

**Scripture**

Mark 1:29-39

# Ministry and Prayer

**Jesus reaches out to people in healing and inward to God in prayer.**

- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus pours out his healing power on God's people, but goes apart to be with God in prayer.
- ◆ Young children, as well as adults, may think of Jesus in primarily one or two ways. We deepen our friendship with Jesus by learning from his teaching, seeking his healing and drawing closer to him in prayer.
- ◆ In today's session we offer stories and activities that portray Jesus as a teacher, a healer and a person of prayer.

**Question of the Week**

What is my favorite way to pray? Why?

**Core Session**

- ◆ Getting Started (*pictures of people praying*)
- ◆ Gospel Story: Jesus and God's People
- ◆ Story-Review Song: Jesus and God's People
- ◆ Praying Together

**Enrichment**

- ◆ Discover the Good News
- ◆ Singing Together
- ◆ Prayer: Praying Jesus' Name
- ◆ Story-Review Game: Roleplay
- ◆ Art: Daniele's *Handimals*
- ◆ 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
- ◆ Our Catholic Heritage: What Response Does Jesus Require? *and* What Are the Commandments Taught by Christ?
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Jesus' Signs and Wonders

## ✓ Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Before the session look for pictures of children or people at prayer.

Show the pictures to the children. Ask:

- ◆ What is this person doing? (Or “What are these people doing?”)
- ◆ Do we ever do what this person is doing? When?

Encourage children to make up stories about each picture. Some children may supply words that they use during prayer times. If you don't have pictures, invite children to act out different ways of praying together as a group; for example:

- ◆ saying “thank you” before sharing a snack
- ◆ asking “God bless” for family members at bedtime
- ◆ praying together in worship

Close by saying:

- ◆ Many people pray—moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas and children.
- ◆ Someone prays in today's story. Listen and find out who.

## ✓ Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

### Jesus and God's People

Jesus teaches God's people. He walks from town to town saying, “Good news! God loves you!”

The people say, “Oh, Jesus, teach us all day long.”

“I love to teach you,” says Jesus, “but there is more I want to do.”

Jesus heals God's people. All the sick and sad people come to Jesus. Jesus makes them happy and well.

The people say, “Oh, Jesus, heal us all day long.”

“I love to heal you,” says Jesus, “but there is more I want to do.”

Jesus goes apart, all by himself to pray.

The people say, “Jesus, why are you just praying? We want you to teach us. We want you to heal us.”

“I love to teach,” says Jesus. “I love to heal. But I need to be by myself sometimes, too. I need time to be with God. I need time to pray.”

## ✓ Story-Review Song (5-15 minutes)

### Jesus and God's People

Children review today's story with song and motions.

Stand in a circle with the children. Teach children these motions and words, sung to the tune of “Here We Go ‘Round the Mulberry Bush”:

*This is the way that Jesus can teach,  
Jesus can teach,  
Jesus can teach.*

*This is the way that Jesus can teach,  
so early in the morning.  
(Frame mouth with hands as you sway back and forth.)*

*This is the way that Jesus can heal,  
Jesus can heal,  
Jesus can heal.*

*This is the way that Jesus can heal,  
so early in the morning.  
(Cross arms in front. Hold hands with neighbors, arms crossed, as you sway back and forth.)*

*This is the way that Jesus can pray,  
Jesus can pray,  
Jesus can pray.*

*This is the way that Jesus can pray,  
so early in the morning.  
(Lift arms up, over head, as you sway back and forth.)*

## ✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Gather the children in a circle. Invite children to pass the peace to one another.

Explain:

- ◆ When we are baptized, Jesus is with us.
- ◆ Jesus says he will stay with us, in good times, in scary times, in all times. Jesus brings us peace in all times.
- ◆ We remember that Jesus brings us peace when we pass the peace to one another.

Begin passing the peace, using the words and gestures common in your congregation. For example, you can turn to one child, hold his or her hands, and say:

- ◆ Peace be with you.

**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)

In today's *Discover the Good News* you'll find an illustrated version of today's story. You'll also find the action rhyme children used today to respond to the gospel story.

## ☐ Singing Together (10-15 minutes)

From *Singing the Good News*, sing together:

- ◆ "Listen for the Voice of the Lord" (songbook p. 24, also available as an MP3)
- ◆ "Teacher and Healer" (songbook p. 27, also available as an MP3)

Together with the Baptism Exploration activity that is attached to this document, you may also sing:

- ◆ "Water, Cool and Clear" (p. 26 of the songbook)

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

The rhythm of "Water, Cool and Clear" makes it a good choice for children's movement activities. Give each child a colored cloth or scarf—shades of blue would be especially appropriate.

Children wave the scarves as they dance and sway in rhythm with these words of the song "Water, Cool and Clear":

*Water, cool and clear,  
Water, flowing free.  
Water, cool and clear,  
Bring new life to me.*

## ☐ Prayer (10-15 minutes)

### Praying Jesus' Name

Affirm to children that we can pray to Jesus at any time. Sit with the children in a circle. Remind children that, in today's story, Jesus made time to pray. Explain that we can pray, too, whenever we like.

