Teaching the Liturgical Year

LESSONS for February 2020

SOPHIA INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS
Teaching the Liturgical Year

Lessons for Middle and Upper Elementary
The Presentation in the Temple (Middle and Upper Elementary)

February 2, 2020 – The Presentation of the Lord

Overview
In this week’s Gospel passage, Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the Temple to present Him to God according to the Old Mosaic law. In the Temple they meet the prophet Simeon and the prophetess, Anna. Simeon foretells the future suffering of Christ and Mary. In this lesson, students will encounter the prayer of Simeon in the life of the Church and in sacred music and consider how prayer lifts our minds and hearts to God.

Directions
A. Have your students read the Gospel passage, or read it aloud to your students, and then answer the focus questions. You may have students answer them on their own or you may discuss them together as a class.
B. First, have your students read about the Nunc Dimittis from part 1. Next, have your student compare the Latin and English versions of Simeon’s prayer, the Nunc Dimittis. Help them try to match words from the English translation to the Latin text. Then, listen with your students to the recording of Palestrina’s Nunc Dimittis, which can be found at the following link: SophiaOnline.org/NuncDimittis. Have them try to follow along with the Latin text.
C. When the recording is over, have your students work individually to complete the reflection questions in part 2. When finished, call on students to share and discuss their responses.

Answer Key
Focus Questions
1. To the Temple in Jerusalem. It was written in the Law that “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord.”
2. A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.
3. Simeon was a righteous and devout man who was awaiting the Messiah—the “consolation of Israel.” The Spirit had revealed that he would not die before seeing the Messiah.

4. He said “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” He was foretelling the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ and the suffering of Mary.

5. Anna was a prophetess who worshipped in the Temple, praying and fasting day and night. When she saw Jesus “she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.” Accept reasoned answers.

**Nunc Dimittis**

1. Accept reasoned answers.
2. Accept reasoned answers.
3. Accept reasoned answers.
Sunday Reading


When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,” and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.
Focus Questions

1. Where did Mary and Joseph take Jesus to present Him to the Lord? Why did they do this?
2. What did the law require a family to offer as a sacrifice when presenting their first-born son?
3. Who was Simeon and what was he waiting for? What had the Holy Spirit revealed to him?
4. What did Simeon prophecy about Jesus and Mary?
5. Who was Anna? What did she do when she saw Jesus? How can we imitate her in our lives?
Did you know that the Catholic Church offers every day in the Liturgy of the Hours the same prayer of Simeon that we heard in this week's Gospel? Liturgy of the Hours is the public prayer of the Church which sanctifies the whole course of the day and night. It consists of a variety of prayers, Scripture readings, most especially the Psalms, and writings of the saints. It is divided into seven “hours” or “offices,” each to be prayed at specific times of the day. Bishops, Priests, deacons, and religious are obligated to pray at minimum the three principle hours of the day (Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and the Office of Readings). Lay persons (that's most of us!) are also encouraged by the Church to pray the Liturgy of the Hours so that it may be the prayer of the whole People of God. Simeon’s prayer, which in Latin is called the Nunc Dimittis (meaning “now release”) is prayed every night during Compline, or night prayer, right before going to bed.

Throughout the history of the Church many composers and choir directors have written musical settings for prayers and Scripture verses, including the parts of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. They did this in order to make the prayers of the Church as beautiful as they possibly could—as an offering of praise to God, and as a way of encouraging and enlivening prayer among the faithful. The Church understood that when the words of prayer are sung beautifully the thoughts and hearts of those listening are more easily raised to God.

One such religious composer, who is considered among the greatest, was Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, an Italian choir director who lived during the 16th century. He wrote hundreds of settings for the Mass, and for many other prayers of the Church. Like all other Catholic composers of his time, Palestrina set his liturgical music to be sung in Latin, the official language of the Church. That way it did not matter if a choir was Italian, English, French, or German: they could learn his music and truly pray with one voice!

It is Palestrina's setting of the Nunc Dimittis that you are about to listen to.
Part 2:
Directions: Next, try to match words in the English translation on the left to the Latin translation on the right. Circle the words that look similar to you. Then as you listen to the recording of the Nunc Dimittis, follow along with the Latin words to the best of your ability. Finally, answer the reflection questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Text</th>
<th>Latin Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word,</td>
<td>Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine, secundum verbum tuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the</td>
<td>Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum, quod parasti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peoples,</td>
<td>ante faciem omnium poulorum:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.</td>
<td>Lumen ad revelationem gentium, et gloriam plebis tuae Israel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflection Questions:

1. Why do you think the Church has set the Nunc Dimittis as a prayer for the faithful to recite at the closing of the day, before bed? Do you think it is fitting to pray it then? Why or why not?

