Dear Friends:

January 2020

As I have faced the last few drab mornings, I am glad that I continue to hold to the old practice of celebrating aspects of Christmas – including Christmas lights - until the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (February 2nd), which also the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary, remembering the Jewish practice of women who had given birth going to the Temple day to offer a sacrifice in thanksgiving¹. This day is also known as Candlemas because of the candles which are blessed and distributed in many parishes; we take them home to light in times of stress to remind ourselves that Jesus, the Light of the World, is everywhere and always with us.

Many countries have their own special Candlemas traditions. For example, in France where it is called “Chandeleur”, people enjoy delicious golden crepes, dating back to a pagan feast. According to local customs, candles had to be lit at midnight as a symbol of purification. The Church adapted the tradition into the blessing of candles to repel Evil… thus reminding all that Christ is the light of the world. Christians would bring home the blessed candles in order to protect them. It was also at that time of the year that the winter seedtime started. The surplus flour was then used without too much risk of shortage and crêpes were made as a symbol of prosperity for the coming year².

This is the day we hear Simeon’s words, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace” – the “Nunc Dimittis” which forms part of the Compline prayer or nighttime prayer of the Church. This prayer service is the last of the “Hours” of the Liturgy of the Hours, which is often referred to as the Prayer of the Church because it, like Mass, is uniform throughout the world. Versions of these prayers are found in Anglican, Lutheran and Orthodox Churches and also in many Protestant Congregations – so truly a ‘catholic’ or universal form of prayer.

At this time of year when many people suffer some degree of Seasonal Affective Disorder or SADness, we may find the hours of darkness and dreariness of cloudy skies to be a real trial. It can be helpful to tell ourselves the words of the psalm for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (January 26), which is Psalm 27:

“The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?”

It’s a good psalm to know off by heart and I find that I sing it to myself quite often. You can find simple settings of it in the many hymnbooks being used in our churches. A favourite of mine can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN-GG8RgvIQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN-GG8RgvIQ)

¹ See Leviticus 12:2-5
That the day after Candlemas is the Feast of Saint Blaise, when we bless throats and pray to avoid diseases of the throat may also be very fitting in this season of potential for upper respiratory problems and sore throats! This blessing is done with Candlemas candles in the form of a cross which are touched to the person’s throat accompanied by the prayer, “Through the intercession of Saint Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

It can also feel strange that we have no sooner finished putting away the Christmas decorations — and are still finding the odd ornaments, and stray pine needles on the floor - than we have to turn our hearts towards the message of Lent.

Shrove Tuesday is well-enshrined in our culture and draws out the “servant leadership” of many of our administrators as they help prepare and serve pancakes to their communities. It is also a good day to have a ceremonial goodbye to Alleluia by burying or hiding a banner or scroll which we then bring out on our first day in school after Easter.

Our school communities have many ways of responding to Jesus’ call to serve one another as we keep the traditions of Lent in fasting, prayer and good works. There will be some new Lenten resources sent out to add to the collections already in the schools and these can be used to increase our accompaniment of the Lord on the journey to Good Friday.

The Desert Fathers and Mothers withdrew to places where they could be still, pray and meditate and listen to the voice of God. They separated themselves from temptations, believing then, as many people still do, that being a little hungry made one more reflective.

Fasting can be from many things — and doesn’t just have to be from food. We can set ourselves time to be without our electronics or games, to try to abstain from saying hurtful things to others, being sarcastic or judgmental. Our Muslim brothers and sisters, as one of the Five Pillars of their faith, fast from food and drink (including water) from before sunrise to after sunset throughout the month of Ramadan:

“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint.” —Surah Baqarah 2:183
This is expected of all those who can do this without self-harm – so excludes young children, pregnant or nursing mothers and people with health or medical conditions which would be affected by abstention from food. People are also expected to refrain from sexual activity and from “back-biting” and other such immoral acts. The intent is to bring those who practise this into closer relationship with God. Some of our Catholic students have committed to take Lent more seriously after walking with their Muslim classmates through Ramadan.

Muslims, like Christians, are exhorted to give alms to those less fortunate and that is often suggested in the context of the money saved from meals not eaten. It is also felt important for us to know what it feels like to go without something so that we can be more appreciative and supportive of those less fortunate than we.

