

**Scripture**

Mark 1:40-45

**Wholeness and Holiness****Jesus restores us to health and community.**

- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus heals a leper, restoring him to the community from which his illness barred him.
- ◆ Although families still provide the most important relationships for young children, they begin to explore friendships outside the family at this age.
- ◆ In today's session we offer stories and activities that celebrate the gift of friendship given to us through God and Jesus.

**Question of the Week**

What do I most want Jesus to heal in myself? in others?

**Core Session**

- ◆ Getting Started
- ◆ Gospel Story: The Man with No Friends
- ◆ Story Review Game
- ◆ Praying Together

**Enrichment**

- ◆ Discover the Good News
- ◆ Singing Together
- ◆ Hug Tag
- ◆ Book Corner (*see titles on p. 3*)
- ◆ Craft: Prayer Chains
- ◆ 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 Is the Summary of the Law? *and* What Is the New Commandment?
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Jesus the Healer

## ✓ Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Children talk about friends as a preparation for today's story, in which we emphasize that friends were important to Jesus, too. You'll find a list of picture books about friendship in the Book Corner activity on page 3. One or more of these books would make a wonderful opening to today's session.

Sit with the children in a circle. Ask:

- ◆ Who are our friends? What are their names?
- ◆ What do we like to do with our friends?

After several minutes of discussion, explain:

- ◆ Friends are important.
- ◆ Today's story is about a man who had no friends at all.

## ✓ Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

### The Man with No Friends

Once there was a sad, sad man.

When he was a little boy, he had many friends. He loved to play with his friends just as you do.

But when the man grew up, he had a disease. The disease made his skin look terrible.

Other people were afraid. "Stay away from us," they said. "We don't want our skin to look terrible, too." Even the man's friends ran away from him.

The man lived all alone. He was very sad.

One day he saw Jesus. He ran to Jesus.

Jesus was not afraid. Jesus did not run away.

The man said, "Jesus, help me! I know you can if you want to."

Right away Jesus said, "Of course I want to!" He touched the man and the man's skin turned a beautiful brown, just as when he was a boy.

"I'm healed!" said the man. "Jesus, you made my skin clean again."

Jesus said, "Now you can go back to live with other people. Now you can have friends again."

And so the man did. Many people were his friends again. "But the best friend I have," said the man, "is Jesus."

## ✓ Story-Review Game (5-15 minutes)

### Friends of Jesus

Remind children that they are friends of Jesus, too, with this action game.

Ask:

- ◆ In today's story, who was a friend of the man with the terrible skin? (*Jesus*)

Explain:

- ◆ We are friends of Jesus, too.
- ◆ We will play a game that reminds us that we are friends of Jesus.

Ask children to scatter around the play area. Ask two volunteers to be the first friends of Jesus. Teach friends this chant, practicing it with a catchy sing-song rhythm:

We are friends of Jesus.  
Who are you?  
Come with us, friend of ours,  
And friend of Jesus, too!

These two children form a chanting, jumping chain of friends, one behind the other, holding the person ahead at the waist.

This pair hops to another child, chants the first line, waits for the child to give his or her name, then chants the rest of the rhyme. The child can then join the chain as it hops to another child. (*For preschoolers, lead the chain yourself until they have learned the game.*)

## ✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Last week, children learned to pray the name of Jesus in times of fear. This week, explain:

- ◆ We can pray the name of Jesus whenever we want to spend time with our friend Jesus, too.

Lead the children by praying softly and slowly, "Jesus... Jesus... Jesus..."

After 1 minute, close by inviting children to thank God for all the friends of Jesus in the room. Encourage children to name each group member.

**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 Review Game rhyme.

You'll also find an activity inviting children to draw a picture of a friend in a heart shape.

## □ 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*.

Children may also enjoy singing this traditional friendship song:

*Oh, the more we get together,  
Together, together;  
The more we get together,  
The happier we'll be.*

*For your friends,  
Are my friends,  
And my friends,  
Are your friends;*

*Oh, the more we get together,  
The happier we'll be.*

(If you are unfamiliar with this song, it is sung to the tune of "Did You Ever See a Lassie?")

## □ Game (5-15 minutes)

### Hug Tag

This variation of Tag reinforces the fact that the children are friends of Jesus, too.

Invite children to play a game of Tag. Explain that children are safe from being tagged only when they are hugging a friend of Jesus; any child can be a friend of Jesus.

Ask a volunteer to be *It*. If *It* never gets to tag anyone, introduce a variation: whenever you say "switch," children must let go of their partners and find a new friend of Jesus to hug.

## □ Book Corner (10-15 minutes)

### Friends and Friendship

In today's Getting Started activity, children talked about friends and friendship. Sharing a picture book on this theme would be an excellent way to break the conversational ice.

