

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

An eight-session Catholic Bible study for sixth grade

Leader Guide • Complete Study

“Come and see.” John 1:39

Using This Guide

Who this is for. Sixth graders in a parish religious education class, led by a catechist who may have no theology background. Most sessions run about 55 minutes; Sessions 2 and 8 run about 60. Basic materials are Catholic Bibles, pencils, a name tent and a reflection card per student, and this guide; check each session's materials list for handouts and any additional items, such as a crucifix in Session 4 and the parish Confession schedule in Session 6. You do not have to be an expert. You have to know the story, know where you are going, and trust the questions.

What the study is. Eight main New Testament readings, each connected with a short Old Testament passage, that tell one story, the story the Church calls the kerygma (kuh-RIG-muh), the first proclamation of what God has done for us in Jesus. We begin with Jesus himself, who is at the heart of St. Peter's own preaching at Pentecost, and let the rest of the story unfold from there. Students read each passage for themselves, notice what happens, work out what it means, and then hear what the Church teaches.

The big question. The whole study reads toward one question, Why did Jesus have to die?, which Session 4 answers after the crucifixion is read. Let the students answer it in their own words first; thank them, correct any misunderstanding gently, and then give the clear answer the guide supplies.

The three parts of every session. Part 1, Before You Begin, is a few pages for you: where we are in the story, the aim, the passage in plain terms, what the Church teaches, two saints who said yes, the questions students will ask with answers ready, materials, and a timed plan with one pre-chosen cut. Part 2, the Discussion Guide, is the script for the hour. Part 3 is a reference card listing every passage, Catechism paragraph, and material.

The answer boxes. Every shaded box labeled share after the discussion contains only words you can read aloud to the group, word for word, after the students have had their say. Anything meant for you alone sits in a separate line beneath the box that begins with Leader. Let the students dig first; the box consolidates, it does not replace the discussion.

The opening situation. Each session begins with a brief made-up situation that raises the question the passage will answer. It is always fictional. Never invite a student to describe their own sins or their family's problems. If a child begins to disclose harm or danger, protect their privacy without dismissing them, follow the parish and diocesan safeguarding procedures and the reporting requirements that apply to you, and do not promise secrecy. This guide does not replace your safeguarding training; it points you to it.

Reading aloud. Passages are read in parts, with a narrator and the characters. Anyone may pass. Give page numbers, because most sixth graders cannot yet find Luke on their own, and never make finding a verse a race. Bibles will differ in wording; the leader lines tell you when it matters.

Names and private writing. Each student has a folded name tent, which is for names, and a reflection card, which is for the private answers they write each week. The reflection card stays with the student and is never collected; you collect nothing. Do not promise privacy the handling cannot keep, and keep it.

Prayer. Every session includes a short prayer the students pray silently while you say the words. Tell them each time that they do not have to feel anything special. The Church teaches that feelings are not the measure of God's grace (CCC 2005).

One step and the family page. Each session ends with one realistic action for the week, never a homework assignment. A one-page family page goes home after each session with the story in a few sentences, the big idea, the memory verse, one dinner question, the step, and a prayer. It is written for a parent, guardian, or any trusted adult, with no theology required.

Two things to hold onto all eight weeks. First, most of these students were baptized as babies, and God has already begun his work in them; this study invites them to grow in a friendship that already exists (CCC 1254). Some may have been baptized later, some may already be confirmed, and some may not be baptized at all. Use conditional wording, never ask a child to say their status in front of the group, and welcome everyone: those preparing for Baptism belong here too. Second, following Jesus is never mainly about trying harder to be good. God's help comes first and makes our response possible (CCC 1996-2000). When a discussion becomes only a list of ways to try harder, return to what God has done and how his grace makes our response possible; then help students see what responding to that grace looks like in their choices. God's initiative and our cooperation belong together.

Preparing in twenty minutes. Read the passage twice. Read Part 1. Skim the questions and their boxes. Check the materials line. Pray for your students by name. That is enough.

Two practical reminders. Children depend on adults for rides and permission; when a weekly step involves Mass or Confession, invite them to ask for help, and never treat not getting there as unwillingness. And make the actual parish safeguarding procedure part of your own preparation; this guide points to it but cannot replace it.

The story in eight sessions

- Session 1: Come and See (John 1:35-42; flashback Exodus 12:3, 6-8, 12-13)
- Session 2: What He Came For (Luke 19:1-10; flashback Genesis 3:1-13)
- Session 3: Who Is This? (Mark 2:1-12; flashback Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 103:2-3)
- Session 4: He Gave His Life for You (Luke 23:32-46; flashback Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12)
- Session 5: Death Did Not Win (Luke 24:13-43; flashback Psalm 16:9-11)
- Session 6: Come Home (Luke 15:11-24; flashback Isaiah 55:6-7)
- Session 7: You Are Not on Your Own (Acts 2:37-47; flashback Ezekiel 36:25-27)
- Session 8: Your Next Yes (Matthew 28:16-20; flashback Genesis 12:1-3)

A short glossary for leaders

- Kerygma: the first proclamation of the Gospel, what God has done for us in Jesus; the story this study tells.
- Grace: God's own life and help, freely given; it comes first and makes our response possible.
- Repentance: turning away from sin and back to God, in action and not only in feeling.
- Sacrament: a sign Christ gave his Church through which he really gives grace; Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, and Reconciliation are discussed in this study.
- Trinity: one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force.
- Absolution: the words the priest speaks in Confession through which Christ forgives sins.
- Original sin: the condition of being born without the original holiness God intended, because of our first parents' sin; not a sin a baby committed; removed by Baptism.

Table of Contents

Page numbers refer to this merged complete-study document, which is numbered continuously. The individual session files restart their page numbers.

Session 1: Come and See • *John 1:35-42*.....6

Session 2: What He Came For • *Luke 19:1-10*.....13

Session 3: Who Is This? • *Mark 2:1-12*.....20

Session 4: He Gave His Life for You • *Luke 23:32-46*.....26

Session 5: Death Did Not Win • *Luke 24:13-43*.....34

Session 6: Come Home • *Luke 15:11-24*.....41

Session 7: You Are Not on Your Own • *Acts 2:37-47*.....48

Session 8: Your Next Yes • *Matthew 28:16-20*.....57

Family Pages 1-8 are published separately, one page each, and as one merged set.

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 1: Come and See

John 1:35-42 • about 55 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. You do not need to be a theology expert to lead this session. You need to know the story, know where you are going, and trust the questions to do their work.

Where we are in the story

RESCUED is an eight-week journey through the heart of the Gospel, what the Church calls the kerygma (kuh-RIG-muh), the first proclamation of what God has done for us in Jesus. We begin with Jesus himself, who is at the heart of St. Peter's own first preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:22-36), and let the rest of the story unfold from there. Tonight the students meet Jesus the way his first followers did.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that being a Christian begins with meeting a person, not passing a test. Jesus's first words to his first followers are a question, What do you seek?, and an invitation, Come and see. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say, in their own words, that Jesus invites people before he asks anything of them.

The passage in plain terms

John the Baptist is standing with two of his own followers when Jesus walks by. John points and says, Behold, the Lamb of God (1:36). His two disciples leave him and follow Jesus, who turns and speaks his first recorded words in this Gospel, a question: What do you seek? They answer with a question of their own, where are you staying?, and Jesus says, Come and see (1:38-39). They spend the rest of the day with him. One of the two is Andrew, who goes to his brother Simon and says, We have found the Messiah (1:41). When Jesus meets Simon, he gives him a new name, Cephas, which means Peter, rock (1:42).

Three details help the students. A rabbi is a Jewish teacher, and students in Jesus's day chose their rabbi by going to live near him and learn from him. Messiah is Hebrew for anointed one, the king God promised to send; Christ is the same word in Greek. And the tenth hour (1:39) means about four in the afternoon. The Gospel keeps the exact time, the kind of detail a witness remembers; the second disciple is unnamed in this passage, and tradition has long identified him as John himself.

What the Church teaches

At the heart of catechesis we find a person, the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and the aim of teaching the faith is to bring people into communion with him (CCC 426-427). That is what tonight models: Jesus does not begin with rules or a quiz. He begins with an invitation. The Church also teaches that faith must grow after Baptism (CCC 1254), so for the baptized students tonight's invitation is the next step of a friendship God began at the font, and for any student not yet baptized it is the beginning of the road toward it.

Two things to hold onto all eight weeks. First, God has already begun his work in these students; this study invites them to grow in a friendship that already exists. Second, following Jesus is never mainly about trying harder to be good. God's help comes first and makes our response possible (CCC 1996-2000), and his grace then shows up in real choices. When a discussion becomes only a list of ways to try harder, return to what God has done, and then help the students see what responding to that looks like.

Saints who said yes

St. Andrew

One of the first two people in John's Gospel to follow Jesus, and the first to bring someone else to him. He did not wait until he understood everything. He spent one afternoon with Jesus and went to find his brother. The Church honors him on November 30, and the Gospel keeps showing him bringing people to Jesus (John 6:8-9; 12:22).

St. Carlo Acutis

An Italian teenager who died of leukemia in 2006 at fifteen and was declared a saint in 2025. He loved video games, soccer, and computers, and he loved Jesus in the Eucharist more than any of them. He is remembered for calling the Eucharist his highway to heaven. Carlo is proof that a normal kid can say yes to Jesus with his whole life, right now, without waiting to grow up.

Questions students may ask

- Why does John call Jesus a lamb? Tonight's flashback answers the first half: on the night Israel escaped Egypt, a lamb was sacrificed and its blood on the doorposts spared the firstborn of each marked house. John is saying, before anyone understands it, that Jesus will be that lamb for the whole world (John 1:29). Session 4 shows what it costs him.
- Was Jesus real? Yes. Jesus is a real person of history, and the Gospels come from people who knew him or knew those who did. The tenth hour in verse 39 is the kind of small detail a witness remembers.
- What if I do not feel anything when I pray? That is normal, and it is not a sign that God is far away. The Church teaches that feelings are not the measure of God's grace (CCC 2005). Andrew did not report a feeling; he reported a person.

- Why did Jesus change Simon's name? In the Bible a new name means a new job and a new relationship with God. Jesus sees who Simon will become, not just who he is. We will meet Peter again in Session 7.

Materials

Catholic Bibles for every student (page numbers ready for John 1 and Exodus 12), pencils, a folded name tent for each student, and a reflection card for each student that they keep (it is never collected).

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 6. Reading John 1:35-42 in segments, 5. Discovery questions, 17. Flashback to Exodus 12, 7. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 6. Prayer, one step, and closing, 5.

If you are running long: shorten the opening situation to one answer. Never cut the reading, the flashback, or the prayer.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Jesus, you asked your first followers what they were looking for. Tonight we are looking for you. Open our eyes and our ears, and help us come and see. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *Over the next eight weeks we are going to read one big story, the story of what God has done to rescue us. We are not starting at the very beginning. We are starting with the main character. Tonight we meet Jesus the way his first friends did.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine a friend texts you: Come with me right now, you have to see this. No explanation. Just come. What makes you willing to follow someone somewhere you have never been? What makes you say no?*

Leader: Let two or three students answer. There are no wrong answers here. Keep every situation in this study fictional; never invite a student to describe their own sins or family problems. Then say: In tonight's story, two people get an invitation almost exactly like that.

READ JOHN 1:35-42

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator, John the Baptist, Jesus, and Andrew. Read verses 35 to 39, then discuss questions 1 to 3. Read verses 40 to 42, then question 4. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for the Gospel of John before you start.

Leader: Bibles will differ. The RSV2CE has Jesus ask, What do you seek? Other Catholic Bibles say, What are you looking for? Both are fine; the question is the same.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 35 to 39

1. What does John the Baptist call Jesus in verse 36? What do his two disciples do right after they hear it?

Answer • share after the discussion

John calls Jesus the Lamb of God. His two disciples leave John and follow Jesus. Notice that John does not try to keep them. He points away from himself toward Jesus, and they go.

Leader: If someone asks why a lamb, give the short version from Part 1: in Israel a lamb was offered for sin, and John is saying Jesus will take sin away. Promise the full answer in Session 4.

2. Jesus turns around and asks them a question in verse 38. What is it? Why do you think he asks that instead of just saying, Follow me?

Answer • share after the discussion

He asks, What do you seek? They are Jesus's first recorded words in the Gospel of John, and they are a question. He wants them to think about what they are really looking for before they follow him. Jesus does not grab people. He asks them what they want, and he takes the answer seriously.

3. They answer with a question of their own: where are you staying? What does Jesus say back in verse 39, and what is he inviting them to do?