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2. Do you think the public worship of God ought to be as beautiful as possible? Why or why not?

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3. If you heard Palestrina's Nunc Dimittis sung at Church how might it help you to raise your mind and heart to God in prayer?

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TEACHING THE LITURGICAL YEAR

The Similes of Salt and Light (Middle and Upper Elementary)

February 9, 2020 – The Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Overview

In this week’s Gospel passage Jesus tells His disciples to be “salt of the earth” and “light of the world.” In other words, Jesus calls them, and us, to make the joy and love of our Christian Faith known to others and allow it to change the world. In this lesson, students will reflect on how they can be the “salt” and “light” of the world today.

Directions

A. Have your students read the Gospel passage, or read it aloud to your students, and then answer the focus questions. You may have students answer them on their own or you may discuss them together as a class.
B. Have your students read and complete the Salt of the Earth and Light of the World activity.
C. Discuss student answers together when they have completed the activity.

Answer Key

Focus Questions

1. “If salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?”
2. We normally use salt to season and bring out flavor in food. Jesus was telling His disciples that they “season” the earth. Christ’s followers bring life, joy, and love, to the world, in essence, “flavoring” the earth.
3. A city on a hill cannot be hidden because it’s light shines and can be seen for miles around. The light from a lamp covered by a basket would not be able to be seen.
4. He meant for them to allow their “light” to be seen, like the city on a mountain or a lit lamp. Christians truly living the life of Christ are a source of love and joy for the world and must allow their joy to be known.
Sunday Reading

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 5:13-16: The Similes of Salt and Light

Jesus said to his disciples: "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

Focus Questions

1. What did Jesus ask His disciples about salt?
2. What do we normally use salt for? Why do you think Jesus would call His disciples “salt of the earth”?
3. Why can a city on a mountain not be hidden? Why would not one light a lamp and then cover it with a basket?
4. What do you think Jesus meant for His disciples to do when He called them “the light of the world?”
Salt of the Earth and Light of the World

Directions: Jesus told His disciples that they are to be the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world.” This mission also applies to the followers of Christ today. We are the “salt” and “light” of the world today! What does this mean?

In speaking about the conduct of a Christian in the world, St. Peter wrote “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Peter 3:15). This statement first assumes something very important: that others have noticed the hope that we have as Christians. In other words, before we can offer an explanation for the joy and love we possess as followers of Christ, we must first let that joy and love be known to others. We have to live the Christian life in all that we do. We must be the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world”!

Answer the questions below about how you can be “salt” and “light” in the world today.

1. Jesus taught us to love God above all things. What are two practical ways that you can show God that you love Him this week?
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2. Jesus also taught us to love our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. What are two practical ways that you can love others this week?
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3. It’s not always easy to share the Good News of our Christian Faith with others. But, as the quote commonly attributed to St. Francis says, “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary use words.” Our example speaks louder than words. What are two practical ways that you can “preach the Gospel” to others by your example this week?
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Teachings about the Law (Middle and Upper Elementary)

February 16, 2020 – Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Overview
In this week’s Gospel passage, Jesus delivers a powerful teaching on the Law. Jesus makes it clear that the Old Law will not go away in the New Covenant, but instead, the truth at the heart of the Law will be restored and deepened. In this lesson, students will contemplate together the meaning of the Law and Jesus’ teaching regarding how the Law pertains to our lives today.

Directions
A. Have your students read the Gospel passage, or read it aloud to your students, and then answer the focus questions. You may have students answer them on their own or you may discuss them together as a class.

B. Arrange your students into small groups. Assign each group one of Jesus’ teachings about the Law (teaching about the Law, teaching about anger, teaching about adultery, teaching about divorce, or teaching about oaths). Then, have each group re-read the portion of the Gospel reading that pertains to their assigned teaching and answer the questions from the What’s Old is New activity. (Note: This activity involves discussion of divorce and other potentially sensitive topics. Handle this subject charitably.)