We recommend:

- ◆ *Blackboard Bear* by Martha Alexander. (New York: Dial, 1969). Martha Alexander has a rare gift of writing simple books that hit the funny spot of both children and adults. In this book, a little boy finds a creative—and hilarious—solution to the problem of big boys who will not let him join their play.
- ◆ *Amos and Boris* by William Steig. (New York: Farrar, 1971). Even preschoolers will understand the depth of friendship between Amos the mouse and Boris the whale, who must help one another to survive.
- ◆ *Best Friends for Frances* by Russell Hoban. Illustrated by Lillian Hoban. (New York: Harper and Row, 1969). Frances is a small badger who tackles a familiar problem—a male friend who suddenly says, "No girls allowed"—with ingenuity and wit.
- ◆ *A Weekend with Wendell* by Kevin Henkes. (New York: Mulberry Books, 1995). When Wendell comes to visit, Sophie's weekend seems long and awful until she asserts her own place in the play and silliness.

## □ Craft (5-15 minutes)

### Prayer Chains

Children make prayer chains they can use as reminders to pray for their friends.

Discuss:

- ◆ What do we like to do for our friends?
- ◆ How do we like to help our friends?
- ◆ How do we like to make our friends feel happy?
- ◆ One thing we can do for our friends is pray for them. What are simple ways we could pray for a friend? (*Accept all answers. If necessary, suggest a simple prayer, such as “Bless [friend’s name]”, or “Thank you, God, for [friend’s name]”.*)
- ◆ Today we will make prayer chains to help us remember to pray for our friends.

Ask the children to cut strips from construction paper. Show children how to cut across the paper to make strips about 9" long and about 1" wide. Children's shapes and lengths will vary widely according to their cutting skills.

Invite children to use stickers, yarn, glitter or other materials to decorate *one* side of each strip. Move around as the children work, offering to write the name of a friend on the other side of each child's strip or strips. Encourage children to name whomever *they* want for a friend. Some younger children, especially, may want to name pets or toys.

Help children form a chain from the strips by bringing the two ends of each paper strip together. Close with glue or staple. Pray for each child whose name is written on the strip as well as for the child who brings you that strip as you work; for example, you can pray, “Thank you, God, for Mia and her friend Juan.”

Hang the finished chain in the room.

*Activity Soundtrack:* play healing music, such as O'Reilly's “Lay Them Down” or Blue Feather's “Heal the Earth.” (Open your Winter-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.)

## INFO Young Children and the Gospel

In today's gospel, Jesus heals a man with skin disease. This is one of several gospel stories that focus on such diseases. The reason for this emphasis lies in historical tradition.

In ancient times, people with skin diseases were excluded from the community. They were expected to live apart from others, cut off forever from families and friends. If Jewish sufferers were healed, they had to show themselves to the priests before they could rejoin the covenant community.

Hence, in healing the man with skin disease, Jesus also heals terrible wounds of alienation and loneliness. Today's story is a story of inclusiveness, affirming the human need for companionship and friendship.

This emphasis appeals to preschoolers and kindergartners, who are beginning to expand their circles of affection to include first friendships.

## 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*.
  - Instructions for one of this season's *Baptism Exploration* activities.
  - An article exploring the best way to prepare your sessions while *Making the Most of Your Ministry*.
- ◆ Open your Winter-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Winter-B's *Models of the Faith*.
  - An article for catechists and/or families further exploring *The Gospel of Mark*.
  - An article for catechists and/or families on *Prophets and Prophecy*.

## More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings look to God as the source of healing and wholeness. Leviticus outlines the regulations for those with leprosy, a disease that brought alienation as well as physical suffering. Paul sums up his counsel with the great Christian principle: do everything for God's glory. Jesus, moved with compassion, touches a leper, healing him immediately.

### Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

Compiled as a manual of worship for Levites who served in the temple, the book of Leviticus sets forth the laws and regulations that would facilitate the Israelites' calling to holiness and service to God. These laws and rituals are geared toward demonstrating inner holiness through outer ritual cleanness or physical

"Raise me up, Lord, do not abandon your servant. I want health that I may sing to you and help your people lead holy lives. I plead with you: you are my strength, do not desert me."

—St. Gregory Nazianzen

wholeness. Sacrifices must be perfect, and neither priests nor worshipers can bring physical deformities into God's presence.

Chapters 11–15 define spiritual cleanness in its physical forms.

Foods, childbirth, skin diseases, mildew and

bodily discharges are all scrutinized for their meaning within the community and in relation to God. As difficult as it may seem to relate these antiquated regulations to contemporary Christianity, we can recognize the importance of the Jewish community's concern with holiness and the clear insistence that earthly realities (our bodies, lifestyles, daily choices) come under God's sovereignty just as much as inner, personal, spiritual realities.

Today's reading addresses the particular symptoms of skin diseases grouped under the description of "leprous." Such skin conditions rendered those who suffered from them unclean—a social as well as spiritual status of separation and mourning.

