

Scriptures

Matthew 22:15-21

Psalm 96

Trusting in God Alone

**God rules over all creation—including us.**

- ◆ Jesus cleverly answers a trick question with another question, teaching his listeners that God is the One to whom we owe thanks and praise.
- ◆ Praise is the natural prayer of young children. We adults may see the spectacular sunset, but young children are more likely to see the wonder in an ordinary rock they find on a walk.
- ◆ In today's session we consider God's gifts in creation and praise our Creator.

Question of the Week

What makes it hard to give to God?

Core Session

- ◆ Getting Started (*mural paper*)
- ◆ Gospel Story: God Makes Everything
- ◆ Psalm Poem
- ◆ Praying Together

Enrichment

- ◆ Discover the Good News
- ◆ Singing Together
- ◆ Movement
- ◆ Free-Play: Clay (*modeling material, 3 cloths: light blue, dark blue, green*)
- ◆ Info: Making a Space for Young Children
- ◆ Info: Young Children and the Gospel
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ The Scriptures and the Catechism
- ◆ New Psalms
- ◆ The World of the Bible: King Cyrus the Great

✓ Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Children work together to paint a mural of God's creation.

Tape a long strip of butcher paper or newsprint to a work surface. Spread newspapers underneath to protect the floor. Dress the children in smocks.

Ask the children to name wonderful things God has made. Encourage children to share their ideas. You can spur their imagination by asking about things that have wonderful colors, things with delicious smells, favorite animals, great places to walk and so on.

Ask the children to paint some of these things on the paper. If you like, you can add a title to the mural, such as *God's Good World*.

✓ Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

God Makes Everything

Story Focus: Use the mural painted in today's Getting Started activity as a visual focus for today's story. You will name items from the mural as part of the story. When you name those items, you can invite children to point to them, too.

Once some people asked Jesus a question.

"What belongs to God?" they asked. "What belongs to us?"

Jesus said, "God makes everything. (*Name items that the children have made. Use each item to complete this sentence: God makes...*) Everything belongs to God."

"Then what belongs to us?" the people asked.

"Everything on earth," said Jesus. "God gives you everything God makes."

"Can we give anything to God?" asked the people.

"Yes," said Jesus. "You can give God thanks and praise."

✓ Psalm Poem (10-20 minutes)

Children invent accompaniments to a rhythmic version of **Psalm 96**, a psalm that gives God thanks and praise for creation.

Gather children around the mural made in today's Getting Started activity. Explain that you want to teach part of a psalm from the Bible. Explain that, just like all his family and friends, Jesus used psalms to give God thanks and praise. Ask children to imitate your words and actions.

Say a line of the psalm, creating a rhythm and keeping time by clapping, rubbing one palm across the other or slapping your thighs. After you say the line, the children repeat it and the action together.

The bold-faced syllables show where to sound the beat:

Sing to the **L**ord a new **s**ong.

Sing to the **L**ord all the **e**arth.

Let the **s**ky **r**ejoyce.

Let the **e**arth be **g**lad.

Let the **s**ea make a **n**oise like **t**hunder.

Let the **f**ields show **j**oy.

Let the **t**rees give a **s**hout.

And **a**ll for **G**od who **m**ade them.

On subsequent lines, invite children to take turns choosing accompanying sound effects and motions.

✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Gather the children around the mural made in today's Getting Started activity. Invite children to name items from God's creation; use the mural to spark children's ideas.

Then thank God for all of creation, inviting the children to name things for which they are especially thankful. Close by praying:

- ◆ Thank you, God, for all good things you make.
Thank you especially for each friend in this group.
(*Name each child.*) Amen.

Note: Distribute this week's *At Home with the Good News* to children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.

□ Discover the Good News

(5-10 minutes)

On page 1 of today's *Discover the Good News*, you'll find an illustrated version of today's Psalm poem.

The picture on page 2 invites children to name things for which we can thank God.

□ Singing Together (5-10 minutes)

From *Singing the Good News*, sing together:

- ◆ "The Great Commandment" (songbook p. 8, also available as an MP3)
- ◆ the chorus of "Sing a New Song" (songbook p. 5, also available as an MP3)

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

You can also teach children the hymn "Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love." This beautiful hymn of fellowship is appropriate to the emphasis on outreach begun in the session for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

□ Movement (5-10 minutes)

Invite children to sing and make motions to the following song, sung to the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know It":

Verse one:

Oh, our God has made us all so let us sing!
Oh, our God has made us all so let us sing!
Oh, our God has made us all,
Oh, our God has made us all,
Oh, our God has made us all so let us sing!

(Children make broad gestures with one whole arm sweeping from one side to the other.)

Verse two:

Oh, our God has made the sky so let's rejoice!
Oh, our God has made the sky so let's rejoice!
Oh, our God has made the sky,
Oh, our God has made the sky,
Oh, our God has made the sky so let's rejoice!

(Children sweep arms back and forth over heads.)

Verse three:

Oh, our God has made the trees so clap your hands!
Oh, our God has made the trees so clap your hands!
Oh, our God has made the trees,
Oh, our God has made the trees,
Oh, our God has made the trees so clap your hands!