C. When complete, call on groups to share and discuss their answers. Students should fill in the rest of their What’s Old is New worksheet based on the answers from the other groups.
Answer Key

Focus Questions

1. Jesus was not eliminating the Law of the Old Testament or the teachings found in the Old Testament. Rather, all that Jesus did was a fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament.
2. While Jesus makes it clear that the Law is still in place, He emphasizes that the Law is meant to change our hearts and teach us to love God and neighbor. For us to enter Heaven, we must not just follow the Law blindly, but allow it to transform our lives for the better.
3. Jesus begins His teachings with what the people know (or think they know) and then deepens each teaching.
4. Accept reasoned answers.

What’s Old is New

Teaching about the Law — Matthew 5:17-20

1. The Old Law has not been abolished and will not pass away until the end of time.
2. Whoever breaks the least of the commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.
3. Jesus specifically teaches that the Old Law has not been abolished. But He reinforces the reward and consequences of keeping and breaking the Law.
4. He challenges us to keep even the smallest of the laws and to be more righteous than even those considered to be the most righteous.

Teaching about Anger — Matthew 5:21-26

1. You shall not kill, and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.
2. Whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Therefore, if your brother has harmed you, settle with them first before doing anything else.
3. We will still be judged if we kill someone.
4. We shouldn’t be concerned only about not killing others, but about how we treat others.

Teaching about Adultery — Matthew 5:27-30

1. You shall not commit adultery.
2. Everyone who looks at a woman (or man) with lust has already committed adultery. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away because it is better to lose an eye or a hand than to go to Hell for your sin.

3. The physical act of adultery is still a sin.

4. Jesus challenges us to control our thoughts and desires, which can not only lead us to the physical act of adultery but can be sinful in themselves.

**Teaching about Divorce — Matthew 5:31-32**

1. Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce (in other words, have a good reason).
2. Whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
3. This teaching is challenging because it seems as if Jesus is canceling out the old teaching. In a certain sense, He is canceling the Law of Moses, which permitted divorce, but He is returning to the original law of God from the very beginning, with Adam and Eve.
4. Jesus challenges us to maintain our commitments in marriage and love.

**Teaching about Oaths — Matthew 5:33-37**

1. Do not take a false oath and keep the vows you make.
2. Do not swear at all. Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no.
3. Jesus is implying that many people make trivial oaths and vows and then fail to keep them because of their trivialness. It is better not to take an oath at all if that is the case, so as to keep any oaths that are made holy and sacred.
4. Jesus challenges us to be true to our own word.
Sunday Reading

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 5:17-37 Teachings about the Law

Teaching about the Law
“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Teaching about Anger
“You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raqa,’ will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.

Teaching about Adultery
“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna.

Teaching about Divorce
“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.’ But
I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

*Teaching about Oaths*

“Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the evil one.

**Focus Questions**

1. “The law and the prophets” is a way of referring to the Old Testament. What did Jesus mean when He said “Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”?

2. In Jesus’ time, the scribes and the Pharisees were religious leaders who held very strictly to the religious laws. Many of those who blindly followed the religious laws did not have a true relationship with God, nor did it result in acts of love and mercy towards others. What do you think Jesus meant when He said “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven”?

3. In this week’s Gospel, Jesus delivers many teachings about the Law. Before each teaching He says “You have heard it said...,” which He follows up with “But I say to you...” Why do you think Jesus introduced each of His teachings in this way?

4. What rules do you have at home that are difficult for you to follow, but that you understand why those rules are in place?
What’s Old is New

Directions: In this week’s Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that the Old Law remains in place in the New Covenant. He affirms the teachings of the Old Law while deepening and enhancing their meaning for the New Covenant. Jesus wants us to not simply follow the Law blindly, but rather allow the truths at the heart of the Law to transform us and show us how to love.

Read your assigned teaching about the Law again and then answer the questions.

Teaching about the Law — Matthew 5:17-20
1. What does Jesus say about the old teaching in this passage?

2. What new teaching does Jesus give?

3. Why does the new teaching not cancel out the old teaching?

4. How does Jesus' new teaching challenge us to go deeper than the old teaching?

Teaching about Anger — Matthew 5:21-26
1. What does Jesus say about the old teaching in this passage?

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2. What new teaching does Jesus give?

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3. Why does the new teaching not cancel out the old teaching?

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4. How does Jesus’ new teaching challenge us to go deeper than the old teaching?