Your school might like to sign up for “24 Hour Fast” on April 7th to 8th in support of the Halton Catholic Children’s Educational Foundation with a staff team, student challenges or both. You are asked to commit for a 24 hour fast, to abstain from … anything the group decides. More information on that will go out to administrators in the next few weeks with the goal of involving as many people as possible during Holy Week.

Lent is also a good time to revisit our prayer and Christian Meditation practices. I have attached Fr Richard Rohr’s reflection from January 10, 2020, as I think it is a good encouragement for us. It seems to me that instilling this practice in our students – - and in ourselves – can only enrich our capability to engage with all the persons of God, and with the “little ones”, the sheep and lambs whom we as Christians are called to tend.

Naturally Indwelling Friday, January 10, 2020

Those who have gone to their own depths through contemplation uncover an indwelling Presence. Austrian philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965) called this intimacy an “I-thou” relationship. It is a deep and loving “yes” to God and to life that is inherent within each of us. In Christian theology, this Presence would be described as the Indwelling Holy Spirit, which is precisely God as immanent, within us, and our deepest and truest self. God is the very ground of our being!

Some saints and mystics have described this Presence as “closer to me than I am to myself” or “more me than I am myself.” Thomas Merton and others call it the True Self. The paradox is that this True Self is immortal and indestructible, and yet it must also be awakened and chosen. The Holy Spirit is totally given and given equally to all, but it must be consciously received. The Presence needs to be recognized, honored, and drawn upon to become a Living Presence.

We all bear the divine image, but we surrender to God’s likeness in varying degrees and stages. None of us is morally or psychologically perfect or whole (at least I have not met anyone who is), but saints and mystics nevertheless dare to believe that they are ontologically (“in their very being”) whole, and that it is totally a gift from God. It has nothing to do with our own private “me”—with anything we could do to earn or deserve it!

The Holy Spirit is never created by our actions or behavior. It is naturally indwelling, our inner being with God. (In Catholic theology, we called the Holy Spirit “Uncreated Grace.”) Culture and usually even

2 Center for Action and Contemplation <Meditations@cac.org>
religion teach us to live out of the false or separate self of reputation, self-image, role, possessions, money, appearance, and so on. It is only as these things fail us, and they always do, that the True Self stands revealed and ready to guide us. Some enlightened souls surrender to this truth and presence early, usually by reason of suffering.

The True Self does not teach us compassion as much as it is compassion already. And from this more spacious and grounded place, one naturally connects, empathizes, forgives, and loves just about everything. We are made in love, for love, and unto love, and it is out of this love that we act.

Action doesn’t mean busyness or “do-goodism.” It may not even mean activism, but it does mean serious engagement with the suffering of the world, beyond our own in-groups and identity groups. Rightly sought, action and contemplation will always regulate, balance, and convert one another. Separately, they are dead-ended and trapped in personality. For all of us, finding tangible ways of expressing our faith is an endless rhythmic dance. The steps change now and then, but Someone Else is always leading and it’s just up to us to “follow” along.

Although we had to postpone the Adult Faith Formation session, “Loving and Forgiving Are You, O Lord….” on January 15th, with Father Joseph de Viveiros speaking about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, both Father Joseph and I are very hopeful that we shall be able to reschedule this a bit later in the spring.

Coming up shortly are:

The Road to Bethlehem.... and Beyond with Renata Dean, on Wednesday February 12th
Do You Love Me? Shall We Dance? With Adriana Rerecich, also on February 12th
Reflecting God’s Love with David Dayler, March 25th
7 Moments on the Journey to Emmaus with Dr. Anne Jamieson on April 29th
And our Retreat at Mount Carmel: “How Wide Are God’s Arms?” with Dr. Murray Watson on Friday evening April 24th and Saturday April 25th

For further information check out the Adult Faith Formation syllabus on StaffNet at Board Services>Focus on Faith>Adult Faith Formation, where you will find the pdf on the right-hand side.

Be sure to register on Event Registration for any of these events.

A reminder also that Holocaust Memorial Day is coming up on January 27th; you can find a number of excellent teacher resources at https://www.hmd.org.uk. Let’s stop and pray that humanity will learn to respect the dignity and right to life of all.