Answer • share after the discussion

He says, Come and see. He does not give them an address or a lecture. He invites them to spend time with him and find out for themselves. That is how following Jesus starts for everyone: not by knowing everything first, but by coming and seeing.

Read verses 40 to 42

4. After spending the afternoon with Jesus, what is the first thing Andrew does?

Answer • share after the discussion

He goes and finds his brother Simon, tells him, We have found the Messiah, and brings him to Jesus. One afternoon with Jesus, and Andrew cannot keep it to himself. And when Jesus meets Simon, he gives him a new name, Peter, which means rock: Jesus sees who Simon will become, not just who he is. Meeting Jesus makes people want to bring someone else, and Jesus sees every one of us the way he saw Simon.

FLASHBACK: THE PASSEOVER LAMB

Read aloud: *One more thing before the personal question. John called Jesus the Lamb of God. To understand that, we flash back about 1,300 years. Israel is enslaved in Egypt and preparing to leave, and God gives each household instructions for one night.*

Read Exodus 12:3, 6 to 8, and 12 to 13 (give the page number; one reader)

1. What was each household told to do with the lamb, and what happened at the houses marked with its blood?

Answer • share after the discussion

God told the households to sacrifice the lamb, mark their doorposts with its blood, and eat the meal. That night, when the plague struck the firstborn of Egypt, God spared the firstborn in the houses marked with the blood. This rescue helps us understand why John calls Jesus the Lamb of God: he will be the lamb whose blood saves, for the whole world. Remember it. Session 4 shows what it cost him.

Leader: Do not explain the cross tonight. Plant the lamb and move on.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to the present. Jesus turns to two men following him and says, Come and see. Now you know a little of what they were going to see.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *If Jesus turned to you tonight and asked, What do you seek?, what would your honest answer be? Take a minute and write it on your reflection card. That card is yours. Nobody collects it.*

Leader: Give real silence, at least a full minute. Do not ask anyone to share. Some students will write one word; that is enough. The reflection card stays with the student all eight weeks; you collect nothing.

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. Being a Catholic does not start with rules, and it does not start with a test. It starts with a person. The Catechism says that at the heart of everything the Church teaches we find a person, Jesus of Nazareth. The whole point is to bring us into friendship with him (CCC 426-427).

Those of you who have been baptized received new life in Christ at your Baptism; some of you were babies, and others may remember that day. God did not wait for you to be ready. For anyone here who has not been baptized, you are welcome, and this is where the road toward it begins. Tonight is Jesus turning around, looking at you, and saying what he said to Andrew: Come and see.

Leader: *Never ask a student to say publicly whether they have been baptized. If one tells you privately they were not, or is not sure, welcome them warmly and talk with a parent afterward.*

PRAYER

Leader: *Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.*

Read aloud: *Let us pray. Talk to Jesus honestly, in your head, while I say these words. Jesus, you asked, What do you seek? Here is my honest answer. Help me come and see who you really are. Amen.*

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: *One thing, not ten. Every day this week, take two minutes and ask Jesus one question: What do you want me to see today? Then be quiet for the rest of the two minutes. That is it.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you looked at Andrew and Simon and you look at us. Thank you for inviting us before we understood anything. Help us come and see. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“Come and see.” (John 1:39)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

John 1:35-42 (read aloud in segments, in parts); flashback Exodus 12:3, 6-8, 12-13

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- John 6:8-9 and 12:22 (St. Andrew bringing people to Jesus)
- Acts 2:22-36 (Jesus at the heart of St. Peter's first preaching)

CATECHISM

- CCC 426-427 (Christ at the heart of catechesis)
- CCC 1254 (faith must grow after Baptism)
- CCC 1996-2000 (grace comes first)
- CCC 2005 (feelings are not the measure of grace)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Andrew (John 1:40-42; 6:8-9; 12:22)
- St. Carlo Acutis (1991-2006, canonized 2025)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles for every student (page numbers ready for John 1 and Exodus 12), pencils, a folded name tent for each student, and a reflection card for each student that they keep (it is never collected).

NOTE

Name tents are for names; reflection cards stay with the students and are never collected.

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 2: What He Came For

Luke 19:1-10 • about 60 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight the students meet the problem Jesus came to solve. They meet it first the way the Gospel presents it, through a man Jesus went looking for, and then the session flashes back to Genesis 3 to see where being lost began. The flashback is the only long one in the study; read it in parts and keep it moving.

Where we are in the story

Last week the students met Jesus through his first followers and heard his invitation, Come and see. Tonight they watch what Jesus does with that invitation when he meets a man the crowd has written off, and then they flash back to the garden to see the disease Jesus came to cure. This is where sin, and original sin, enter the study.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that Jesus goes looking for people who are lost, and that sin is what makes a person lost. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say, in their own words, that Jesus came to seek and to save people who are lost, and that no one is too far gone for him.

The passage in plain terms

Luke tells us three things about Zacchaeus: he is a chief tax collector in Jericho, he is rich, and he is short (19:2-3). Tax collectors worked for the Roman occupiers and were widely resented, often for good reason; the crowd will call him a sinner, and his own words about paying people back suggest he knows why. Luke does not spell out his record; he lets Zacchaeus own it. When Jesus comes through town, Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree to see him over the crowd. Jesus stops under the tree, calls him by name, and invites himself to dinner: Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today (19:5).

The crowd is scandalized. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner (19:7). Then Zacchaeus does something no one told him to do. He pledges half his goods to the poor and promises that if he has defrauded anyone, he will pay it back four times over (19:8). Jesus announces the result: Today salvation has come to this house, and gives the sentence that names the whole study: For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost (19:9-10).

A detail for the students: Jesus never lectures Zacchaeus. He does not list the man's sins. He invites himself over, and the change comes from the inside. The order matters. Jesus goes first; Zacchaeus answers.

What the Church teaches

Sin is real, and the Church does not soften it: sin is an offense against God, a failure of love (CCC 1849-1850). Genesis 3 shows its anatomy: distrust of God's goodness, disobedience, hiding, and blaming. Because of our first parents' sin, we are born without the original holiness God intended for humanity; this inherited condition is called original sin, and it is not a personal sin a baby committed (CCC 404-405). Baptism removes it and gives new life in Christ, though our struggle against sin remains; Session 7 returns to that. Zacchaeus does not deny the crowd's charge; his promise of restitution admits it. But the Church also teaches that Jesus came precisely for sinners. He invites sinners to the table of the kingdom, and he tells the self-righteous that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners (CCC 545). Being lost is the reason he came, not a reason he stays away.

Keep the two halves together all night. If you only say sin is serious, the students will hear that God is disappointed in them. If you only say Jesus loves everyone, they will hear that nothing they do matters. The Gospel says both: your sin is real, and he came for you anyway.

Saints who said yes

St. Matthew

A tax collector like Zacchaeus, sitting at his booth when Jesus walked by and said two words: Follow me (Matthew 9:9). He got up and followed, and he threw a dinner for Jesus and a house full of other tax collectors and sinners. He went on to write the Gospel that carries his name. The man who collected money for Rome ended up recording the words of God.

St. Augustine

As a young man in the fourth century he chased pleasure and success and ran from God for years while his mother, St. Monica, prayed for him. In his book the Confessions he tells how God kept seeking him the whole time, and how his life turned around in a garden in Milan in the year 386. He became a bishop and one of the greatest teachers the Church has ever had. His story is Zacchaeus stretched over thirty years.

Questions students may ask

- Were Adam and Eve real people? The Church teaches that our first parents really did turn away from God at the beginning of human history, and that Genesis tells it in figurative language (CCC 390). She does not fight with science about how human bodies came to be, and tonight is not the place to try. What the story tells us for certain is what sin is and what God did next: he came looking.
- Why did people hate tax collectors? They worked for the Roman empire that ruled Israel, and many charged extra and kept it, so they were seen as cheats and traitors. Luke does not list what Zacchaeus did; the crowd calls him a sinner, and his promise to pay people back suggests they had a point. What they were wrong about was what Jesus would do with him.
- Did Zacchaeus have to give his money away to be saved? He could not buy salvation, and Jesus did not name a price. Jesus went first, Zacchaeus received him, and the giving flowed out of that.

But real change shows up in real actions: repentance includes making things right where we can. Grace comes first, and it changes what we do.

- What does lost mean? It does not mean worthless. A lost sheep is still the shepherd's sheep. Lost means separated from the one you belong to. That is what sin does, and it is why Jesus goes looking.
- Is anyone too bad for Jesus? No. That is the whole point of tonight. If Jesus went to dinner at the house of the man the whole crowd called a sinner, he will come to anyone who lets him in.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 19 and Genesis 3, pencils, name tents, and the students' reflection cards from last week.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 5. Reading Luke 19:1-10 in segments, 5. Discovery questions, 18. Flashback to Genesis 3, 12. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 6. Prayer, one step, and closing, 5. Total: 60 minutes.

If you are running long: drop discovery question 6 and let the Catholic connection carry its point. Never cut the reading, the flashback, or the prayer.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Jesus, you called Zacchaeus by name and went to his house. Tonight, call us closer to you, and help us welcome you. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *Last week we met Jesus and heard his invitation: Come and see. Tonight we find out what Jesus actually came to do by watching him visit Zacchaeus, a wealthy chief tax collector whom the crowd called a sinner.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine there is a kid at school with a reputation for cheating. One day someone invites that kid to sit with them, and another student says, Why would you want anything to do with him? Would you sit there? Does spending time with someone mean you approve of everything they do?*

Leader: Let a few students answer both questions. Keep it fictional; do not let anyone name a real classmate. Then say: Tonight, Jesus walks into that lunchroom.

READ LUKE 19:1-10

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator, Jesus, Zacchaeus, and the crowd. Read verses 1 to 4, then questions 1 and 2. Read verses 5 to 7, then questions 3 and 4. Read verses 8 to 10, then questions 5 and 6. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Luke 19 before you start.

Leader: Some students will know the Sunday school song about Zacchaeus. That is fine, but tonight we read the real story, which is sharper than the song.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 1 to 4

1. In verses 2 and 3, what do we learn about Zacchaeus? List every detail.

Answer • share after the discussion

He is a chief tax collector, he is rich, and he is small. Tax collectors worked for the Romans, and people resented them as cheats and traitors. He is the last person the crowd would expect Jesus to notice.

2. What does Zacchaeus do in verse 4, and why do you think a rich, important man would do that?

Answer • share after the discussion

He runs ahead and climbs a sycamore tree. He wants to see Jesus badly enough to run and climb, whatever anyone watching thinks. Something in him is already reaching for Jesus before Jesus says a word.

Read verses 5 to 7

3. Look at verse 5. Who speaks first, Jesus or Zacchaeus? What does Jesus say?

Answer • share after the discussion

Jesus speaks first. He stops, looks up, calls Zacchaeus by name, and says, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today. Zacchaeus has not said a single word. Jesus knows his name, and Jesus invites himself over. He goes first.

Leader: This is the point of the night. Make sure the group sees that Jesus acts before Zacchaeus does anything to deserve it.

4. How does the crowd react in verse 7? Were they wrong about Zacchaeus?

Answer • share after the discussion

They grumble: he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. Zacchaeus does not argue with them; his next words admit he has wrongs to put right. What the crowd got wrong was Jesus, who came for exactly that kind of person.

Read verses 8 to 10

5. In verse 8, what does Zacchaeus say he will do? Did Jesus tell him to do it?

Answer • share after the discussion

He pledges half of everything he owns to the poor and promises that if he has defrauded anyone, he will pay it back four times over. Jesus never told him to. Meeting Jesus changed him from the inside, and the change showed up in his wallet. Real change shows in real actions.

6. Read verses 9 and 10 again. In your own words, what does Jesus say he came to do?

Answer • share after the discussion

He says salvation has come to this house today, and then he says why he came at all: to seek and to save the lost. That sentence is the whole study in one line. Jesus does not wait for lost people to find him. He goes looking.

Leader: This is the question to drop if you are short on time; the Catholic connection carries its point.

FLASHBACK: WHERE LOST BEGAN

Read aloud: *Zacchaeus was lost. Where did lost begin? We flash back to the very beginning of the story: the man and the woman are in the garden God made for them, and a serpent starts asking questions. This is the disease Jesus came to cure.*

Read Genesis 3:1-13, in parts: a narrator, the serpent, the woman, the man, and God (give the page number)

1. In verses 1 to 5, what does the serpent get the woman to doubt about God?

Answer • share after the discussion

That God's word is true, and that God is good. Did God say? Then: you will not die. Then: you will be like God. The first sin begins with distrust, with believing that God is holding something back from us. Every sin since has started the same way.

