light of the world," coach student to write prayers about how they can make their light shine in the darkness through works of kindness to others.
 - * For the Gospel about the parable of the fig tree, coach students to write prayers about ways to change their behavior for the better in order to prepare for Easter during Lent.
- Compose together an entire class prayer based on the Gospel and
 - * read that prayer with some single voices and some group voices,
 - * or with two or three groups facing each other and reading, back and forth, selected parts of the class prayer.
 - * For instance, for the Gospel about the Good Shepherd, simply turn the exact sentences of that Gospel into a prayer. One group of 3-4 students reads verse 1, then one student says a refrain ("I am the good shepherd."), a second group reads verse 2, the one student says the refrain, group one reads verse 3, the one student says the refrain, and so on.
 - * For the Gospel when Jesus appears to his disciples after His resurrection and Thomas doubts the appearance, simply turn the spoken parts (the sentences in quotes) into a prayer, with alternating groups of 3-4 students speaking Jesus and Thomas said.
 - * For the Gospel when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, or for the Gospel when Jesus tells his disciples to "love one another as I have loved you," turn the entire sermon Jesus preached into a reverent prayer with alternating groups of 3-4 students speaking the sentences Jesus spoke.

VISUAL PRESENTATION

- Illustrate the Gospel story as it is being read by one student narrator
 - * using posters the students have made,
 - * collages they have pasted together from magazines,
 - * or photos you or they have taken.
 - * For instance, for the Gospel when Jesus tells us the Beatitudes, have students draw posters that show the merciful, the peacemakers, those who suffer injustice, etc.
 - * For the Gospel of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, have students find pictures of water in magazines. Paste each onto half sheets of

poster board. Ask the students to come up with reasons water is important. Conclude with one student quoting Jesus that anyone who drinks the water He gives us will never be thirsty.

- Make a large class sign, collage, or mural that the students explain.
 - * For instance, for the Gospel when Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit, write the letters of "Holy" (H, O, L, Y, etc.) vertically down a sheet of poster board and of "Spirit" vertically down a second sheet of poster board. Coach the students to come up with words that begin each letter and that reflect aspects of the Holy Spirit.
 - * For the Gospel when Jesus gives Simon his name of "Peter", investigate the origins of the first names of your students (use websites or library books). Have your students letter their names, their name meanings, and what they would have liked Jesus to call them on two or more sheets of poster board. Have them tell about their names and why they chose what they would have liked Jesus to call them.