Teach the children one simple prayer: saying the name of Jesus over and over. Lead the children by praying softly and slowly, "Jesus... Jesus... Jesus..."

Ask children to name scary things. Examples:

- ◆ dogs
- ◆ the dark
- ◆ thunder and lightning
- ◆ monsters

Invite children to recall ways they can handle such scary things. Then explain:

- ◆ We can also pray to Jesus when we are afraid.

When a child suggests a scary thing, such as a barking dog, help all the children act out that scary thing, for example, by growling and barking. After a moment begin praying, "Jesus... Jesus... Jesus..."

When you begin to pray, the children stop their roleplay and link arms around the circle, joining you in praying over and over the name of Jesus. Children can experience Jesus' peace descend on the group as they gradually quiet themselves.

Repeat the sequence as long as interest is sustained.

## ☐ Story Review Game (5-15 minutes)

### Roleplay

Children explore ways to help people who are sick.

Set up one corner of the room with a selection of the free play materials. Gather children around these materials. Ask:

- ◆ In today's story, what kinds of things did Jesus do? (*teaching, healing, praying*)
- ◆ What did Jesus do for sick people? (*Accept the children's answers. You can stress that Jesus welcomed sick people, loved sick people and cared for sick people.*)

Show children the free-play materials. Explain that they can use these materials to play games of being sick and helping those who are sick. Encourage children to take turns being "sick" and caring for those who are "sick."

## ☐ Art (5-10 minutes)

### Daniele's Handimals

Use your computer and online access to display a sampling of Italian artist Guido Daniele's astonishing hand paintings, available at <http://www.guidodaniele.com/hand-painting/art>.

Review selected images with the children, asking them to point out the wonderful things the artist has done with human hands.

Explain that Jesus did wonderful things with his hands. Invite children to act out what Jesus did with his hands:

- ◆ heal the sick
- ◆ pray to God

**Note:** Guido Daniele, the artist behind *Handimals*, lives in Milan. You can learn more about him at <http://www.guidodaniele.com>. Be warned! Some areas of the site contains nudity (though *not* the section linked directly to hand-painting, found at the beginning of this activity)

## INFO Young Children and the Gospel

Today's gospel shows three facets of Jesus' ministry. Jesus heals many sick, goes apart to pray, then journeys to another town to teach and preach to God's people. Today's session names Jesus as a teacher, a healer, and a person of prayer. The children explore Jesus' work, participate in healing play, and use Jesus' name in prayer together.

## 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*.
  - A copy of today's *Gospel Story: Jesus and God's People*, which can be distributed or e-mailed to children and their families.
  - Instructions for one of this season's *Baptism Exploration* activities.
  - An article exploring the best way to prepare your sessions *When Prep Time is Short*.
- ◆ Open your Winter-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Winter-B's *Models of the Faith*.
  - A printable article titled *First Impressions*, which offers practical helps for the use of fine art in the classroom.
  - An article for catechists and/or families further exploring *The Gospel of Mark*.
  - An article for catechists and/or families on *Prophets and Prophecy*.
  - For catechists and/or families, an *Epiphany Overview*.

## More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings highlight the demands of committed Christian ministry. In Job we witness the intense, honest, anguished prayer of one in intimate relationship with God. Paul explains how he willingly lays down his privileges as a Christian to reach people with God's message of good news. Jesus' ministry revolves around healing and preaching, solitude and prayer.

### Job 7:1-4, 6-7

The story of Job issues from the Jewish tradition of wisdom literature that treats the complexities of living in relationship with God and with others.

This dramatic account focuses on the dilemma of an innocent man who is apparently being punished by God for sins he did not commit. Job addresses both the horizontal aspects of suffering—how do I cope?—and the vertical aspects of undeserved pain—why

“When our worries are led to the heart of God and there become prayer, then ministry and prayer become two manifestations of the same all-embracing love of God.”

—Henri Nouwen  
*The Way of the Heart*

is God doing this? The author's solution provides no explanation of suffering but only highlights the mystery of faith in the complete absence of personal gain. At this time in Judaism, Job's dilemma could not be solved by appealing to later Christian beliefs in an afterlife where things would be resolved or in a God who did not directly cause evil but only permitted it.

In today's reading, Job laments the misery of his condition, likening it to the hopelessness of a slave who has no prospect of betterment. Even his allotted time of rest at night has become a source of unending distress. His pain has removed all perspective on past pleasures or former hopes.

### 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

In chapter 9, Paul defends his status as an apostle. His authority had apparently been called into question because he had waived two apostolic rights: being married and receiving support for preaching. Opponents may have used Paul's restraint as evidence of his unworthiness. Paul retorts that he did not choose preaching as a career in order to earn a living. Instead, like the prophets, he received a commission from God and so has no choice but to preach.