2. What do the man and the woman do when they hear God coming (verse 8)? What is God's first question (verse 9), and what do they do when he asks what happened (verses 12 and 13)?

Answer • share after the discussion

They hide. God's first question in the whole Bible after sin is not What have you done? It is Where are you? He comes looking. Then each of them blames someone else: the man blames the woman, the woman blames the serpent. Distrust, hiding, blaming. That is the disease, and every one of us has caught it.

Leader: If a student asks whether Adam and Eve were real, use the answer in Part 1: a real turning away at the beginning, told in picture language, and no argument with science tonight.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to Jericho. In the garden, God called to people who were hiding. Here, Jesus calls Zacchaeus, who has climbed a tree to see him. The situations are different, but the same loving initiative is in both: God reaches out to bring people closer to himself. He has been doing it since the garden.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *Zacchaeus climbed a tree because he wanted to see Jesus but the crowd was in the way. What gets in the way between you and Jesus? Write one word on your reflection card. That card is yours to keep.*

Leader: Give a full minute of silence. Do not ask anyone to share. If a student writes nothing, that is fine.

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. Sin is real. The Church calls it an offense against God, a failure to love him and to love other people (CCC 1849-1850). And it goes back to the garden. Because of our first parents' sin, every one of us is born without the original holiness God intended for us. The Church calls that inherited condition original sin. It is not a sin you committed. Baptism removes it and gives new life in Christ, and we will talk about that in Session 7. Zacchaeus did not argue with the crowd; his promise to pay people back admits he had wrongs to put right.

But the Church also teaches that Jesus came precisely for sinners. He invites sinners to the table of the kingdom, and he says plainly that he did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (CCC 545). Being lost is not a reason Jesus stays away. It is the reason he came. If he went to dinner at the house of the man the crowd called a sinner, there is no one in this room he will not come to.

Leader: If a student asks whether that means sin does not matter, point back to verse 8: it mattered so much that Zacchaeus gave away half of everything. Grace comes first, and it changes what we do.

PRAYER

Leader: Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.

Read aloud: Let us pray. Talk to Jesus in your head while I say these words. Jesus, you knew Zacchaeus's name and you know mine. You came looking for the lost, and sometimes that is me. Come to my house today. Amen.

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: One thing this week. Zacchaeus made something right that he had done wrong. Pick one thing you owe someone, an apology, something you borrowed, a promise you broke, and make it right before we meet again.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you came to seek and to save the lost. Thank you for looking for us before we looked for you. Help us come down from our trees and let you in. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Luke 19:1-10 (read aloud in segments); flashback Genesis 3:1-13 (read in parts)

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- Matthew 9:9-13 (the call of Matthew)
- Luke 15:4-7 (the lost sheep, if a student asks what lost means)

CATECHISM

- CCC 1849-1850 (what sin is)
- CCC 397-401 (the first sin: distrust and disobedience)
- CCC 404-405 (original sin, an inherited condition)
- CCC 390 (Genesis 3: figurative language about a real event)
- CCC 545 (Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom)
- CCC 1996-2000 (grace comes first)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13)
- St. Augustine (Confessions, his conversion in 386; summarized)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 19 and Genesis 3, pencils, name tents, and the students' reflection cards from last week.

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 3: Who Is This?

Mark 2:1-12 • about 55 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight the question shifts from what Jesus does to who Jesus is. The students will watch him claim something only God can claim, and then prove it. Let them feel the shock the scribes felt before you explain it.

Where we are in the story

Session 1: Jesus invites. Session 2: Jesus goes looking for the lost. Tonight the students ask the question the crowd in Capernaum asked, and the answer is the foundation for everything after it: Jesus is God. Next week that answer is what makes the cross mean anything.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that Jesus claims the authority to forgive sins, which the scribes correctly say belongs to God alone, and that he proves the claim by healing the man in front of everyone. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say that Jesus does what only God can do, and that this is why the Church says Jesus is God.

The passage in plain terms

Jesus is teaching in a crowded house in Capernaum. Four men arrive carrying a paralyzed friend on a mat, cannot get through the door, and dig through the roof to lower him down in front of Jesus (2:3-4). Jesus sees their faith and says something no one expected: My son, your sins are forgiven (2:5).

The scribes, the religious experts, are silently outraged: Who can forgive sins but God alone? (2:7). They are right about the rule. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus knows what they are thinking and asks which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven or rise and walk. Then he says the second thing to prove he can do the first: that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (2:10). The man gets up and walks out. The crowd says, We never saw anything like this! (2:12).

A detail for the students: Jesus does the invisible thing first, forgiveness, and the visible thing second, healing, as proof. He is telling them what the man needed most.

What the Church teaches

The Church teaches that only God can forgive sins, and that Jesus forgives sins because he is the Son of God (CCC 1441, which quotes tonight's verse). The scribes' logic was sound; their conclusion was wrong only because they could not accept who was standing in front of them.

The Church also teaches that Jesus is true God and true man, not part of each, but fully both (CCC 464). That is why he can be tired and hungry and also forgive sins. Tonight does not need the word Incarnation; it needs the students to see a man who does what only God can do.

Saints who said yes

St. Thomas the Apostle

He refused to believe Jesus had risen until he could see the wounds himself. When Jesus stood in front of him a week later, Thomas said the clearest confession in the Gospels: My Lord and my God! (John 20:28). The doubter became the one who said it plainest. Tonight's scribes asked the right question; Thomas eventually gave the right answer.

St. Teresa of Calcutta

Mother Teresa spent her life caring for the poorest and sickest people in Calcutta, India, and she said she was serving Jesus himself in each of them. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 and was declared a saint in 2016. She is remembered for treating every suffering person as if Jesus were lying on that mat. The four friends in tonight's story would have understood her.

Questions students may ask

- Why did Jesus forgive his sins instead of healing him? Because forgiveness was the deeper need, and because Jesus wanted everyone to see that he could do what only God can do. The healing came second, as proof.
- Were the scribes bad guys? Not in this scene. They knew the rule: only God forgives sins. Their mistake was refusing to consider that God might be standing in the room.
- How do we know Jesus is God and not just a great teacher? Because of nights like this one. A great teacher does not forgive sins against God and then heal a paralyzed man to prove it. Jesus does. Either he is God or he is something much worse than a teacher.
- Can I get my sins forgiven like that man? Yes. Jesus gave that authority to his Church, and it happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We will spend a whole night on that in Session 6.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Mark 2, Isaiah 43, and Psalm 103, pencils, name tents, reflection cards.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 6. Reading Mark 2:1-12 in segments, 5. Discovery questions, 18. Flashback to Isaiah and the Psalms, 6. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 6. Prayer, one step, and closing, 5.

If you are running long: briefly summarize how the friends lowered the man through the roof, then begin the discussion with question 2. Never cut questions 3 or 4; they are the point of the night.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Jesus, four friends carried a man to you and you gave him more than he asked for. Tonight, help us see who you really are. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *So far we have met Jesus, and we have watched him go looking for someone who was lost. Tonight we ask the question everyone in the room was asking: who is this?*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine someone takes your things. Then a third person, who had nothing to do with it, walks up and announces: I forgive you. Everything is settled. What is wrong with that? Who was actually wronged, and who has the right to forgive?*

Leader: Let them work out that only the person wronged can forgive the wrong. Then say: Tonight Jesus forgives sins, and the experts in the room ask exactly your question.

READ MARK 2:1-12

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator, Jesus, the scribes, and the crowd. Read verses 1 to 5, then questions 1 and 2. Read verses 6 to 9, then question 3. Read verses 10 to 12, then questions 4 and 5. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Mark 2 before you start.

Leader: Pallet means a mat or stretcher. Scribes means the religious experts of the day, the people who knew the law best.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 1 to 5

1. In verses 3 and 4, what do the four friends do to get their friend to Jesus? What does that tell you about them?

Answer • share after the discussion

They carry him, they cannot get through the door, so they climb up, dig through the roof, and lower him down. They are not giving up. They believe Jesus can help their friend, and they will wreck a roof to get him there. Verse 5 says Jesus saw their faith, the friends' faith, not just the sick man's.

2. What is the first thing Jesus says to the paralyzed man in verse 5? Is that what anyone expected?

Answer • share after the discussion

He says, My son, your sins are forgiven. Nobody expected that. Everyone expected a healing. Jesus deals with the deeper problem first. He is telling the whole room that this man's biggest need was not his legs.

Read verses 6 to 9

3. What do the scribes think in verse 7? Are they right about the rule?

Answer • share after the discussion

They think: this is blasphemy; who can forgive sins but God alone? And they are right about the rule. Only God can forgive sins, because every sin is against God. The scribes knew the law. What they could not accept was who was standing in front of them.

Leader: Do not rush past this. The students need to see that the scribes' logic is sound; that is what makes verse 10 so big.

Read verses 10 to 12

4. Jesus mentions two statements in verse 9. Which one could the crowd check with their own eyes? What does he do next, and why does that prove the other one?

Answer • share after the discussion

Rise, take up your pallet and walk is the one anyone can check. Your sins are forgiven cannot be seen. So Jesus tells the man to rise and walk, and the man gets up. The healing everyone can see confirms his authority to forgive, which no one can see.

5. Verse 10 says the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. Put the pieces together: if only God can forgive sins, and Jesus forgives sins, who is Jesus?

Answer • share after the discussion

Jesus is God. That is the conclusion the whole scene is built to force. He does not say it in so many words here; he does what only God can do and lets the room work it out. The Church says it plainly: Jesus is true God and true man (CCC 464). And the crowd's reaction in verse 12 is the honest one: We never saw anything like this!

FLASHBACK: ONLY GOD FORGIVES

Read aloud: *The scribes' question reflects something Israel's Scriptures teach: forgiveness comes from God. We flash back to two passages that help us understand their objection, a promise God made through the prophet Isaiah and a song of praise from the Psalms.*

Read Isaiah 43:25, then Psalm 103:2-3 (give both page numbers; two readers)

1. According to these verses, who forgives sins? And what does the psalm say God does right beside forgiving?

Answer • share after the discussion

God does: I, I am he who blots out your transgressions. And the psalm puts two things side by side: who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases. These passages speak of God forgiving and healing. In the Gospel scene, Jesus forgives the man's sins and heals him, showing his authority to forgive.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to the house with the hole in the roof. Now we can better understand the scribes' question: Who can forgive sins but God alone?*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *Four friends carried that man to Jesus. Who has carried you toward Jesus, a parent, a grandparent, a friend, a teacher? And who could you carry? Write one name of each on your reflection card.*

Leader: *Give a full minute. Do not ask for names aloud. Some students will only think of one; that is fine.*

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. Only God can forgive sins, and the Church teaches that Jesus forgives sins because he is the Son of God (CCC 1441). The scribes had the right rule and missed the right answer. The Church says what they could not: Jesus is true God and true man, not half of each, but fully both (CCC 464).

That is why the cross will matter next week. If Jesus were only a good teacher, his death would be sad. Because he is God, his death can save the world. And the forgiveness he gave the man on the mat is still given today, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where Jesus forgives through his priest. We will spend a whole night on that in Session 6.

Leader: *Keep the Reconciliation mention to one sentence tonight; Session 6 carries it. Two guards: do not suggest the man's paralysis was caused by a particular sin (the passage does not say that), and do not say God could never give human ministers a role in forgiveness; Jesus's authority to do exactly that matters in Session 6. If a student pushes back that a teacher could just be lying, honor it: that is the choice the scene forces, and we will watch Jesus back it with his life.*

PRAYER

Leader: *Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.*

Read aloud: *Let us pray. Talk to Jesus in your head while I say these words. Jesus, you are not just a good teacher. You are God, and you can forgive what nobody else can. Forgive me. And help me carry someone to you. Amen.*

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: *One thing this week. Every day, pray for the person you would like to carry to Jesus, by name, for one minute. That is it. Just the name and one minute.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, true God and true man, you forgave a man's sins and then made him walk to prove it. Forgive ours. And make us like the four friends, willing to break a roof to bring someone to you. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” (Mark 2:10)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Mark 2:1-12 (read aloud in segments); flashback Isaiah 43:25 and Psalm 103:2-3

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- John 20:24-29 (Thomas: My Lord and my God)
- Matthew 9:2-8 (the same story in Matthew, if a student's Bible is open there)

CATECHISM

- CCC 1441 (only God forgives sins; Jesus does because he is the Son of God)
- CCC 464 (true God and true man)
- CCC 1422-1424 (the Sacrament of Reconciliation, for Session 6)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Thomas the Apostle (John 20:24-29)
- St. Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997, canonized 2016; summarized)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Mark 2, Isaiah 43, and Psalm 103, pencils, name tents, reflection cards.