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Teaching about Retaliation and Love of Enemies (Middle and Upper Elementary)

February 23, 2020 – Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Overview
In this week’s Gospel passage, Jesus continues His teaching on the Law. Here, He deepens His command to love our neighbor by telling us that our neighbor includes our enemy. In this lesson, students will reflect on sacred art and the parable of the Good Samaritan as an illustration of Jesus’ teaching.

Directions
A. Have your students read the Gospel passage, or read it aloud to your students, and then answer the focus questions. You may have students answer them on their own or you may discuss them together as a class.
B. In groups of three or four, have your students reflect on the painting The Good Samaritan by Vincent Van Gogh using the given reflection questions.
C. When complete, call on groups to share and discuss their answers.

Answer Key

Focus Questions
1. The Old Law said: “Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.”
2. Offer no resistance, turn the other cheek, if someone asks something of you, give them more and do not turn your back.
3. Jesus’ teaching makes it clear that we should not be the ones to take the eye for an eye and so forth. Everyone will still receive their just reward from God for their actions in the end. Therefore, we should always show love and compassion to others, even those who might wish to harm us.
4. Jesus challenges us to love even those who hurt and wrong us. No good comes from evil done, even if it seems justified.
5. The Old Law said: “Love your neighbor, hate your enemy.”
7. The old teaching to hate your enemy is an action that would keep us separate from those who harm us. This is not a bad thing. However, it may lead to a growing dislike of them. When we love our enemies, we have a greater chance of changing their hearts and preserving our own life as well.

8. Jesus challenges us to do the harder thing, which is love those who do not love us. In fact, He goes further and challenges us to love as the Father loves, to be perfect as He is perfect.

**The Good Samaritan**

1. Accept reasoned answers.
2. Accept reasoned answers.
3. This painting shows the Samaritan helping the robbery victim. He is helping him onto his horse to take him to the inn. The figures in the front are the Samaritan and the robbery victim. The figures in the background are the priest and the Levite walking away.
4. The scholar asked Jesus “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asked the scholar what he thought the answer to the question was, to which he answered “You shall love the lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” The Samaritan lived this command by caring for his neighbor and attending to his wounds. By doing so, he was also showing his love for God by following His command.
5. Jesus's teaching was to love our enemies. The priest and the Levite avoided doing this, and so failed to love their neighbor. The Samaritan, who was considered an enemy, and could rightfully consider the Jews his own enemy, disregarded this and helped a person in need.
6. Accept reasoned answers.
Sunday Reading

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 5:38-48: Teaching about Retaliation and Love of Enemies

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow."

“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Focus Questions

1. To “retaliate” means to “get even” or “to react in proportion to what was done to you.” What does Jesus say about the teaching of the Old Law regarding retaliation in this passage?
2. What new teaching does Jesus give about dealing with those who might do us harm?
3. How does Jesus' new teaching not cancel out the old teaching?
4. How does Jesus' new teaching challenge us to go deeper than the old teaching?
5. What does Jesus say about the Old Law regarding our enemies?
6. What new teaching does Jesus give about how we should treat our enemies?
7. How does Jesus' new teaching not cancel out the old teaching? Why would the old teaching say hate your enemy?
8. How does Jesus' new teaching challenge us to go deeper than the old teaching?
The Good Samaritan

**Directions:** In this week’s Gospel, Jesus affirms His teaching to love our neighbor as ourselves. Notice that Jesus didn’t say, “Love only your neighbors whom you like or who treat you well.” Loving our neighbor includes loving our enemies, because they, too, are our neighbor. Following this teaching can be hard.

One of Jesus’ most well-known parables, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a great illustration of this principle.

Reflect on the painting of the Good Samaritan by Vincent Van Gogh below and discuss the questions.

1. What do you first notice about this painting?
2. How does this painting make you feel?
3. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25–37. How does this painting illustrate the parable? Who are the figures in the front of the painting? What are they doing? Who are the two figures in the background? What are they doing?
4. What question did the scholar of the law ask of Jesus? How was this question answered? Who in the parable lived this command? Why?
5. In a very real way, Samaritans were the “enemies” of the Jews of Jesus’ time. They were outcasts in society, considered to be less than others. In fact, it was against the law for upstanding Jewish citizens to even speak to a Samaritan. How did the Samaritan in this parable exemplify Jesus’ teaching in this week's Gospel?
6. Discuss a time when you did the right thing for someone else, even when you didn’t want to. How can Jesus’ teaching in this week’s Gospel help you to love others in your own life?