

INTRODUCING THE BIBLE

A lesson prepared by Nora Bonilla,
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Doctrinal Points: The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus is the light.

Direct Aim: to know and revere the Bible

Indirect Aim: to initiate veneration and love for the Holy Bible in the child; to initiate his love for listening to it; to prepare the child for the celebration of the Word; to introduce the child to prayer.

Material: Various bibles, 2 candle holders and candles, matches, prayer table and tablecloth.

Presentation: The group sits in a circle in the prayer corner.

The catechist says: "The most important book in the whole world is the Bible, the Holy Bible. This is the book where we find many of God's secrets for us. These secrets are for all the people in the world, both men, women and children. We know this because this precious book, the Bible, is written in every language and idiom spoken by human beings. This book can be found in different sizes, large or small, in all colours, but it always says the same thing."

Solemnly and lovingly, the catechist places in the children's hands various bibles in as many different sizes, colours, and languages as possible. This most precious book, the Bible, is displayed on the book stand and children are told that it will remain in this corner where they can come, filled with love, to listen to it, to become familiar with it and little by little to read it. Nearby, are placed the candles which are to be lit when we come to read the Bible which is the Word of God who is speaking to us. The catechist asks: "Would you like to read something from this precious book, the Bible? Then we should prepare ourselves to listen to this Word, because even though I read it with my voice, it is the Word of God. Let's all stand up (or all sit down). We should fix our socks or shoes, or whatever might distract us. Now let's create an atmosphere of silence and listen intently. I will begin when I see that we are all ready to listen."

The catechist calls 2 children and shows them how to hold the lighted candles in their hands. The catechist then reads John 8:12 directly from the Bible. When the reading is concluded, depending on the group, one might say, "What does Jesus say He is? The light of what? This is the reason we light the candles; they help us think about Jesus as the light. He is the light of us all, of all the persons in the world."

Allow for silence and prayer response, verbal or sung.

MAKING BIBLE PASSAGES COME ALIVE

Light the candle and give a short (couple of sentences) introduction to what will be read. Read the story once, solemnly. Ask, "What did you hear?" to get an idea of the children's understanding of what they heard. Often, they will have blanked out during the reading! Read the story again, this time you can:

- Examine and discuss a piece of fine art illustrating the story (this can also be done before you read the story to prepare the children to listen)
- Draw the story on a whiteboard
- have feltboard figures to act it out
- have a symbol of the story (such as a figure of a shepherd or grapes for the true vine) on display
- have children act out the scene, if appropriate (discuss with children how they will act out the story reverently and accurately before acting it out)
- depending on reading ability, have children do a choral reading of the Bible passage (each character's part is read by a different child)

After this reading, more indepth questions can be used to ponder the doctrinal points of the story. After a few weeks, you can begin to suggest that children discover connections between the stories.

After the final reading, children can be encouraged to take a line from the story they most liked and write and illustrate it with nice pencils or pens. (Show children illuminated manuscript pictures to give them an idea of how to make beautiful "prayer cards".)

A NOTE ABOUT THE LITURGY

You will never go wrong when you stay close to the sources. The Rites book and the Roman Missal are essential tools for any catechist. In the liturgy, the Church teaches us what we believe (*lex orandi, lex credendi*).

The Rites of the Catholic Church Vol. 1 & Vol. 2: Liturgical Press

- all parishes should have one of these, most likely in the sacristy, that you can borrow and look through

The Revised Roman Missal

- you can either borrow this from the parish priest or use a revised personal Missal or a Magnificat publication, as this has all the parts of the Mass.

USING VISUAL ART FOR CATECHESIS

Arising from talent given by the Creator and from man's own effort, art is a form of practical wisdom, uniting knowledge and skill, to give form to the truth of reality in a language accessible to sight or hearing. *Catechism of the Catholic Church #2501*

Visual art can be a valuable resource in catechesis. It has a particular attraction for children, since drawing and colouring are among a child's earliest means of communicating to others his own understanding of the world. Whether you are viewing beautiful religious artwork or encouraging children to make their own as they reflect on a Scripture passage, this is a medium that naturally lends itself to deepening our understanding of the Gospel. It is not enough to simply show children a work of art, though, they must be helped to understand it.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN VIEWING ART IN A CATECHETICAL SESSION

Scripture Passages

Most masterpieces based on Scripture are not intended simply to illustrate a Bible story. Rather, they highlight or proclaim the message in a different medium. It is important to share the Scripture passage(s) that a picture is based on. Fra Angelico, a Dominican friar and painter, saw his art as a form of preaching. Therefore, we should seek to understand what the artist is saying about the Scripture portrayed.

Light and Darkness

Where is the light coming from? (In art, it is not always from the sun.) Which people or objects are in the light? Which are in darkness or shadow? In art, light symbolizes grace and life, while darkness symbolizes sin and death. How does that help you understand the picture?

Colours

In medieval and renaissance art, colours are symbolic. The Blessed Virgin Mary is usually painted wearing blue, not because it was a colour she actually wore, but because she is full of grace. For these artists, blue as the colour of the sky, which is above all things, was a symbol of the divine, of God who is above all things, and therefore also of His grace.

Some other common colours and their symbolic meaning:

Blue - as the colour of the sky is a symbol of divinity

Red - as the colour of blood is a symbol of humanity, also of Christ's sacrifice for our redemption

*By painting Jesus in robes of blue and red, artists expressed the truth that Jesus is true God and true man.

Gold - light of heaven, things of God and heaven

Green - new life

Brown, black - sin, death, suffering; brown can also be a symbol of humanity as it is the colour of the soil from which Adam was made

White - purity, eternal life

Facial Expressions, Hand Gestures

Body language says a lot. Ask children to tell how the people in the picture feel, what they may be thinking, who or what they are looking at, etc.

People and Objects

Who's who and what's what? Why are these people and these things in the picture? Do not worry whether the children can correctly identify the people or objects when you first discuss the image with them. They will base their answers on their own experience or knowledge of Bible stories that they have heard; this will prepare them to listen to Scripture. After reading the story from Scripture, you can revisit the picture and identify the people based on what they have heard. This helps them understand the painting, but more importantly, to remember and understand the Scriptures.

Background and Landscape

Where is the event taking place? Is it a natural background (of this earth) or supernatural (of heaven)? This, too, can be part of the message, often hinting that the mystery portrayed is not as distant in time and space as we tend to imagine. "The Word became flesh, he lived among us" (John 1:14). Often, artists portrayed their own towns or figures wearing contemporary clothes to illustrate that salvation is happening now, today, amongst us.

Web Gallery of Art - <http://www.wga.hu> - This site has thousands of images of Western European art from between 1000 and 1900 AD. The search engine allows you to search by artist or text (title, subject, keyword).