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 4: He Gave His Life for You

Luke 23:32-46 • about 55 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight is the center of the study. Prepare it with special care and pray before class. Some students will hear the crucifixion as a real story for the first time.

Where we are in the story

The students have met Jesus (Session 1), watched him seek the lost (Session 2), and worked out that he is God (Session 3). Tonight they watch the Son of God die for them, and they get an answer to the question the whole study has been reading toward: Why did Jesus have to die? Next week, the tomb is empty.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that Jesus refused to save himself so that he could save us, and that a dying criminal who admitted his sin and turned to Jesus in trust was welcomed that same day. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say, in their own words, that Jesus freely gave his life for our sins, and that anyone who turns to him is welcome.

The passage in plain terms

Jesus is crucified between two criminals at the place called The Skull. His first words are a prayer for the men killing him: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (23:34). The rulers, the soldiers, and one of the criminals each throw the same kind of taunt at him, in their own words: if you are who you say you are, save yourself (23:35-39).

The other criminal stops the mockery. He admits that they deserve their sentence and that Jesus has done nothing wrong, and then he turns to Jesus with a request that begins, Jesus, remember me (23:40-42). Jesus answers, Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise (23:43). Darkness covers the land from noon to three, the temple curtain tears, and Jesus dies with a prayer: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit! (23:44-46).

Two details for the students. First, Jesus does not save himself, because saving himself would mean not saving us. Second, the second criminal cannot undo his past or repay anything; what he does is admit his sin, defend Jesus, and turn to him in trust, and Jesus freely welcomes him.

One precision for you, because a student may ask. When we say God died for us, we mean that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, truly died in his human nature. He did not stop being God, and the Father and the Holy Spirit did not die (CCC 626-630).

What the Church teaches

The Church teaches that Christ's death is the unique and definitive sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, offered once for all (CCC 613-614), and that he died for every single person without exception (CCC 605). The Father and the Son are united in this saving love: the Father gave his Son, and the Son freely offered himself (CCC 614-615). The Father already loved us; Jesus did not have to persuade him to start (CCC 604).

Why did the whole human family need this? God made us for friendship with him. Through sin, the human family became wounded and separated from the life God intended for us, and we cannot heal and save ourselves. God did not abandon us; he sent his Son to rescue us and bring us into his life. That is the story in one paragraph, and tonight is its center. Session 7 says more about the wounded condition we are born into and how Baptism heals it.

Isaiah 53, written centuries before, describes a servant wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, whose stripes heal us (53:5). The Church reads that passage every Good Friday as a description of Jesus. Tonight the students find it themselves, in pairs.

The good thief: the Church has always read him as a striking example of Christ's mercy, and he keeps two things together that students need to hold together. He could not earn God's first gift of grace, and he did respond: he admitted his sin, accepted the justice of his sentence, defended Jesus, and turned to him. God's grace comes first; with his help, we respond by trusting him and turning from sin.

Before you give the clear answer, let the students say what they now think the answer is. Thank every student for answering honestly; some answers will contain real misunderstandings, that the Father hated Jesus, that Jesus had sinned, that God needed someone to hurt before he could love us. Gently correct any that remain, and then give the whole group the clear answer. The night ends in understanding.

Never assign collective blame for Jesus's death to the Jewish people. The Church teaches that sinners were the authors of Christ's Passion, all of us, and that his death cannot be blamed on the Jews of his time as a whole or on Jews today (CCC 597-598).

Saints who said yes

St. Dismas, the good thief

The Gospel does not give his name; an old tradition calls him Dismas, and the Church has honored him for centuries as the patron of prisoners. Devotion has long treated him as the saint for anyone who thinks it is too late. He is the only person in the Gospels to whom Jesus personally promises Paradise, and he could not earn it; he admitted his sin and turned to Jesus, and that was received.

St. Maximilian Kolbe

A Polish Franciscan priest imprisoned at Auschwitz in 1941. When the guards chose ten men to starve to death as punishment, one of them, Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out for his wife and children. Father Kolbe stepped forward and asked to take his place. The guards agreed. He died two weeks later, and the man he saved lived another fifty-three years and was there when Kolbe was declared a saint in 1982. He freely bore another man's sentence, without pretending he had done anything wrong. So did Jesus.

Questions students may ask

- Why could Jesus not just forgive everyone without dying? God was not forced to save us this way. In his wisdom and love, he chose to save us through his Son's death and Resurrection. Jesus freely offered his life for our sins, overcoming sin and bringing us back to God (John 10:18). The cross shows how completely he loves us.
- Was it God the Father punishing Jesus? No. The Father and the Son together chose this out of love for us, and the Father already loved us before the cross (CCC 604). Jesus was not a victim of his Father; he gave his life freely. Keep it simple: God so loved the world that he gave his Son.
- Did God die? Jesus, the Son of God, truly died in his human nature. He did not stop being God, and the Father and the Holy Spirit did not die. That is a hard idea; say it plainly and do not try to explain more than that tonight.
- What about the other criminal? The Gospel tells us that he mocked Jesus. It does not tell us what happened to him afterward, and neither should we. What we know is that the door was open for him too.
- Did Jesus really feel it? Yes. He was fully human. The nails were real, the thirst was real, the darkness was real. That is what makes his prayer for his killers so astonishing.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 23 and Isaiah 53, a crucifix placed where everyone can see it, pencils, name tents, reflection cards.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 5. Reading Luke 23:32-46 in segments, 6. Discovery questions, 16. Flashback to Isaiah 53 in pairs, 6. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 6. The big question answered, 3. Prayer, one step, and closing, 4. Total: 55 minutes.

If you are running long: drop discovery question 6 (the darkness and the curtain). Never cut the Isaiah flashback, the big question, or the prayer.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Jesus, you refused to save yourself so that you could save us. Tonight we are going to watch you do it. Give us quiet hearts and open eyes. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *We have met Jesus, watched him go looking for the lost, and found out that he is God. Tonight we watch what he does for us, and we answer the question this whole study has been reading toward: why did Jesus have to die?*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine you caused damage you cannot repair on your own. Someone who loves you steps forward and freely helps bear the cost of putting it right. They do not pretend they caused the damage. How would you feel? Would you let them?*

Leader: *Keep it brief tonight; the passage needs the time. Then say: No example explains everything about the cross, but hold onto this one: tonight someone who never sinned freely bears the cost for the whole world.*

READ LUKE 23:32-46

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator, Jesus, the rulers and soldiers (one voice), the first criminal, and the second criminal. Read verses 32 to 38, then questions 1 to 3. Read verses 39 to 43, then questions 4 and 5. Read verses 44 to 46, then question 6. Read slowly. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Luke 23 before you start.

Leader: *Let there be a few seconds of silence after verse 46 before you move on. Do not fill it.*

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 32 to 38

1. What are the first words Jesus says from the cross, in verse 34? Who is he talking about?

Answer • share after the discussion

Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. He is praying for the soldiers who just nailed him to the cross and the leaders who arranged it. Before he says anything else, he forgives the people killing him. That tells you what he came to do.

2. In verses 35 to 38, what do the rulers and the soldiers tell Jesus to do?

Answer • share after the discussion

To save himself, if he is really the Christ. They think that if Jesus were who he says he is, he would come down. They have it backwards. He stays on the cross precisely because he is the Christ.

3. Why does Jesus not save himself? Think about what he came to do.

Answer • share after the discussion

Because saving himself would mean not saving us. He came to seek and to save the lost (Session 2). Coming down from the cross would have saved one person and abandoned everyone else. He chose us.

Leader: Let the students reason toward this themselves. The answer is in Session 2's memory verse, and some will get there on their own.

Read verses 39 to 43

4. Read verses 39 to 42 again. How do the two criminals respond differently to Jesus? What does the second one admit, and what does he ask for?

Answer • share after the discussion

The first criminal joins the mockery: save yourself and us. The second stops him. He admits that they deserve their punishment, he says Jesus has done nothing wrong, and then he turns to Jesus with a request that begins, Jesus, remember me. He does not ask to be rescued from his cross. He admits his sin, defends Jesus, and asks to be remembered.

5. What does Jesus promise him in verse 43? Could the criminal have earned that?

Answer • share after the discussion

Today you will be with me in Paradise. No, he could not earn it. He cannot undo his past or repay anyone. But he admitted his sin and turned to Jesus with faith and repentance, and Jesus freely welcomed him. That is how it works for us too: we cannot earn God's first gift of grace, and with his help we respond by trusting him and turning from sin. It is never too late to turn to Jesus.

Leader: This is the sentence the students should leave with. Keep both halves together: the gift, and the turning.

Read verses 44 to 46

6. In verses 44 to 46, what happens in the sky and in the temple, and what are Jesus's last words?

Answer • share after the discussion

Darkness covers the land from noon to three, the temple curtain tears in two, and Jesus prays, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit! Even dying, he is talking to his Father. Through his death and Resurrection, Jesus opens the way to the Father; he invites us to receive his grace and turn away from the sin that separates us from God.

Leader: *This is the question to drop if you are short on time.*

FLASHBACK: ISAIAH 53, IN PAIRS

Read aloud: *Long before Jesus was born, the Book of Isaiah brought hope to God's people in exile, and it describes a servant of God who suffers for other people's sins. Work in pairs. Half of you find Isaiah 53, verses 4 to 6; the other half find verses 11 and 12. Iniquities and transgressions are old words for sins. In your verses, find three things: who suffers, whose sins are involved, and what the suffering does. Then we will compare.*

Answer • share after the discussion

Isaiah 53:5 says he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and with his stripes we are healed; verses 11 and 12 say he bore the sin of many. The one who suffers is innocent, the sins are ours, and his suffering heals and makes many righteous. It sounds exactly like Jesus on the cross, and it was written centuries before he was born. The Church reads this passage aloud every Good Friday. And remember the Passover lamb from our first session: its blood stood between one family and death. Tonight the blood of the Lamb of God stands between the whole world and death.

Leader: *Give page numbers; Isaiah is hard to find. Let each pair show the group the words that helped them.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *The second criminal turned to Jesus with just a few honest words. If you turned to Jesus right now, what would you want him to remember about you? Write it on your reflection card.*

Leader: *A full minute of silence. Do not ask anyone to share. This one can go deep for some students; be ready to talk with anyone who lingers afterward.*

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. Jesus's death on the cross is the one sacrifice that takes away the sins of the whole world, offered once for all (CCC 613-614). He did not die for people in general. He died for every single person, including you (CCC 605). And the Father already loved us; Jesus did not have to persuade him to start (CCC 604). The Father gave his Son, and the Son freely gave himself.

Why did the whole human family need this? God made us for friendship with him. Through sin, the human family became wounded and separated from the life God meant for us, and we cannot heal ourselves. God did not abandon us. He sent his Son to rescue us and bring us into his life.

And the criminal beside him shows how a person receives it. He could not undo his past or repay Jesus. But he admitted his sin and turned to Jesus with faith and repentance, and Jesus freely welcomed him. We cannot earn God's first gift of grace. With God's help, we respond by trusting him, turning from sin, and receiving the life he gives us, above all in the sacraments he gave his Church.

Leader: If someone asks why God did not just forgive without the cross, use the answer from Part 1: God was not forced to save us this way; in his wisdom and love he chose to, and the cross shows how completely he loves us. If someone asks whether God died, use the precision from Part 1.

THE BIG QUESTION

Read aloud: Here is the question this whole study has been reading toward: Why did Jesus have to die? Now that we have read tonight's story, how would you answer it? Say it in your own words.

Share after the students have answered

Here is the answer we have been reading toward. Jesus did not die because he had sinned; he never sinned. He freely offered his life to the Father for our sins, to bring us back to God. His loving obedience makes up for our disobedience. The Father did not need to be persuaded to love us; the Father and the Son together chose this out of love. And Jesus did not save himself, so that he could save us.

Leader: Let two or three students answer. Thank each one; do not grade. If an answer carries a misunderstanding, correct it gently and briefly. Then give the whole group the clear answer, in these words or your own.

PRAYER

Leader: Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.

Read aloud: Let us pray. Talk to Jesus in your head while I say these words. Jesus, you did not save yourself, so that you could save me. I am sorry for my sins. Remember me, and help me turn to you. Amen.