And, the World Day of Prayer is Friday March 6th. This is supported by our Bishops and they refer us, in the Ordo, to https://wicc.org/world-day-of-prayer/ where you will find all sorts of suggestions. A prayer service suitable for children is attached, although you may want to choose other songs as your students may not be familiar with those suggested.

You may like to check out this link for suggestions and resources on how to follow our Holy Father’s Prayer Intentions:
Did you know that we have our Board’s Theological Theme prayer translated into Anishinaabemowin – one of the languages spoken by our local Indigenous people? You may like to challenge students to learn at least a part of this. One of the Indigenous consultants may be able to help with the pronunciation.

The Title, “Do You Love Me? Translates as “Gda zaagiim na?” and the prayer continues:

Zezus, gda zhaabwiiged’naa miinwaa nwiijkenh’naa,

Gii shinoomishmi niibana zaagidwin.
Gda waangawiziym niinwi, kiim naandumeni, giin boo jiibaadtigoon jį’niinawi.
Noongo gda kwedjimiishmi, “Gda zaagiim na?”

Epiichi bizhaa’aan wii kendmigoyin men’n’a,
miinwaa waamdamaan akina gaa zhichigeyin niinwi,
Maanoo nda adewin’naa de mooshkine zaagigoyin.
Zhitoon wii wewebmaang pane wii zhichigeyaang e’kwedjimiiyin niinwi,
Miiwinwaa wii waamdamaang gda gdengwenh miinwaa
gaa’zaagigo akina wiya e’koweshkowaang,
Mendige wiinawaa daam kamaang e’zaganagak wii zaagi’geyaad.

Niinwi zaagidwin’n’aak maajii’biimsobdek nda bemaadiziwin’n’a aataaying.
Ni gijitoonwi wiizaagigeyin nikeyaa gaa zaagmishing,
Gii biyami nooj miinwaa nooj dibishko kiin.
Zhinoomooshnaang niinwi pane e’niszhaa’aang,
Zhinoomooshnaang niinwi ensa giizhiigak owaashi zaagigoyin nooj-yaabih.
Mnidoowin e’bemaadizid Dibendjiget, mooshnido niinwi adewin’n’nan!
Ahow

Until next time,

Gillian
Objective
For children to see Jesus’ love, compassion and caring, and be encouraged to show love and compassion to others.
Age group: 3-12 years

Opening Prayer
Lord, we thank you for your gift of life, peace, good health, protection and for your love. Thanks for being compassionate to us. Be with us as we learn from your word.
Help us to see, help us to understand. Help us to apply what we learn today from you. Above all, help us to grow in knowing you. Amen.

Song Jesus loves me, yes I know. Anna Bartlett Warner (1859). Public domain.

Bible Story
Reading of the Bible: Jesus heals by the pool - John 5: 2-9a.
Choose one of the three suggestions below to tell the Bible story and to talk about it according to your group age and interest. The Bible story narrative should conclude with a conversation and activity about the meaning of Jesus’ action today. See the Conclusion session below.

The facilitator may use the Bible Study material for its self-preparation before giving the lesson to the children.

1. Free narrative of the Bible story:
Jesus performed another miracle in Bethesda, a pool by the sheep market which had five porches. Many people with different disabilities - the blind, lame and paralyzed - lay there waiting for the movement of water by an Angel. The first to step in after the troubling of the water got healed.

One of the men, a lame man, who had been sick for thirty-eight years, was seen by Jesus, and Jesus knew he had been ill for a long time. Jesus asked him, “Do you want to be made well?” and the man answered, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me. Jesus said to him, “Rise!
Take your mat and walk.” Immediately the man was made well and he took up his mat and began to walk.

**Talking about the story:** Form groups with the children based on their age and let them answer some of the questions below. Adapt the questions to their understanding level. After the group conversation, invite them to share specially the two last questions.

1. Which kind of people were at the pool? (v. 3)
2. Who then came to the pool? (v. 6)
3. Which question did Jesus ask? (v. 6)
4. How did Jesus react when he saw the lame man? (v. 6)
5. For how long had the man been ill? (v. 5)
6. When Jesus asked the lame man, what did the man say? (v. 7)
7. What then happened after the man answered Jesus? (vs. 8-9)
8. What are the three things Jesus told the lame man to do? (v. 8)
9. What three things did you learn from what Jesus did?
10. If you were Jesus, what would you do in seeing the lame man lying by the pool?