(Children clap their hands. End song by repeating the words and motions from the first verse.)

□ Free Play (10-15 minutes)

Clay

Activity Soundtrack: As children work, play the exuberant and majestic "Allegro" from Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto #3*, which is well suited to today's session in praise of our Creator. (Open your Fall-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.)

Before the session you can make play dough or baker's clay yourself. For play dough, mix together 1½ cups flour, ½ cup salt, ½ cup water and ¼ cup oil. Knead well. Use food coloring to tint the play dough. Store in plastic containers.

For baker's clay, mix together 4 cups flour and 1½ cups salt. Gradually add about 2 cups water, kneading and testing for consistency as you go. The clay is too dry if it does not hold together well. It is too wet if it is all sticky or does not hold a shape when you model with it.

Invite children to play with the clay. Spread three work surfaces with colored cloths, preferably washable vinyl tablecloths. Use light blue to represent the sky; dark blue to represent the sea; and green cloth to represent the earth.

Ask:

- ◆ What can we find in the sky? (*sun, moon, stars, birds, airplanes, rockets, planets, etc.*)
- ◆ What can we find in the ocean or sea? (*fish, whales, seaweed, lobsters, etc.*)
- ◆ What can we find on the earth? (*You may need to rephrase this question several ways; for example, "What can we find growing in the ground? What animals can we find in a field?"*)

Invite each child to choose one setting/work surface—*sky, sea* or *earth*. Ask children to fill the surfaces with things we can find in the sky, sea or earth. Encourage children to talk with you and with one another as they work.

Remark that the children have made many things, and that God makes many things, too. God is the one who makes the sky, sea and earth, and God is the one who makes everything in them.

INFO Making a Space for Young Children

As you continue to plan a comfortable environment for the children you teach, remember how small preschool children are. When possible, provide tables and chairs designed for their age group.

If that is not possible, think of alternatives that will be comfortable, such as carpet squares arranged around a couple of old coffee tables. Hang artwork, such as today's mural, at their eye level rather than yours. Whenever possible, get down on their level to greet them and talk to them throughout the session.

INFO Young Children and the Gospel

In today's gospel, Jesus answers a trick question. His questioners ask, "Should we pay taxes?" If Jesus answers yes, he loses favor with the common people, who hate the oppressive taxes. If Jesus answers no, he's in danger with the Roman authorities.

Jesus' answer is more subtle than it may appear. The inscription on the coin read *Caesar Dives*, which may be loosely translated as "divine Caesar." His injunction to give back to God what belongs to God forcibly reminds his listeners that thanks and praise belong to God, not Caesar.

For preschoolers and kindergartners, we focus on the truths underlying today's gospel:

- ◆ God, our Creator, makes everything.
- ◆ We can give thanks and praise to God.

Our session encourages recalling the many wonderful things God creates and suggests that our appropriate response is thanks and praise.

INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
 - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
 - Today's *Gospel Story*, to distribute or e-mail to children and their families.
 - Instructions for an alternative *Nature Placemats* craft activity.
 - Instructions for an alternate *Nature Dolls* craft activity.
 - Today's *At Home with the Good News*, to distribute or e-mail to families after the session.
- ◆ Open your Fall-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
 - Information on Fall-A's *Models of the Faith*.
 - A reproducible handout for parents titled *Nurturing Your Child's Spirituality*.
 - Further information on *The Gospel of Matthew*.

More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings assert the sovereignty of God over all human endeavor. In Isaiah, the prophet proclaims that God directs the affairs even of Israel's adversaries, causing them to act on God's behalf. Paul greets the congregation in Thessalonika with the assurance that God has chosen them for great works of faith. In today's gospel, Jesus deflects the Pharisees' malice by redirecting their thoughts to God's sovereignty.

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Today's reading tells of the Lord's choice of Cyrus as God's agent. Cyrus, king of Persia (559–530 BC), overthrew the Babylonian empire and ushered in a

“Let us recognize our weakness, knowing we cannot stand for the twinkling of an eye except with the protection of grace, and let us reverently cling to and trust only in God.”

—*Julian of Norwich*

more humane era in the treatment of subject peoples.

The prophet asserts that Cyrus unknowingly acts at the will of the Lord, even identifying Cyrus as God's “anointed” (v. 1), *messiah*.

This term had not yet acquired the special meaning given it in intertestamental Judaism or in Christianity, but it was a title reserved for the Davidic king. Here in the Old Testament is it used for someone outside the covenant people.

The prophet uses language from the Babylonian enthronement ceremony to emphasize that it is Yahweh, not the Babylonian god, who grasps Cyrus's “right hand” (v. 1) to make him king. It is for the sake of both Israel and of all people that the Lord has acted. As the Creator of all, God rules over all nations.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

Paul's stay in Thessalonika was relatively brief, and he left the new congregation exposed to attacks from local Jews and Gentiles. His concern for their welfare led him to send Timothy back to visit. His joy at Timothy's encouraging report is the occasion for this letter.