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: One thing this week. Once a day, look at a crucifix, at home, at church, or on a rosary, and say one sentence to Jesus: You did that for me. Nothing else. Just that.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, wounded for our sins, you forgave the men who killed you and welcomed a criminal who turned to you. We turn to you. Remember us. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Luke 23:32-46 (read aloud in segments); Isaiah 53:4-6 and 11-12 (found live, in pairs)

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- Luke 19:10 (Session 2's verse, the reason he does not save himself)
- John 10:18 (he lays down his life of his own accord)
- John 3:16 (God so loved the world)

CATECHISM

- CCC 613-614 (Christ's death, the unique sacrifice)
- CCC 604-605 (the Father's love comes first; he died for all)
- CCC 614-615 (the Father's gift and the Son's free offering, together)
- CCC 626-630 (the Son truly died in his human nature)
- CCC 597-598 (no collective blame for the Passion)
- CCC 2005 (feelings are not the measure of grace)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Dismas (Luke 23:39-43; the name comes from later tradition)
- St. Maximilian Kolbe (Auschwitz, 1941; canonized 1982)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 23 and Isaiah 53, a crucifix placed where everyone can see it, pencils, name tents, reflection cards.

NOTE

Bring a crucifix. The big question is answered after the Catholic connection.

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 5: Death Did Not Win

Luke 24:13-43 • about 55 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight the students meet the risen Jesus the way two disciples did: without recognizing him at first. The passage also happens to describe the shape of the Mass, and the students will find that themselves if you let them.

Where we are in the story

Last week was the cross. Tonight the tomb is empty, and Jesus is alive. This is the session that turns the study from a sad story into good news. Next week the students learn how to come home when they have walked away.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that Jesus really rose from the dead, that he explained the things concerning himself in the Scriptures, and that his friends recognized him when he broke the bread. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say that Jesus is alive, and that he is still known in the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread.

The passage in plain terms

On Easter Sunday afternoon, two disciples are walking seven miles from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus, talking about everything that happened. Luke names one of them, Cleopas, and leaves the other unnamed. Jesus joins them on the road, but they do not recognize him (24:13-16). He asks what they are discussing, and they tell the whole story with sad faces: Jesus was a prophet, he was crucified, we had hoped he was the one, and now some women say the tomb is empty (24:17-24).

Jesus calls them slow of heart to believe, and then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (24:25-27). Luke does not list the passages; he tells us the subject. At Emmaus they invite him to stay. At the table he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them, and their eyes are opened; then he vanishes (24:28-31). They say, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road? (24:32), go back to Jerusalem that same hour, and find the eleven and the others gathered, who tell them: The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon! (24:33-34). Then the two tell their own story (24:35). While they are still talking, Jesus himself stands among them, shows them his hands and feet, and eats a piece of fish to prove he is not a ghost (24:36-43).

Two details for the students. First, the disciples say we had hoped, past tense; they have given up. Second, the pattern of the evening is the pattern of every Mass: first Jesus opens the Scriptures, then he breaks the bread, and they recognize him in the breaking of the bread (24:35).

What the Church teaches

The Church teaches that the Resurrection of Jesus is a real event, witnessed by real people, and the foundation of the whole Christian faith (CCC 638-639). It is not a metaphor for his teaching living on. The same Jesus who was crucified is alive in a glorified body, no longer subject to death; the tomb was empty, and he ate with his friends (CCC 645-646). The Church rests her faith on the apostles' testimony, on the empty tomb, and on the appearances of the risen Lord, and she holds that this faith is not something the apostles made up or wished into being (CCC 639-644).

The Church also sees in the Emmaus story the structure of the Eucharist: the Liturgy of the Word, where Jesus opens the Scriptures, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, where he is known in the breaking of the bread (CCC 1347). When the students go to Mass this Sunday, they will be walking the road to Emmaus.

Follow Luke's precision: he names Cleopas and leaves the second disciple unnamed. Say two disciples, not two men. And do not hand the students a reconstructed list of the passages Jesus explained on the road; Luke gives the subject, the things concerning himself, not a list of passages.

Saints who said yes

St. Mary Magdalene

The first person to see the risen Jesus. She went to the tomb early on Easter morning, found it empty, and stood outside weeping. When Jesus spoke to her, she thought he was the gardener until he said her name (John 20:11-18). Then she went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord. The Church calls her the apostle to the apostles, because she carried the news first.

St. Paul

He hated Christians and hunted them until the risen Jesus stopped him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Years later he listed the witnesses of the Resurrection, hundreds of them, and added himself last: he appeared also to me (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). He spent the rest of his life telling people that if Christ has not been raised, faith is useless, and that Christ has been raised.

Questions students may ask

- Why did they not recognize Jesus? Luke says their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Jesus wanted them to understand the Scriptures first, so that when they saw him, they would know what it meant. He does the same for us: Word first, then the breaking of the bread.
- How do we know Jesus really rose? The Church's faith rests on the people who saw him: the empty tomb, the appearances to many witnesses, and the apostles who staked their lives on what they had seen (CCC 639-644). They did not expect it, and it took them time to believe it themselves. We will not solve every question tonight; the point is that the first witnesses saw him, touched him, and ate with him.

- Was the second disciple a woman? Luke does not say. He names Cleopas and leaves the other unnamed. Some old traditions think it was his wife. We do not know, and we should not fill in what Luke left blank.
- What does the breaking of the bread have to do with Mass? Everything. At every Mass Jesus opens the Scriptures for us, then takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it. The Emmaus evening is the shape of the Mass, and the Church has known that from the beginning (CCC 1347).

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 24, Psalm 16, and Acts 2, pencils, name tents, reflection cards.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 4. Reading Luke 24:13-43 in segments, 8. Discovery questions, 18. Flashback to Psalm 16, 5. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 6. Prayer, one step, and closing, 5.

If you are running long: shorten the opening situation to one answer. Never cut question 4, the flashback, or the Catholic connection.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Jesus, you walked beside two friends who did not know it was you. Walk beside us tonight. Open the Scriptures to us, and open our eyes. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *Last week we watched Jesus die. Tonight we find out what happened next, from two people who had already given up.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine you get news so good you cannot believe it. Your team won, the test was cancelled, someone you thought was gone is coming back. What is your first reaction: joy, or suspicion that it cannot be true? Why is really good news sometimes hard to believe?*

Leader: Two or three answers. Then say: *Tonight, two people get the best news in history, and they cannot see it even when it is walking beside them.*

READ LUKE 24:13-43

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator, Jesus, the two disciples, and the gathered disciples. Read verses 13 to 24, then question 1. Read verses 25 to 35, then questions 2 to 5. Read verses 36 to 43, then question 6. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Luke 24 before you start.

Leader: Luke names only one disciple, Cleopas. Say two disciples, not two men; Luke leaves the second one unnamed.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 13 to 24

1. In verses 15 and 16, who joins the two disciples on the road? Do they know it is him?

Answer • share after the discussion

Jesus himself joins them, but their eyes are kept from recognizing him. He is walking right beside them, and they think he is a stranger. And listen to how they tell him the story in verse 21: we had hoped, past tense. They think their hope died on Friday. They have already given up.

Read verses 25 to 35

2. In verses 25 to 27, what does Jesus do before he lets them recognize him?

Answer • share after the discussion

Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he shows them the things in the Scriptures that are about him. He teaches them from the Scriptures first. He wants them to understand who he is before they see who he is.

3. At the table in verses 30 and 31, what four things does Jesus do with the bread? Where have you heard those four words before?

Answer • share after the discussion

He takes it, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Those are the four actions of the Last Supper, and they are what the priest does at every Mass. The moment he breaks the bread, their eyes are opened and they recognize him.

Leader: If a student says Mass, celebrate it. If no one does, ask: where do you see a priest take, bless, break, and give bread?

4. Verse 32: what do they say their hearts were doing while he talked on the road? And verse 35: how do they say he was known to them?

Answer • share after the discussion

Their hearts were burning while he opened the Scriptures, and he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. That is the shape of the whole evening: first the Word, then the Bread. It is also the shape of every Mass you have ever been to: first the readings, then the Eucharist.

5. What do they do as soon as they recognize him, in verses 33 to 35? What do they hear when they arrive?

Answer • share after the discussion

They get up that same hour and go back to Jerusalem to tell the others. When they arrive, the gathered disciples greet them with the news: The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon! Then the two tell their own story. Meeting the risen Jesus makes people go and tell someone, and they find the good news already spreading.

Read verses 36 to 43

6. In verses 36 to 43, the disciples think they are seeing a ghost. What does Jesus do to show them he is not one?

Answer • share after the discussion

He shows them his hands and feet, tells them to touch him, and eats a piece of broiled fish in front of them. Ghosts do not have flesh and bones, and they do not eat. Jesus really rose, in a real body, and Luke wants us to know it.

Leader: Sixth graders love this one. Let it be a little funny; it is meant to be convincing.

FLASHBACK: THE PSALM THAT SAW EASTER COMING

Read aloud: *On the road, Jesus explained the Scriptures about himself. Here is one he could have used. Seven weeks later, St. Peter used it at Pentecost. We flash back a thousand years: King David is singing a song of trust in God, even in the face of death.*

Read Psalm 16:9-11, then Acts 2:31, where Peter explains it (give both page numbers; two readers)

1. What does the psalm say God will not let happen to his holy one, and what will God show him instead?

Answer • share after the discussion

God will not abandon him to the grave or let his holy one see the Pit; instead he will show him the path of life. A thousand years before Easter, David sang about a body that would not rot in the tomb. At Pentecost, Peter told the crowd that David was speaking about Jesus: he was not abandoned to death, and his body did not decay (Acts 2:31). Jesus truly died and was buried, and on the third day he rose.

Leader: This is what tonight's flashbacks are: the Old Testament waiting for Easter. Do not give the students a list of every passage Jesus explained; Luke does not.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to the road to Emmaus. This is what Jesus meant by Moses and all the prophets. The whole Old Testament was waiting for this morning, and Jesus was the one explaining it.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *The two disciples did not recognize Jesus even though he was right beside them. Where do you think Jesus might be walking beside you this week without you noticing? Write one place on your reflection card.*

Leader: *A full minute of silence. No sharing required.*

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. Jesus really rose from the dead. It is not a way of saying his ideas lived on. The tomb was empty, he ate with his friends, and hundreds of people saw him. The Church calls the Resurrection the foundation of everything we believe (CCC 638-639).

And the Church has always seen something else in this story. The two disciples met the risen Jesus in two ways, in the Scriptures he opened on the road and in the bread he broke at the table. That is the shape of every Mass: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (CCC 1347). When you go to Mass this Sunday, you are walking the road to Emmaus, and the same Jesus is at the end of it. The bread the priest breaks has become his Body, and he is really there.

Leader: *Keep the Mass connection concrete: readings, then Eucharist. Session 7 says plainly what the Eucharist is; tonight one sentence is enough.*

PRAYER

Leader: *Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.*

Read aloud: *Let us pray. Talk to Jesus in your head while I say these words. Jesus, you are alive. You walked beside two friends who had given up, and you opened their eyes. Walk beside me this week, and open mine. Amen.*

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: *One thing this week. At Mass this Sunday, watch for the two halves of Emmaus: the readings, where Jesus opens the Scriptures, and the bread being taken, blessed, broken, and given. Tell someone in your family afterward where you saw them.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, make our hearts burn when the Scriptures are opened, and open our eyes when the bread is broken. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“The Lord has risen indeed.” (Luke 24:34)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Luke 24:13-43 (read aloud in segments); flashback Psalm 16:9-11 with Acts 2:31 read live

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- John 20:11-18 (Mary Magdalene at the tomb)
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (St. Paul's list of witnesses)
- Luke 22:19 (the same four actions at the Last Supper)

CATECHISM

- CCC 638-639 (the Resurrection, a real event)
- CCC 639-644 (the witnesses; not invented)
- CCC 645-646 (the glorified body)
- CCC 1347 (the Emmaus meal and the two parts of the Mass)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)
- St. Paul (Acts 9; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 24, Psalm 16, and Acts 2, pencils, name tents, reflection cards.

NOTE

Luke names Cleopas only; say two disciples, not two men.

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 6: Come Home

Luke 15:11-24 • about 55 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight is about what returning to God actually looks like, told through the best story Jesus ever told. It leads naturally to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and it should end with the door to Confession open, not with pressure to walk through it tonight.

Where we are in the story

The students have met Jesus, watched him seek the lost, seen that he is God, watched him die for them, and met him risen. Tonight the question turns personal: what happens when someone who belongs to God walks away, and then wants to come back? Next week: how we live this together in the Church.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that the father in the parable runs to his son before the son can finish his apology, and that coming home to God is exactly like that. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say, in their own words, that God's mercy is waiting for anyone who turns around, and that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is where Catholics come home.

