

Prepare with Prayer

How great is God's love for all who worship him? Greater than the distance between heaven and earth! How far has the LORD taken our sins from us? Farther than the distance from east to west!

Psalm 103:

11-12

Today's Readings

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

Psalm 103:1-2, 3 and 13

1st Corinthians 3:18-20

Matthew 5:38-48

The disciples hear a surprising new teaching about love.

Scripture Background

Today's reading from Matthew's Gospel is among the most challenging in the entire New Testament, which is why Scripture scholar Benedict T. Viviano, OP, discusses it at length in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990).

The reference Jesus makes to the old "eye for an eye" teaching concerns an ancient Jewish law that forbade blinding more than one eye of a captured criminal guilty of blinding one eye in someone else. This law states, in other words, that the punishment should fit the crime but never exceed it.

The higher standard Jesus sets, however, demands forgiving a wrong while sometimes exacting *less* than the allowed punishment. Here, Jesus is not suggesting a criminal justice policy for governments to adopt. Rather, he is asking that, on the personal level, his disciples rethink their attitudes toward their enemies. If God continues to provide rain and sunshine to the good and bad alike, then how should imitators of God behave toward those who offend them?

With his command to turn the other cheek if struck by an enemy, Jesus is not advocating total abdication to evil. Rather, he is opening the door for the kind of nonviolent resistance practiced in modern times by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Jesus' essential message is not "put up with evil" but "find smart ways to fight it." What's smart and what's stupid will vary with circumstances. Nonviolent strategies worked for Gandhi and King because

both were dealing with fundamentally humane governments.

Clearly, Gandhi's Indian masses could stop trains because the Englishmen controlling the trains refused to plow into unarmed protesters who meant them no personal harm.

In short, Christ's "turn the other cheek" teaching is to be applied discriminately. It is not meant as a total replacement for all previous biblical teachings about confronting evil and its perpetrators. But sometimes it is the wisest way to deal with an enemy.

Relationship to Children

Who doesn't love watching a play? Children will enjoy the change of pace—and learn a big lesson—if you provide the suggested skit as today's Gathering activity.

You will need two adult or teenaged volunteers to dress as two young children, Jo and Jeri, while you play the part of OP (Offstage Parent). Be sure that the three of you get together at least one time before the Sunday liturgy to rehearse. Running through the script a few times will help you share ideas on how best to present the story. It will also increase your confidence in the way you communicate the skit's central message about going the extra mile, and a sharper performance will be the end result.

There are a few additional points you might want to make about the skit, either right after presenting it or later during the Homily:

(1) Going the extra mile is often a good idea with friends, neighbors, and family, but going the extra mile with strangers is something only adults should try—and only sometimes. Jesus does not want you to forge about everything you have ever learned about "strange danger."

This Week's Preparation

In the worship space, on a table draped with a green cloth, place: a lectionary, a candle, a festive houseplant or bouquet of fresh flowers.

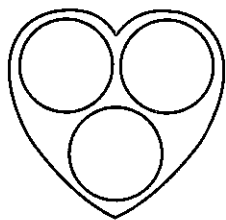
Make sure two volunteers practice the Gathering skit with you ahead of time. To play the roles of Jo and Jeri, each person will need: clothes little kids would wear, such as baseball cap, jeans, T-shirt, tennis shoes; a box of toy cars and trucks; a copy of the script.

(2) In the end, Jeri was taking the chance that Jo might accidentally break the toy from Grandpa. If Jeri understood that and was willing to accept breakage if it happened, then the decision to share was a good one.

(3) There are other ways, though, that Jeri could have gone the extra mile with Jo. Jeri could have tried to interest Jo in another toy with some really cool features. Jeri could have politely asked for the toy and taken it inside to Mom, so that she could keep it safe. Or Jeri could have suggested they play some other game instead. Anything that would have been a peaceful solution to the problem would have been a form of going the extra mile.

Alternate Gathering Activity: Art Project

Cut sheets of drawing paper, enough so that there is one sheet for each child, into large heart shapes. By using a compass or tracing around a saucer or jar lid, draw three circles inside each heart, two circles at the top and one centered below them.