Paul adapts the ordinary Greek letter form to his own purposes. After saluting the recipients, he proceeds to a thanksgiving that he expands to express his sense of God's activity among them. He knows that God has chosen the Thessalonian Christians. The evidence of

their election lay in the power wrought by the proclamation of the good news.

Matthew 22:15-21

The posing of a question on the payment of the Roman tax was meant to force Jesus to declare himself in a way offensive to some group, for the Jewish people were bitterly divided on the issue. To advocate payment of the tax as legal, as did the Herodians (the supporters of the ruling family) whose policy was complete loyalty to Rome, would alienate the general populace.

At the other extreme, to advocate nonpayment, as did the Zealots, would signal treason and reinforce all the nationalist hopes and fears aroused by the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. (Resistance to taxes and the necessary census that preceded them was often the catalyst of insurrection). The Pharisees also hated the tax, which implied their submission to a pagan sovereign rather than to God.

Jesus asks his questioners to produce the coin, the Roman *denarius*, used to pay the tax. This coin, bearing the head of the emperor and an inscription declaring him divine, was itself offensive to the Pharisees as an example of an idolatrous image prohibited by the first commandment.

Jesus ironically counsels them to “give” (v. 21; literally, to “give back”) to the emperor what is his and to give back to God what is God's. Jesus refuses to take sides on the political issue, but uses the situation to address their failure to repay God with what belongs to God, as delineated in 22:34-40.

Reflection

The question put to Jesus in today's gospel sounds oddly contemporary. Some faithful Christians question whether to pay taxes that will be spent on war and destruction. Aren't we called to use our resources for what is life-giving, not life-threatening?

Jesus would probably continue to skirt the question as cleverly now as he did then. He knew that if he supported the Roman tax, his own people would find him traitorous. If he appeared to undermine Rome, the occupiers would whisk him off to a dungeon. His response is pure, mysterious genius. Thoreau commented on this passage that Jesus left hearers “no wiser than before as to which was which; for they did not wish to know.”

Their concern is limited to this world; Jesus, as always, tries to stretch his hearers beyond temporal concerns. What inscription is marked on the coinage of your life? he asks. Do you belong to God, in whose image you were made? Or have you sold out to lesser deities like the state or corporation?

The poet Rumi raises a similar concern, using a different metaphor:

*you set out to find God
but then you keep stopping for long periods
at mean-spirited roadhouses.*

The Scriptures and the Catechism

God’s work for the kingdom community often includes surprising help from persons who are not formally members. Sometimes it is hard to accept that God is actively at work beyond the boundaries of our Church in other religions and in the affairs of our social and political life (CCC, #27–29, 843, 848, 856).

Being concerned about the kingdom does not mean withdrawing from the political arena, but sanctifying it by infusing kingdom values into the laws of our nation (CCC, #852–905, 2044, 2244–46). We cannot simply do holy things, but we must do all things in a holy way (CCC, #904–07, 2471–74).

New Psalms

by Mary Lee Wile

During the 11th century, St. Romuald wrote in his “Brief Rule” for monks: “The path you must follow is in the Psalms; never leave it.” The psalms, the poetry of our Hebrew forebearers, have long been at the heart of monastic prayer. Encouraging those in faith formation to emulate this daily encounter with the psalms is to offer them light for their journey.

Inviting the group members to compose their own psalms can help them see their private journey as part of salvation history. An exercise that works well with both teens and adults is to write a single line from a psalm on a piece of paper, pass it to one person who adds a single line in response to the original, folds the paper so only the new line is visible, and passes it on. The psalm gets built line by line, each line written in response to the one before.

In a class of more than four or five people, start the original line in several places. This means that the original line from the psalm gets repeated when all of the lines join together; such repetition is actually in keeping with traditional Hebrew poetry.

Once it’s done, read the new psalm aloud. Ask what participants hear as a collective response, and what themes or ideas they hear woven through it. I’m continually astonished by the loveliness of the psalms these groups create through their woven words. Take their lines home, type them and begin each class with “their” psalm. Here are a few suggestions for the opening line:

- ◆ For God alone my soul in silence waits (Psalm 62:1a).
- ◆ As the deer longs for the waterbrooks, so longs my soul for you, O God (Psalm 42:1).
- ◆ You speak in my heart, Lord, and say ‘Seek my face’ (Psalm 27:11).

The World of the Bible

King Cyrus the Great

Cyrus the Great was king of Persia from approximately 559–530 BC. After conquering Babylon, he ushered

“You cannot be buried in obscurity: you are exposed upon a grand theater to the view of the world. If your actions are upright and benevolent, be assured they will augment your power and happiness.”

—*King Cyrus the Great*

in a more humane era in the treatment of subject peoples that contrasted with the cruel domination of the Babylonians.

In 539 BC Cyrus released the exiled Jews, who had been exiled by the Babylonian conquest in 587, and encouraged them to

return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. (See the Book of Ezra 1:1-4. You may want to read this passage out loud for the group.)

From historical inscriptions, scholars have surmised that Cyrus worshiped Marduk, a Babylonian god. Thus it is very strange for Cyrus to be identified as the “anointed” of the God of the Jews.