The passage in plain terms

A younger son asks his father for his share of the inheritance early. Many readers hear that request as a deep insult, as if he wished his father were already gone; Luke records the request, not the son's feelings. The father gives it. The son leaves for a far country, wastes everything, and ends up feeding pigs, so hungry he wants their food (15:11-16). Then, Luke says, he came to himself (15:17). He plans a speech: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants (15:18-19).

He heads home. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him (15:20). The son starts his speech and never gets to the part about being a servant. The father is already calling for the best robe, a ring, shoes, and the fatted calf: this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found (15:22-24).

Two details for the students. First, the father sees the son while he is still far off; Luke does not say he was watching, but we can imagine it. Second, the father runs to welcome his son before the son begins his confession.

What the Church teaches

The Church uses this parable to describe the whole process of conversion and repentance: the son's misery, the moment he comes to himself, his journey home, and the father's generous welcome (CCC 1439). It is the Church's own picture of what happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Church calls this sacrament by several names: conversion, Penance, Confession, forgiveness, and Reconciliation (CCC 1423-1424), and it teaches that the priest acts in the person of Christ as his sacramental minister, so that it is Jesus himself who forgives through the priest's absolution (CCC 1441-1442, 1448). The parable shows the Father's heart; the sacrament's own foundation is John 20:21-23, where the risen Jesus gives his apostles the authority to forgive sins, and tonight the students read that verse themselves. Before sending them toward Confession, give them the shape of it: examine your conscience, be sorry, intend to turn away from sin, confess honestly to the priest, receive absolution, do your penance, and try to repair the harm (CCC 1451, 1456, 1459-1460).

Be honest about the difference between feeling sorry and turning around. The son felt his hunger for a long time before he came to himself and started walking. Repentance is a direction, not just a feeling. And do not assume every student has already made First Reconciliation, or has a close relationship with an earthly father; the parable is about God, and some students will need that said out loud.

Saints who said yes

St. Augustine

We met him in Session 2: the young man who ran from God for years while his mother prayed. He is also the man who came home. When he finally turned around, he did not sneak back; he wrote a whole book, the Confessions, telling God the truth about everything. He learned what the prodigal son learned: the father was watching the road the whole time.

St. John Vianney

A parish priest in a small French village in the 1800s who was not a strong student and almost did not get ordained. But people came from all over France to confess their sins to him, and he spent up to sixteen hours a day in the confessional. He is remembered for saying that God's mercy is greater than any sin. The Church made him the patron saint of parish priests, the men who sit where the father stood, watching the road.

Questions students may ask

- Why did the father give him the money in the first place? Because love does not force anyone to stay. God lets us walk away. He does not stop loving us while we are gone.
- Did the son really repent, or was he just hungry? Both. It started with hunger, and it became a decision to go home and tell the truth. God can use anything, even an empty stomach, to turn us around. What matters is that he walked.

- Why do Catholics confess to a priest instead of just to God? Because Jesus gave his apostles the authority to forgive sins (John 20:21-23), and that authority has been handed down to priests. The priest is Christ's minister in the sacrament: when he says the words of absolution, it is Jesus who forgives you and brings you back to his Church. And you get to hear it.
- What if I am scared to go to Confession? Nearly everyone is, the first time and sometimes every time. The son rehearsed his speech too. You can tell the priest you are nervous or do not remember what to do, and he will help you. He is there to help you come home.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 15, Isaiah 55, and John 20, pencils, name tents, reflection cards. Bring the parish Confession schedule to hand out.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 4. Reading Luke 15:11-24 in segments, 5. Discovery questions, 17. Flashback to Isaiah 55, 5. John 20:21-23, 4. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 8. Prayer, one step, and closing, 3.

If you are running long: shorten the opening situation to one answer. Never cut question 3, John 20, the Catholic connection, or the prayer.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Father, you watch the road for every one of us. Tonight, help us come to ourselves, turn around, and walk home. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *We have met Jesus, seen him seek the lost, seen that he is God, watched him die for us, and met him alive. Tonight Jesus tells a story about what it looks like to come back to God after walking away.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine you did something wrong, and you know you need to tell someone, but you keep putting it off. Every day it gets a little harder. What are you afraid will happen when you finally say it? What would make it easier?*

Leader: Keep it fictional; no one is asked to disclose anything real. Two or three answers. Then say: Jesus told a story about someone in exactly that spot.

READ LUKE 15:11-24

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator, the younger son, and the father. Read verses 11 to 16, then question 1. Read verses 17 to 20, then questions 2 and 3. Read verses 21 to 24, then questions 4 and 5. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Luke 15 before you start.

Leader: Some students will know this as the Prodigal Son. Prodigal means wasteful. We are reading only through verse 24 tonight; the older brother in verses 25 to 32 is a story for another day.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 11 to 16

1. In verses 11 to 16, what does the younger son ask for, what does he do with it, and how bad does it get?

Answer • share after the discussion

He asks for his share of the inheritance now, while his father is still alive, a request most readers hear as a deep insult. Then he goes far away and wastes all of it. Then a famine hits, he has nothing, and he takes a job feeding pigs, which for a Jewish boy was about as low as it could go. He is so hungry he wants to eat the pigs' food, and nobody gives him anything. He has hit bottom.

Read verses 17 to 20

2. Verse 17 says he came to himself. What does he decide to do, and what does he plan to say (verses 18 and 19)?

Answer • share after the discussion

He decides to go home and tell his father the truth: I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. He plans to ask for a job as a servant. He does not expect to be a son again. He just wants to be home.

3. Read verse 20 slowly. What does the father do when he sees his son, and when does he see him?

Answer • share after the discussion

He sees him while he is still far off; we can imagine him watching the road. He has compassion, he runs, he embraces him, and he kisses him, all before the son says a single word. The father does not wait for the speech.

Leader: This is the heart of the night. Let the students find every verb in the verse: saw, had compassion, ran, embraced, kissed.

Read verses 21 to 24

4. Compare what the son planned to say (verses 18 and 19) with what he actually gets to say (verse 21). What part does he never finish?

Answer • share after the discussion

He never gets to the part about being a hired servant; Luke moves straight to the father's orders. The son came home hoping for a job, and the father gives him back his place as a son: the best robe, a ring, shoes, and a feast. He gets more than he dared to ask for.

5. What do you think Jesus wants his listeners to understand about coming back to God?

Answer • share after the discussion

That God is like this father. He does not wait for us with his arms crossed; he runs when he sees us turn around. Coming home to God is not about getting the speech right. It is about turning around and walking. He does the rest.

FLASHBACK: ABUNDANTLY PARDON

Read aloud: *The father ran. Six hundred years before Jesus told that story, a prophet said the same thing about God. We flash back to Isaiah, where God is calling his people to return to him and receive mercy.*

Read Isaiah 55:6-7 (give the page number; one reader)

1. What does the prophet tell the unrighteous man to do, and what does he promise God will do?

Answer • share after the discussion

Return to the LORD, and God will have mercy on him; he will abundantly pardon. Not barely pardon. Abundantly. The robe and the ring and the feast in tonight's story are what abundantly looks like when a son comes home.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to the road home. The son had a speech ready about being a servant, and the father was already running.*

FIND IT: JOHN 20:21-23

Read aloud: *The story shows us the Father's heart. Now find where Jesus gives his Church the power to forgive. Turn to John 20, verses 21 to 23, and read them aloud. What does Jesus breathe on the apostles, and what does he give them the authority to do?*

Answer • share after the discussion

On Easter night, the risen Jesus breathes on the apostles and says, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. He gives them the authority to forgive sins in his name. That authority has been handed down to bishops and priests ever since, and it is why Catholics confess to a priest: Jesus himself forgives, through the priest.

Leader: *Give page numbers. This verse is the sacramental link; the parable is the picture of the Father's heart.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *What is the difference between feeling sorry about something and actually taking a step to put it right? Think of one thing in your own life. What would the step be? Write one word on your reflection card.*

Leader: *A full minute. No sharing. This is a private question by design.*

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. The Church uses this exact story to describe what happens when a person turns back to God (CCC 1439). There is the misery, the moment of coming to yourself, the walk home, and the father's welcome. Catholics have a place where that walk home happens. It is called the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession.

Here is what happens in Confession. You examine your conscience, you are sorry for your sins, and you intend to turn away from them. You honestly confess your sins to the priest. Through the priest's absolution, Christ himself forgives you and brings you back to his Church (CCC 1441-1442, 1448). You do the penance the priest gives you and try to repair the harm you caused. If you are unsure what to do, the priest will help you. And the story shows you the most important thing before you walk in: the one waiting for you is not angry. He runs.

Leader: *Hand out the parish Confession schedule here. Do not pressure anyone to go tonight or name a date; open the door and leave it open. Students depend on adults for rides and permission; invite them to ask for help, and never treat not getting there as unwillingness. If a student has not made First Reconciliation or is not baptized, handle it privately with a parent; never ask sacramental status in front of the group, and never ask students to tell the group their sins.*

PRAYER

Leader: *Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.*

Read aloud: *Let us pray. Talk to God in your head while I say these words. Father, I have wandered off in ways only you and I know. Help me come to myself and turn around. I know you are watching the road. Amen.*

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: *One thing this week. Those of you who are baptized Catholics and have prepared for Confession: ask your family to help you go before our next session. The schedule is in your hand, and your family can go to the church together, each making your own private confession. Those preparing for Baptism or for First Reconciliation: ask the parish, or me, to help with your next step. And everyone, every night this week: Father, I have sinned; help me turn toward you.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, you saw us while we were still far off, and you ran. Give us the courage to turn around, and the trust to let you welcome us home. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran.” (Luke 15:20)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Luke 15:11-24 (read aloud in segments); flashback Isaiah 55:6-7; John 20:21-23 read live

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- John 20:21-23 (read live: Jesus gives the apostles authority to forgive sins)
- Luke 15:25-32 (the older brother, not read tonight)

CATECHISM

- CCC 1439 (the parable as the picture of conversion)
- CCC 1423-1424 (the names of the sacrament)
- CCC 1441-1442 and 1448 (Christ forgives through the priest's absolution)
- CCC 1451, 1456, 1459-1460 (contrition, confession, penance)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Augustine (Confessions; summarized)
- St. John Vianney (1786-1859, patron of parish priests; summarized)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 15, Isaiah 55, and John 20, pencils, name tents, reflection cards. Bring the parish Confession schedule to hand out.

NOTE

Bring the parish Confession schedule. Open the door; do not push anyone through it.

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 7: You Are Not on Your Own

Acts 2:37-47 • about 55 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight the students hear the crowd at Pentecost ask the question the whole study has been building toward, What shall we do?, and they hear the answer. The answer is not try harder. It is Baptism, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. For baptized students, this is the night they learn what they already have; for any student not yet baptized, it is the night they learn what is being offered.

Where we are in the story

Six sessions in, the students have the whole story: Jesus invites, seeks, forgives as God, dies for us, rises, and welcomes us home. Tonight they learn how a person actually enters that story and how they keep living in it: with the Church, not alone. Next week they are sent.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that when three thousand people asked what to do, St. Peter told them to repent and be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, and that the new Christians then lived four things together: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say that being a Christian is something you live with other people in the Church, and that their Baptism was the door.

The passage in plain terms

It is Pentecost, fifty days after Easter. The Holy Spirit has come, and St. Peter has just preached the first sermon of the Church, telling the crowd that the Jesus they crucified is Lord and Christ. The crowd is cut to the heart and asks, Brethren, what shall we do? (2:37). Peter answers: Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38). About three thousand people are baptized that day (2:41).

Then Luke describes their life: they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (2:42). They share what they have, meet in the temple, break bread in their homes, and praise God, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (2:43-47).

Two details for the students. First, Peter's answer to what shall we do is not a list of rules; it is a sacrament and a gift. Second, verse 42 is four things the new Christians did together as a Church; we can pray and read Scripture alone, but the Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation.

What the Church teaches

The Church teaches that Baptism is the door to life in the Spirit and the gateway to the other sacraments; it forgives sins, gives us new life, and makes us members of Christ and of his Church (CCC 1213, 1262-1267). Most of the students walked through that door as babies. Tonight is where they learn what was given to them.

Why does a baby need Baptism? Because of our first parents' sin, we are born without the original holiness God intended for humanity. This inherited condition is called original sin. It is not a personal sin a baby committed (CCC 404-405). Baptism removes original sin and gives new life in Christ, although our struggle against sin remains, which is why Confession exists. If a student asks whether Adam and Eve were real, the Church teaches that our first parents really did turn away from God at the beginning of human history, told in Genesis in figurative language (CCC 390); she does not fight with science about how human bodies came to be, and this study is not the place to try.