The absolute claim of the gospel relativizes all cultural, ethnic, national or legal values. The freedom that his decision gives him puts him in a position of servitude under “Christ's law”—the obligation of love. Paul's flexibility is neither cowardice nor compromise; rather, his freedom allows him to speak to and from the experience of others. Paul's freedom is for service, and his ministry is its own reward.

### Mark 1:29-39

Today's reading continues the account of a day in Jesus' ministry. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law is presented without direct interpretation or theological comment. Then at sundown, when the sabbath was over, people are brought to Jesus for healing and the casting out of spirits. Enjoining silence upon the spirits (v. 34) was apparently part of the regular technique of exorcism as reported by contemporary writers. But Mark implies, as Luke makes explicit (Luke 4:41), that Jesus does not wish his identity made known by evil spirits who have no credibility as witnesses.

The following morning Jesus withdraws from Capernaum and, in part, from his disciples. He seeks communion with God and perhaps also wishes to avoid the superficial popularity indicated by the report that “everyone is searching for you” (v. 37). Jesus responds by going to the next towns, for that is why he came from Capernaum. Jesus acts as the envoy of God. His mission of “preaching” includes the whole of his ministry: teaching, healing, casting out spirits and finally his death and resurrection.

## Reflection

In 10 short verses of Mark's gospel, Jesus gives us a pattern to model in our lives. He moves first from the synagogue to the home, the place of need. He doesn't stay stuck in the safe environment of church, that clubby place where the in-group can reassure each other how holy they are.

Instead, he goes to meet illness, fever, pain. Drawing many other sick people after curing Peter's mother-in-law, he heals them and returns to the source of his energy: prayer. It might be a good movement for all of us: from worship to work, alleviating need, then back to the relationship with God which motivates, drives and blesses our efforts.

It's also important to note how Jesus attracts people. They are desperate for his cure and crowd the doorway. People haven't changed that much: they still hope for

genuine cures. They recognize that physical and mental sickness stains our world. But many have not found what they seek in church. For various reasons, they turn away, disappointed. Institutions focus on internal squabbles; churchgoers speak in jargon. Have we failed to offer seekers the Christ? Individually, we need to see if our lives follow the pattern of his.

## The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today's readings help us understand our human suffering (*CCC*, #164, 272–74, 309–14, 599–618, 521). Mark describes Jesus' ministry as a continuation of God's response to our human suffering. But Jesus not only ministers to people, he takes time to pray. Prayer is needed to put our lives into the right context—to see things as God does so that we might act as God does in responding to the needs of others (*CCC*, #2558–65, 2697–2719).

## Our Catholic Heritage

### What Response Does Christ Require?

Jesus commands only two things, which are really only one. He requires us to believe in him. “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29). Such belief means an attitude of absolute trust and confidence in Jesus, in the work of God through him and in us. Believing in Jesus means utterly abandoning our own efforts to justify ourselves and relying completely on God's goodness and compassion.

John's gospel often mentions this belief, especially in the early chapters, as the first step in a relationship. In the later chapters of the gospel, when Jesus explains his deepest teachings to his disciples, he indicates the evidence of such belief in their lives: *obedience*. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (John 14:15, 21).

### What Are the Commandments Taught by Christ?

Early in his teaching, Jesus summarizes the law, pointing out that all the sacrifices and rules and regulations of Jewish society could best be kept if people put their hearts and minds into loving God first and loving one another second.

At the end of his life, Jesus gives a new commandment, a final way to fulfill the law: to let his model of life and death become the pattern of their relationships. As Paul notes, “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). “The only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).

## The World of the Bible

### Jesus' Signs and Wonders

Although we use the word *miracles* to describe these events, biblical writers used the terms “deeds of power,” “signs” and “wonders.” These describe God's actions to reorder our world from Satan's domination that frustrates God's plan for a covenant community.

The word *miracle* (Latin, *mirari*, to wonder at) refers to that which causes wonder. The extraordinary is one essential element in a miracle, as the observers of Jesus' wonders so often illustrate through their awe and astonishment. The other is that the extraordinary event cannot be explained in terms of familiar, everyday causation and so is attributed to a more-than-human force or agency. Everyone would readily conclude that a more-than-human power would be necessary for a human being to perform the miracle.

In reading the miracle stories, we notice that the usual concern of Jesus' audience focuses on the source of such awesome power. They see the event, they experience the wonder. The deed of power is not something beyond the natural world, but part of the natural world with extraordinary implications. They recognize that only through the influence of a supernatural power could the natural world be reordered. The question is whether this more-than-human agent is good (God) or evil (Satan), a benefactor or a tyrant?

Even for believers, miracles did not create faith but presupposed it. Miracles were not proofs but wonderful signs for those who had “eyes to see.” For those who could not accept the miracles, they remained simply “astonished.”