Have the children gather where they can draw with crayons. Talk about the different ways we might draw a picture of God—hand from heaven, father figure, Jesus as good shepherd, Holy Spirit as dove or fire, etc. Distribute the paper hearts and instruct the children to draw their favorite way of picturing God inside one circle. Then tell them to draw a picture of themselves inside another circle. Finally, have them draw a family portrait in the third circle.

Tell them they now have a little preview of today's Bible readings, which talk about loving God, yourself, and the people around you.

Music

Gathering: "Cry the Gospel" by Tom Booth. From the CD *With One Voice*. Pflaum.

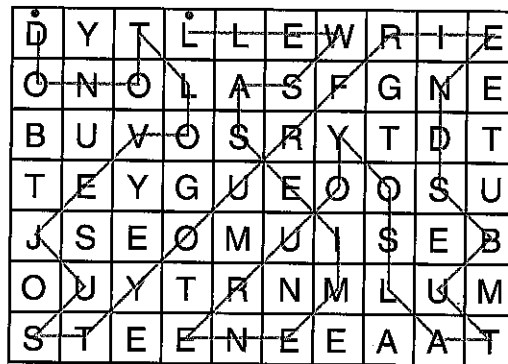
Psalm: "Path of Life" by Trevor Thomson. From the CD *With One Voice*. Pflaum.

Gospel Acclamation: "Alleluia" by Steve Angrisano. From the CD *With One Voice*. Pflaum.

Children's Leaflet

Today's suggestion for families includes picking a project of service to work on together. The children's activity emphasizes the kingship of Jesus. For your convenience, this reproduction shows the solution to the puzzle.

Jesus gave us a very important message in today's Gospel. See if you can find it by going from one letter to the next in this puzzle. All of the letters you need are here and can be found by going up, down, right, left, or diagonally in all directions. There are some letters that will not be used. Begin at the D under the green dot. End with the L under the red dot. Write the complete quote from Jesus on the lines below.



**DO NOT LOVE JUST YOUR
FRIENDS BUT ALSO
YOUR ENEMIES AS WELL.**

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**Children Celebrate!* follows the readings from the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* (©1992, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.) The readings in the children's lectionary sometimes differ from those in the adult lectionary used at Mass. See page 11, Fall 2016 Leader's Guide.

Order of worship

Gathering

Decide where the staging area will be for the skit, and then have the children sit where they can see the action.

Jo and Jeri come onstage from opposite sides. Each carries a box of toy cars and trucks. Sitting down together, each takes a vehicle from his/her box and starts rolling it around and making “vroom” sounds. Then Jo suddenly spots a desirable toy in Jeri’s box.

Jo: Oh, what a cool car! (taking the car out of Jeri’s box). Can I play with it?

Jeri: (suddenly angry) No! You’ll break it!

Jo: No, I won’t. See, it’s strong (banging it on the floor).

Jeri: Stop! It’s from Grandpa and it’s not that strong.

Jo: (stopping) Oh, I’m sorry. What if I’m really careful?

Jeri: No, I don’t want you to play with it.

Jo: (voice rising) Well, I want to and I will!

Jeri: Will not! Jo: Will too!

OP: Cut that out in there or I’ll put both of you in timeout!

Jeri: Uh-oh. Let me think. (With hand on chin, Jeri stares at the floor as Jo simply sits still, grasping the toy.)

Jeri: (face brightening) OK, let’s do this (reaching into his/her box for an even bigger and better toy). Play with that one, and go ahead and play with this one, too.

Jo: Gosh, Jeri—thanks!

OP: The End.

After leading the children in applause, ask:

- How were you expecting the story to end?
- What surprised you about the way it ended?

Tell the children that today’s Scripture readings will contain some surprises, too.

Collect

Leader: Please bow your heads for prayer. At the end of each prayer, repeat, “Lord, have mercy.” Lord Jesus, you are always kind and patient with us. Lord, have mercy.

Children: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Lord Jesus, your love never fails. Lord, have mercy.

Children: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Lord Jesus, you are kind to all who worship you. Lord, have mercy.

Children: Lord, have mercy.

Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

Leader: In today’s First Reading, God gives us the Great Commandment. We call it great because it’s all about love.

At the end of the reading:

Leader: The word of the Lord

Children: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103:1-2, 3 and 9

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning the Psalm, sing or announce the response.

Leader: The Lord is kind and merciful.