The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity, not a force or a feeling (CCC 685). Confirmation is not a person ratifying their Baptism to make it real; Baptism was real the day it happened (CCC 1308). In Confirmation, God gives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, deepens the grace of Baptism, strengthens our union with Christ and the Church, and equips us for witness (CCC 1302-1303). Renewing our baptismal promises is our response to that gift, not its cause.

The four things in Acts 2:42 are the Church's own description of her life: the apostles' teaching (what the Church teaches), fellowship (the community), the breaking of bread (the Eucharist, which the first Christians called by exactly that name, CCC 1329), and the prayers (CCC 2624). Tonight the students also hear plainly what the Eucharist is: at Mass, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of Jesus spoken by the priest, the bread and wine become Christ's Body and Blood; Jesus is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, not merely represented by a symbol; and the Mass makes present his one sacrifice on the cross without Jesus dying again (CCC 1366-1367, 1374-1376). A sixth grader does not need the philosophy; they need the claim, stated clearly.

Keep the safeguard in view: the answer to what shall we do is not try harder. It is receive. Grace comes first (CCC 1996-2000), and the four things in verse 42 are how a person keeps living from it. God saves persons and incorporates them into the Church; those are not alternatives.

Saints who said yes

St. Peter

The man who denied Jesus three times on the night of the arrest is the man who preaches the first sermon of the Church, after which about three thousand people are baptized. In between, the risen Jesus forgave him by the lake and asked him three times, Do you love me? (John 21:15-17). Peter is proof that being forgiven and being sent are the same story.

St. Stephen

One of the first seven deacons chosen to serve the community in Acts 6, and the first Christian to die for Jesus. As he was being stoned he prayed for the men killing him, Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60), the same kind of prayer Jesus prayed from the cross. The teaching of Jesus had become the way he faced death.

Questions students may ask

- I was baptized as a baby, so did I ever say yes? At Baptism, God truly gave you new life in Christ, even though you were a baby; your parents and godparents answered for you, the way they fed you before you could feed yourself. As you grow, you learn to live that gift. In Confirmation, God gives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, deepens the grace of Baptism, and strengthens you to live and share the faith, and you renew your baptismal promises as your response. Your response does not make your Baptism real. It already was.
- Who is the Holy Spirit? God himself, the third person of the Trinity, living in you. Not a force or a feeling. The same Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost is given to us in Baptism, and in Confirmation he strengthens us and increases his gifts in us.
- Why did I need Baptism as a baby if I had not done anything wrong? Because of our first parents' sin, every one of us is born without the original holiness God meant for us. That inherited condition is called original sin. It is not a sin you committed. Baptism removes it and gives you new life in Christ, though your struggle against sin remains. If someone asks whether Adam and Eve were real: the Church teaches that the first human beings really did turn away from God, and Genesis tells it in picture language; the Church does not argue with science about how human bodies came to be, and we are not going to try tonight.
- What does fellowship mean? It means sharing life with other Christians: showing up, eating together, helping each other, praying together. The first Christians did not try to follow Jesus alone, and neither should we.
- Why do I need the Church? Can I not just believe by myself? You can and should pray and read Scripture on your own. But look at verse 42: the Church's teaching, fellowship, the Eucharist, and prayer together are things you cannot have by yourself, and the Eucharist can only be celebrated by a validly ordained priest. Jesus saved those three thousand people and united them in one Church. You cannot be baptized by yourself, and you cannot receive the Eucharist by yourself.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Acts 2 and Ezekiel 36, pencils, name tents, reflection cards. Optional: invite students who know the date of their Baptism to bring it, or a photo; never require it or ask anyone to say their status in front of the group.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 4. Reading Acts 2:37-47 in segments, 5. Discovery questions, 15. Flashback to Ezekiel 36, 5. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection in three units with pauses, 13. Prayer, one step, and closing, 4.

If you are running long: shorten the opening situation to one answer. Never cut question 2, question 4, the flashback, or the three units.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Come, Holy Spirit. You filled the first Christians and made them one family. Fill us tonight, and show us the family we already belong to. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *We now have the whole story: Jesus invites us, seeks us, forgives us as God, dies for us, rises, and welcomes us home. Tonight we find out what three thousand people did when they heard that story for the first time, and what they did the next day, and the day after that.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine someone teaches you the rules of a sport, or how to play an instrument, for one afternoon. Then they say: Now do it perfectly. You are on your own. What is missing?*

Leader: Two or three answers; they will name practice, a coach, a team. Then say: Tonight three thousand people ask what to do, and the answer is not, you are on your own.

READ ACTS 2:37-47

Briefly explain that the Holy Spirit has just come at Pentecost and Peter has preached that the crucified Jesus is risen and is Lord. Then read in segments, in parts: a narrator, the crowd, and St. Peter. Read verses 37 to 41, then questions 1 to 3. Read verses 42 to 47, then questions 4 and 5. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Acts 2 before you start.

Leader: Brethren means brothers. The breaking of bread in verse 42 is the first Christians' name for the Eucharist.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 37 to 41

1. In verse 37, what does the crowd ask after hearing Peter preach about Jesus? What does cut to the heart mean?

Answer • share after the discussion

They ask, Brethren, what shall we do? Cut to the heart means they are shaken; they have just realized that the Jesus they rejected is the Lord. It is the question everybody asks once they understand the story: now what?

2. Read Peter's answer in verse 38 carefully. What are the two things he tells them to do, and what does he say they will receive?

Answer • share after the discussion

Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the answer is not try harder or be good. It is turn around, be baptized, and receive a gift. The first thing a Christian does is receive.

Leader: This is the point of the night. Make sure the group sees that Peter's answer is a sacrament and a gift, not a list of rules.

3. How many people were baptized that day (verse 41)? What does that tell you about how they understood Baptism?

Answer • share after the discussion

About three thousand. They did not go home to think about it or try to fix their lives first. They were baptized that same day. Baptism was the door, and they walked through it as soon as it was open.

Read verses 42 to 47

4. Verse 42 lists four things the new Christians devoted themselves to. Name them. Which of them can you do on your own, and which need other people?

Answer • share after the discussion

The apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. You can pray on your own, and you should. But the Church's teaching needs the Church to hand it on, and fellowship needs other people. And the breaking of bread, the Eucharist, is Christ's gift to his Church: only a validly ordained priest can celebrate Mass and consecrate the bread and wine. The first Christians did not try to follow Jesus in isolation, and neither should we. And look at verses 44 to 46: they shared what they had with anyone in need and broke bread in their homes with glad hearts. The Holy Spirit changed not only what they believed but how they lived with each other.

Leader: Give the students time to find all four before you name them. If someone knows the breaking of bread is the Eucharist, celebrate it.

5. Verse 47 says the Lord added to their number day by day. Who is doing the adding?

Answer • share after the discussion

The Lord. The Church grew because God kept bringing people in, through the witness of people living verse 42 together. God saves each person, and he gathers those he saves into one family, his Church.

FLASHBACK: CLEAN WATER, A NEW HEART, GOD'S OWN SPIRIT

Read aloud: *Peter promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. That gift had been promised long before. We flash back about six hundred years, to the prophet Ezekiel, where God is promising to cleanse and renew his people after they have failed him.*

Read Ezekiel 36:25-27 (give the page number; one reader)

1. What three things does God promise to do in these verses?

Answer • share after the discussion

Sprinkle clean water on you so that you are clean, give you a new heart, and put his own Spirit within you. Clean water, a new heart, God's Spirit: that is Baptism and Pentecost, promised six centuries early. Peter is not inventing anything on Pentecost morning. He is handing out what God had promised.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to Jerusalem, where three thousand people are about to receive exactly that.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *Look at the four things in verse 42: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Which one is strongest in your life right now, and which one is missing? Write those two on your reflection card.*

Leader: *A full minute of silence. No sharing. Some students will realize they have never thought of Mass as the breaking of bread; let that land quietly.*

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. Baptism is the door. It forgives sins, gives new life, and makes you a member of Christ's Church (CCC 1213). Those of you who have been baptized walked through that door, most of you as babies, before you could remember it. Anyone preparing for Baptism is welcome here, and we will help you take the next step. Why does a baby need Baptism? Remember the garden from Session 2. Because of our first parents' sin, we are born without the original holiness God intended for us. That inherited condition is called original sin, and it is not a sin a baby committed. Baptism removes it and gives new life in Christ, though our struggle against sin remains.

Leader: Pause here and ask the group: What does Baptism give us? Then go on to the next box. Never ask a student to say publicly whether they have been baptized. If one tells you privately they were not, or is not sure, this is a moment for warmth, not awkwardness; talk with a parent afterward. If students brought Baptism dates or photos, take a minute to hear them. Some students may already be confirmed; the description of Confirmation still holds for them.

WHO STRENGTHENS US IN CONFIRMATION?

Read aloud: Second question: who strengthens us in Confirmation?

Share after the discussion

The Holy Spirit given to us in Baptism is God himself, the third person of the Trinity, not a force or a feeling (CCC 685). Confirmation, which is ahead of some of you, does not make your Baptism real; it already was. In Confirmation God gives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, deepens the grace of Baptism, and strengthens you to live and share the faith (CCC 1302-1303).

Leader: Pause again: ask, Who is the Holy Spirit? (God, the third person of the Trinity.) Then go on.

WHO IS TRULY PRESENT IN THE EUCHARIST?

Read aloud: Third question: who is truly present in the Eucharist?

Share after the discussion

The four things in verse 42 are still the Church's life: what the Church teaches, the people around you, the breaking of bread, and prayer together (CCC 1329, 2624). Here is what the breaking of bread is. At Mass, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of Jesus spoken by the priest, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, not just a symbol of him. The Mass makes present his one sacrifice on the cross; Jesus does not die again (CCC 1374, 1366-1367). Jesus saved those three thousand people and united them in one Church. We can pray and read Scripture on our own, but we are not meant to live the Christian life in isolation. We need the Church's teaching, fellowship, worship, and sacraments, and you are in that family.

Leader: Last pause: ask, What becomes of the bread and wine at Mass? Fix any misunderstanding warmly before you move to prayer.

PRAYER

Leader: Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.

Read aloud: Let us pray. Talk to God in your head while I say these words. Holy Spirit, you are God, and you come to us as a gift we could never earn. Thank you for Baptism, for those of us who have received it, and for the door that is open to everyone. Help me live the four things: your teaching, your people, your bread, and prayer. Amen.

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: One thing this week. Pick the one of the four that is missing for you, and do it once. Go to Mass with your family, join a parish activity, read the Gospel with someone, or pray with one other person. Tell me next week which one you picked.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you added to their number day by day. Thank you for adding us. Make us a family that learns, shares, breaks bread, and prays together, and let it show. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Acts 2:37-47 (read aloud in segments); flashback Ezekiel 36:25-27

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- Acts 2:14-36 (Peter's sermon, if a student wants what came before)
- John 21:15-17 (Peter forgiven and sent)
- Acts 7:54-60 (Stephen's prayer)

CATECHISM

- CCC 1213, 1262-1267 (Baptism, the door; its effects)
- CCC 389-405 (original sin as an inherited condition)
- CCC 685 (the Holy Spirit is a divine person)
- CCC 1302-1303, 1308 (the effects of Confirmation; Baptism needs no ratification)
- CCC 1329 (the breaking of bread as a name for the Eucharist)
- CCC 1366-1367, 1374-1376 (the Real Presence; the one sacrifice made present)
- CCC 2624 (Acts 2:42 as the pattern of the Church's prayer)
- CCC 1996-2000 (grace comes first)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Peter (Acts 2; John 21:15-17)
- St. Stephen (Acts 6-7)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Acts 2 and Ezekiel 36, pencils, name tents, reflection cards. Optional: invite students who know the date of their Baptism to bring it, or a photo; never require it or ask anyone to say their status in front of the group.

NOTE

Never ask baptismal status publicly. Confirmation is described accurately but briefly; do not turn tonight into Confirmation prep.

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 8: Your Next Yes

Matthew 28:16-20 • about 60 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. The last session. Tonight the risen Jesus sends his friends out, and the students discover that they are now inside the story, not reading about it. End with a commissioning, not a quiz, and if your parish can manage it, end with food.

Where we are in the story

The students have the whole story now: Jesus invites (1), seeks the lost (2), forgives as God (3), dies for us (4), rises (5), welcomes us home (6), and gives us the Spirit and the Church (7). Tonight he sends them. The last question of the study is the one every disciple has to answer: what is my next yes?