### 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

Today's reading concludes the section on the issue of Christian liberty as it related to areas of community disagreement. In Corinth, as in Rome, one example of this disagreement concerned meat that had been previously sacrificed to idols.

Paul has considered the importance of personal conviction, the knowledge that lies behind such choices, and the sensitivity that each Christian member must cultivate in relationships with others. According to Paul, the one principle that should govern every such decision is the glory of God.

This intangible goal, however, is given very concrete boundaries: putting up no barriers to the gospel so that all might be saved. The gospel demands that we seek not our advantage but that of others, who will benefit eternally from life in Christ.

### Mark 1:40-45

The account of the leper's healing joins the preceding section of a typical day of ministry (1:21-39) to the next self-contained sequence, a set of controversy stories (2:1–3:6). In the original Greek of this account, the same word (*ekballein*, to drive out or expel) is used to describe the casting out of demons and the cure (driving out) of the leprosy.

Ignoring the risk of defilement, Jesus touches the outcast who is immediately cleansed. Jesus then sends the healed leper to present himself to the priest for examination and to make the required sacrifice. This recognition of the validity of the Mosaic law refutes the charges to be made against Jesus in the following stories.

Jesus sternly charges the leper to keep silent, as before he has silenced the demons. Some scholars think that Mark may reflect Jesus' concern about being acclaimed Messiah on the basis of his miracle-working without considering his death and resurrection. In this view the leper's breach of the command to secrecy illustrates the tension between the presence of God made evident in Jesus' words and deeds and the mystery of the nature of Jesus' messiahship, which will only be finally made clear by the cross.

## Reflection

Today's gospel shows the power of Jesus' healing touch. It shouldn't surprise us. We all know how sweet a hand on the shoulder can feel when we're aching. Those who have been separated from loved ones for a long time don't merely exchange words; watch the footage of soldiers returning from war: they are enveloped in the arms of their families. Massage therapy has become a big industry and a prime stress relief. Because touch is so powerful, its misuse is criminal. The phony hug seems even worse than dishonest words. The sexual abuse of children appalls even a jaded society.

When Jesus stretches out his hand to the leper, it is an extension of his heart and a tangible sign of his compassion. To all of us, he succinctly offers the same healing: “I will; be clean.” What a world of difference those words contain! The leper would have been ostracized by his society since he was highly contagious. So Jesus says in effect, “Welcome back to the human race.” The religious and cultural taboos surrounding the disease mean nothing to him. He reaches across that artificial boundary between peoples, defying it.

## The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today’s readings challenge us to be imitators of Christ (*CCC*, #459, 519–21, 564, 1709, 2188, 2470–72). The primary sign of the vitality of Christianity is our living example, especially our compassion for the sick (*CCC*, #1503–05). Our Christian imitation of Jesus means recognizing each person’s dignity (*CCC*, #1700–09) and reaching out to those who are separated from our community by diseases, poverty, race, wealth and status. This begins the reordering our society and our world according to the vision and values of Jesus (*CCC*, #1886–89).

## Our Catholic Heritage

### What Is the Summary of the Law?

So what rules must we keep? What does obedience look like? Christ taught us the summary of the Law: *Love God. Love your neighbor.* “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40). Thus Jesus introduces again the essence of the Old Covenant, a covenant of compassion and faithfulness.

These two commandments are not invalidated by the New Covenant. The revelation of God to humanity and about humanity has never changed. It is a revelation about relationship in and under God.

### What Is the New Commandment?

Then Jesus gives us his New Commandment, a commandment that is not new in focus but is entirely new in practice. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34). “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Love now has a new definition. The act of God in Jesus Christ is the consummate act and revelation of love.

What is true love? True love is God’s love, and “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

We are not commanded to be nice, to have good manners, to give in or to have warm feelings. We are commanded to act toward one another as Jesus acted, to live in relationship with one another as Jesus lived.

This is truly a New Commandment. “And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another” (1 John 3:23).

## The World of the Bible

### Jesus the Healer

Jesus’ signs and wonders suggested that God was acting now in our world through Jesus. His kingdom invitation to live in God’s presence and under God’s rule was a direct confrontation with the powers of evil that dominated our world. In Jesus the final battle between God and Satan for domination of our world had reached its resolution.

Like a deadly virus attacking God’s creation, Satan’s disordering power was all-pervasive. It had affected the order of the natural world through the chaos of storms, famine, plagues and other disasters. It eroded the social order through the hatred that erupted in family feuds and national wars, rebellion against authority and the breakdown of community relationships. It also weakened the bodily order through sickness, disease and finally death.

Jesus’ deeds of power signified that God was reordering each of these realms. Satan’s domination of the world and the evil agenda of disorder could not match God’s power and the divine agenda of right order (that is, salvation, healing in all its many dimensions). Jesus’ various signs—exorcisms, cures, resuscitations and nature miracles—all demonstrated that Satan had lost control of our world and God was now its ruler.