Children: The Lord is kind and merciful.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:18-20

Leader: In today’s Second Reading, St. Paul says that God’s wisdom is different from our wisdom, and that’s why God’s word sometimes surprises or confuses us.

At the end of the reading:

Leader: The word of the Lord

Children: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

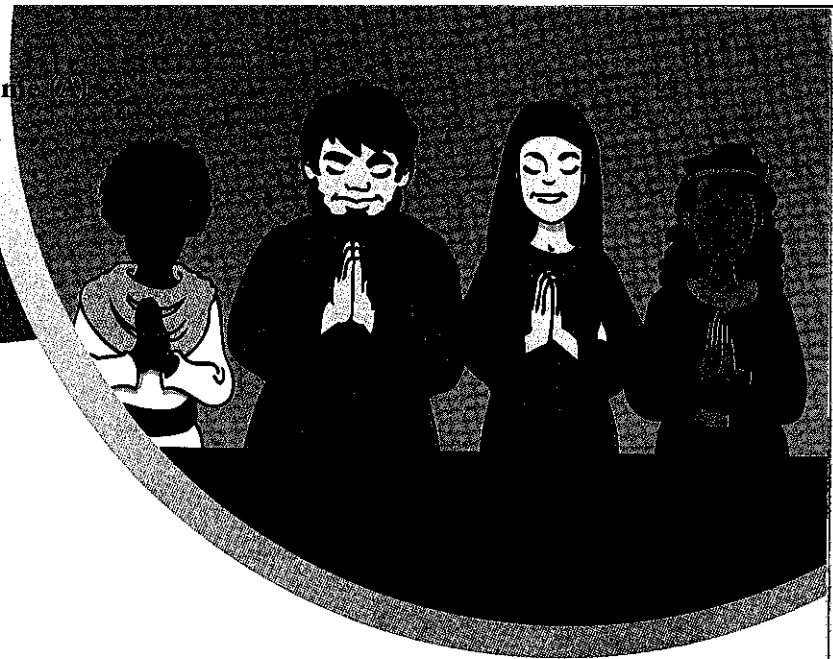
Leader: Recall that the First Reading told us to love others as much as we love ourselves. In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives us three ways we can do this. You might find them surprising.

Leader: The Lord be with you.

Children: And with your spirit.

Leader: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

Children: † Glory to you, O Lord.



At the end of the reading:

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord.

Children: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Using the following outline, discuss the three things that Jesus asks of us in today's Gospel.

- Instead of being mean to someone who is mean to you, do or say something nice in return. This is called "going the extra mile."
 - How can you go the extra mile for a brother who plays with one of your toys, without asking, and then accidentally breaks it?
 - How can you go the extra mile for a school friend who loses her temper and hits you after you accidentally bump into her in the lunch line?
- Instead of hating your enemies, pray for them.
 - Jesus did this as he hung on the cross.
 - Who are some of our country's enemies that we might pray for?
- Instead of being nice only to your friends, be nice to everybody.
 - How can you do this when adults come to your house to visit your parents?
 - How can you do this when a new kid in school sits alone in the cafeteria?

Review the three points, and then conclude with this thought: When you are nice to your friends, your reward is more of their love, but when you are nice to strangers and even to enemies, your reward is more of God's love.

Profession of Faith

Leader: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Respond to each question with the words, "I do." Do you believe in God, the Father, who is almighty, all-knowing, and all-loving?

Children: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who teaches us to how to become more like our Father in heaven?

Children: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, who has spoken to us through Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets?

Children: I do.

General Intercessions

Leader: As people called to be loving and merciful like our God who is loving and merciful, let us pray. Our response to each petition will be, "Hear us, O Lord."

Leader: That Pope ___ and all Church leaders will be the loving face of God to the world, we pray.

Children: Hear us, O Lord.

Leader: That people all around the world, especially those in countries unfriendly to ours, will realize God's love for them, we pray.

Children: Hear us, O Lord.

Leader: That we will grow in our ability to love all people, especially those who are strangers and enemies to us, we pray.

Children: Hear us, O Lord.

Invite the children to add their own petitions.

Leader: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the message about love in today's liturgy. It is true that to be more like you, we need to be more kind and forgiving, even with people who don't know us or don't like us. Grant that we may grow in the wisdom it takes to love as you love, through Christ our Lord.

Children: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. Remind them to take a leaflet home and share it with their families.