Tonight's aim

Students discover that Jesus sends his followers to make disciples, that he sent them even though some doubted, and that he promised to be with them always. By the end of the hour every student should be able to tell the Gospel in their own words in under a minute, name one person they could invite the way Andrew invited Simon, and say that Jesus is with them.

The passage in plain terms

The eleven disciples go to a mountain in Galilee where Jesus told them to meet him. When they see him they worship him, but some doubted (28:17). Jesus does not send the doubters home. He says: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (28:18-20). The governing command is make disciples; baptizing and teaching are how it is done, and the teaching is about living what Jesus commanded, not only hearing it.

The supporting verse tonight is Acts 1:8, the last thing Jesus says before he ascends: you shall be my witnesses. A witness is not an expert. A witness is someone who tells what they saw.

Three details for the students. First, some doubted, and Jesus sent them anyway; having questions does not disqualify you. Second, the sending is one command with two parts inside it: make disciples, by baptizing and by teaching them to live what Jesus commanded, which is what the Church has done ever since, including to them. Third, the last words are a promise, not a command: I am with you always.

On doubt, be precise, because students will hear this one. Having questions or struggling to understand is not rejecting Jesus, and it is not a sin. The Church does distinguish that kind of difficulty from a deliberate refusal to believe what God has revealed, which is a different thing (CCC 2088). Faith means trusting God and accepting what he reveals while our understanding keeps growing. Reassure the questioner; do not tell the students that all doubt is harmless.

What the Church teaches

The Church teaches that this passage is her missionary mandate: the reason she exists is to bring the Gospel to everyone (CCC 849). And everyone who has received the faith is called to pass it on: the Catechism opens by saying that those who have come to believe are called to proclaim the Gospel in every generation (CCC 3). That includes an eleven-year-old.

For the baptized students, their own Baptism happened because of tonight's verse: someone went, someone baptized, someone taught. Tonight they learn they are the next link. Keep the safeguard: this is not a burden laid on them, and our ability to respond begins with God's grace, not with a good personality or a speech (CCC 1996, 2001-2002). It is Jesus, with all authority, promising to be with them while they do it.

Do not end the study with a private decision disconnected from the Church. The sending in Matthew 28 is into Baptism and teaching, which is the Church's life. The next yes for most students is to keep coming and bring someone. Those preparing for Confirmation can look forward to receiving that gift; those already confirmed can keep learning to live from it. Help them distinguish sharing faith from pressuring someone; an invitation leaves the other person free.

Saints who said yes

St. Francis Xavier

A Spanish priest and one of the first Jesuits who sailed to India in 1541 and then to Japan, teaching the faith to people who had never heard the name of Jesus. He baptized thousands and died in 1552 on an island off the coast of China, still trying to get farther. He took go and make disciples of all nations literally, and the Church made him the patron of missions.

St. Pier Giorgio Frassati

An Italian college student who loved mountain climbing, jokes, and his friends, and who quietly spent his money and his time on the poor of Turin. He died of polio at twenty-four in 1925, and thousands of poor people his family had never heard of came to his funeral. He was declared a saint in 2025. On a photo of himself climbing he wrote the words that became his motto: Verso l'alto, to the heights. He was a witness through ordinary friendship, prayer, and service, every day, in the city where he lived.

Questions students may ask

- Some of them doubted? Really? Yes, Matthew says so plainly, and Jesus sent them anyway. Having questions or struggling to understand does not mean you have rejected Jesus. Bring your

questions to him and ask for help. Faith means trusting God and accepting what he reveals, even while your understanding keeps growing. You can have questions and still be sent.

- I am eleven. How am I supposed to make disciples? The same way Andrew did in Session 1: you find one person and bring them. You do not have to explain everything. You have to know Jesus and tell what you have seen.
- What if I do not know enough? Nobody in tonight's passage knew everything. Jesus builds teaching into the sending because learning never stops. Keep coming, keep reading, and go anyway.
- What does I am with you always mean if I cannot see him? It means what it meant on the road to Emmaus: he walks beside you whether you notice or not. And in the Eucharist he is with you in a way you can actually receive.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Matthew 28, Acts 1, and Genesis 12, pencils, name tents, the students' own reflection cards, and, if at all possible, food for a celebration at the end.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 4. Reading Matthew 28:16-20 in segments, 4. Discovery questions, 11. Flashback to Genesis 12, 5. Acts 1:8, 3. Three quick checks, 5. Tell the story, 7. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 4. Commissioning and prayer, 5. One step and closing, 3. Total: 60 minutes, before the celebration.

If you are running long: shorten the opening situation to one answer. Never cut the flashback, Tell the story, the commissioning, or the prayer.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Jesus, you have all authority in heaven and on earth, and you promised to be with us always. Tonight, send us. And go with us. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *In our first session Jesus asked two people, What do you seek?, and said, Come and see. We came, and we saw: he seeks the lost, he is God, he died for us, he rose, he welcomes us home, and he gives us his Spirit and his Church. Tonight he tells us what comes next.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine you found out something that could change a friend's whole life for the better, and nobody had told them yet. What would stop you from telling them? Fear of sounding weird? Not knowing how to start? What would make you do it anyway?*

Leader: *Two or three answers; keep it moving. Then say: Tonight Jesus gives his friends exactly that job, and a promise to go with it.*

READ MATTHEW 28:16-20

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator and Jesus. Read verses 16 to 18, then questions 1 and 2. Read verses 19 and 20, then questions 3 and 4, and have a student read verses 18 to 20 a second time. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Matthew 28 before you start.

Leader: *Lo means look, or behold. To the close of the age means until the end of the world.*

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 16 to 18

1. In verse 17, what do the disciples do when they see the risen Jesus? Read the whole verse; there is a surprise in the second half.

Answer • share after the discussion

They worship him, but some doubted. Even standing in front of the risen Jesus, some of them were not sure. Matthew does not hide it, and Jesus does not send them away; he sends them out. Having questions or struggling to understand does not mean you have rejected Jesus. Bring them to him and ask for help; faith means trusting God and accepting what he reveals while your understanding keeps growing.

2. In verse 18, what does Jesus say he has? Why does he say that before he gives them a job?

Answer • share after the discussion

All authority in heaven and on earth. He says it first because the job is going to sound impossible, all nations, and he wants them to know whose authority they are going with. It is not their power; it is his.

Read verses 19 and 20

3. Verses 19 and 20 give the disciples one job with two parts inside it. What is the job, and what are the two parts? Is Jesus asking them to pass along information, or to teach a way of living? Which words tell you?

Answer • share after the discussion

The job is make disciples. The two parts are baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded. Observe means live it, not just know it. And the Church has done exactly this: someone went, someone baptized with those words, and someone is teaching you right now. If you have been baptized, you are here tonight because of this verse.

Leader: *Let the students make the connection to their own Baptism before you say it. The words in verse 19 are the words the priest used. Use conditional wording; do not assume every student was baptized.*

4. What are Jesus's last words in verse 20? Is that a command or a promise?

Answer • share after the discussion

Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. It is a promise. The passage starts with a job and ends with a promise, and the promise is what makes the job possible. He does not send anyone alone.

FLASHBACK: A BLESSING FOR ALL NATIONS

Read aloud: *Go, Jesus says. God has been saying that word for a long time. We flash back to the beginning of God's people, about two thousand years before this mountain, where God calls one man to leave everything he knows.*

Read Genesis 12:1-3 (give the page number; one reader)

1. What does God tell Abram to do, and what does he promise will happen for all the families of the earth?

Answer • share after the discussion

Go: leave your country and your family for a land I will show you. And God promises that through Abram all the families of the earth will be blessed. St. Paul explains that Christ is Abraham's promised descendant and that through him the blessing reaches the nations (Galatians 3:8, 14, 16). So when Jesus says, Go and make disciples of all nations, he is finishing the sentence God started with Abraham. The blessing for every family on earth is Jesus, and the people in this room are how it keeps traveling.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to the mountain in Galilee. Go, he says, and then the promise: I am with you always.*

FIND IT: ACTS 1:8

Read aloud: *Just before Jesus went up to heaven, he said one more sentence about what his friends would be. Find Acts 1, verse 8, and read it. What word does he use for them?*

Answer • share after the discussion

Witnesses: you shall be my witnesses. A witness is not an expert or a lawyer. A witness is someone who tells what they saw. That is the whole job description. You do not have to explain everything. You have to know Jesus and tell what you have seen.

Leader: Give page numbers. Then move to the three quick checks.

THREE QUICK CHECKS

Read aloud: Before you tell the story, three questions, and any of you can answer. Who is Jesus? What does his death and Resurrection make possible for us? What happens in Baptism, in Confirmation, and in the Eucharist?

Share after the checks

Who is Jesus? True God and true man, the Son of God who came to seek and save the lost. What does his death and Resurrection make possible? The forgiveness of our sins and a new life with God that death cannot end. What happens in the sacraments? In Baptism, God forgives sins, gives new life, and makes us members of his Church. In Confirmation, he gives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit and strengthens us to live and share the faith. In the Eucharist, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, and he is truly present.

Leader: These are teaching moments, not a test of anyone's faith. If an answer is off, fix it warmly and move on; the box gives you the clean version.

TELL THE STORY IN A MINUTE

Read aloud: Now the whole story. Turn to the person next to you. You have one minute to think. Then you have one minute to tell them the whole story we have read over eight sessions, in your own words: who Jesus is, what he did, and what he offers. Then switch. No notes.

Leader: One minute to prepare, then one minute each to tell it. Walk around and listen; you will hear the study come back to you in eleven-year-old words, which is the goal. If a pair gets stuck, offer four words: invites, dies, rises, sends. Afterward, ask one or two volunteers to tell it to the whole group.

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: In our first session, Andrew spent one afternoon with Jesus and went and got his brother. Who is your Simon? On your reflection card, write one name: one person you could invite the way Andrew did. Then finish this sentence: With God's help, I will _____, and I will ask _____ to help me.

Leader: A full minute of silence. No sharing required. Welcome a specific, modest response rather than a dramatic promise. The reflection cards have stayed with the students all eight weeks; remind them to keep them.

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. This passage is the reason the Church exists. Jesus sent his friends to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to live what he commanded. The Church has been doing it for two thousand years, all the way to you (CCC 849). And everyone who has received the faith is called to pass it on. The very first pages of the Catechism say that those who have come to believe are called to proclaim the Gospel in every generation (CCC 3). That means you.

You are not being handed a burden. You are being handed a promise. Jesus has all authority, and he is with you always. Our ability to respond begins with God's grace, not with having the right personality or a perfect speech. Your next yes is not to become an expert. It is to keep coming, and to invite one person while leaving them free to say no. Those of you preparing for Confirmation can look forward to receiving that gift; those already confirmed can keep learning to live from it.

Leader: Then commission them. Have the students stand. Say each name, and say to each one: [Name], go and share the good news. Jesus promises to be with you always. It takes two minutes and they will remember it. Say it as his witness, not in his person.

PRAYER

Leader: Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.

Read aloud: Let us pray. Talk to Jesus in your head while I say these words. Jesus, you have all authority, and you are with me always. Here is the name of my Simon. Give me the courage to invite them. Send me. Amen.

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: One thing this week, and one thing for the rest of your life. This week: invite your Simon to one thing, Mass, youth group, or just a conversation about what you learned. For the rest of your life: keep coming and seeing. He is with you always.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, in our first session you asked what we were seeking. We found you. Now you send us. Go with us, as you promised, to the close of the age. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Matthew 28:16-20 (read aloud in segments); flashback Genesis 12:1-3; Acts 1:8 (found live by the group)

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- Galatians 3:8, 14, 16 (Christ, Abraham's promised descendant; the blessing reaches the nations)
- John 1:40-42 (Andrew brings Simon, Session 1)
- Acts 8:26-39 (Philip and the Ethiopian, if a student wants to see a witness at work)

CATECHISM

- CCC 849-852 (the missionary mandate)
- CCC 3 (those who believe are called to proclaim the Gospel)
- CCC 2088 (questions and difficulty are not the same as refusing to believe)
- CCC 1996, 2001-2002 (our response begins with grace)
- CCC 1213 (Baptism, Session 7)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552, patron of missions)
- St. Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925, canonized 2025)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Matthew 28, Acts 1, and Genesis 12, pencils, name tents, the students' own reflection cards, and, if at all possible, food for a celebration at the end.

NOTE

Order of the night: questions, Genesis 12 flashback, Acts 1:8, three quick checks, tell the story, personal question, Catholic connection, commissioning, prayer; the script follows this order. End with food if you can; eight weeks deserve a table.