**2. Dramatize the Bible story**

The narrator explains that the children are to dramatize Jesus healing the lame man by the pool, based on John 5: 2-9a. Prepare the scenery with props and ask for volunteers to play the roles of the story’s characters.

There should be a mat, sign of a pool, an Angel to disturb the water, children with different disabilities - the blind, the lame, the paralyzed - and Jesus. Three others children with cards bearing the attributes of Jesus (compassionate, love, caring).

**Narrator:** *(crying in agony to terrible pain)* Oh-oo Please help! Anyone to help?

**Jesus:** *(approaching the lame man)* Do you want to be made well?

**Child (lame man):** Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am trying to get in, someone else steps in ahead of me.

**Jesus:** Rise, take your mat and walk

**Child:** *(as he walked with a mat in his hand celebrating)* Our Lord is a mighty healer, Jesus is a healer, indeed he is great! I am healed! I am healed!

**Child 1:** *(raising card written - compassionate)* Indeed, Jesus is compassionate.

**Child 2:** *(raising card written - love)* Jesus is full of love.

**Child 3:** *(raising card written - caring)* Jesus really takes care of us.

**Narrator:** Let’s go and do likewise!

**Talking about the story:** Prepare the cards with the words below. Place the cards in a box, reshuffle and let the children pick one each. You may need to adapt some of the words according to the age group. Let each child explain the meaning of the word and create a complete sentence with the word. If the group is too big, form small groups to do the activity. Motivate a conversation with the children based on their shared sentence and the meaning of Jesus’ action. The conversation may be used to introduce an art activity, like drawing the story or continuing the dramatization based on the sentences created by the children.
Words:

3. **Draw the Bible story**

Pin on the wall the drawings of the story as provided. Invite the children to choose one of the drawings, and ask them to share what they see in the picture. Motivate them to create the sequence of the story and the meaning of Jesus’ action today. You may use questions 9 and 10 (see above) to talk about the application of the Bible story today. Finish the conversation reading the Bible text.

**Conclusion** (Use the conclusion below for each of the three suggestions of Bible story narrative)

To conclude the conversation and sharing, invite the children to repeat a few times, with great joy and creative gestures: “Rise! take your mat and walk” (John 5:8). Let’s go and love one another and help others as demonstrated by Jesus.

**Song Isu Tinofara**

Isu Tinofara eheee
Isu Tinofara (x2)
Jesu vati tora
Simuka tora nhowo ufambe eheee
Simuka tora Nhowo ufambe (x2)

We are so happy eheee
We’re so happy (x2)
Jesus said
Rise, take your mat and walk ehee
Rise, take your mat and walk (x2)

4. **Playing for love, peace and reconciliation**

Use the game song Mingle Mingle to talk about the focus of the program on love, peace and reconciliation.

**Song**

Leader: Mingle Mingle
Children: Mingle

Repeat the two song lines 3 times

**Activity:** Children are running up and about mingling, following the leaders instructions. They should not move in groups but individually. If the leader calls out a number (for example 4) it means the children should stand into groups of 4 and after a little while, those not in groups are asked to go out of the game. The leader continues to do so until there are very few children left.

**Talking points about the relevance or teaching:** Love, peace and reconciliation

- There is a true mix up despite color, height, structure, class etc.
- They are doing it together in joy and peace.
- If ever some had not liked each other before, they are made to reconcile.
- They learn that they need each other to fill up the required number, which shows that in life despite any differences people need each other.
5. Talking about Zimbabwe

Population diversity: Form a group of children to play the role of the students in school.

Narrator: At a high school in Zimbabwe, a new Ndebele-speaking pupil (Child 1) has just got start school. She is walking down the corridor meeting a group of 4 older Shona-speaking girls. Shona is the major indigenous language spoken in Zimbabwe whereas Ndebele is the second one.

Child 1: (smiling) linjani Girls?

Child 2: (from the group) E-ei what are you saying?

Child 3: (from the group) We don’t understand you, can you speak in Shona?

Child 1: Oh no. I am from Matebeleland. I speak Ndebele.

Child 2: What?? We are in Harare my dear, if you don’t speak Shona we are not going to talk to you.

Child 4: Oh no, you have to understand that we are all Zimbabweans. Remember in our country we have 10 provinces from which 16 languages are spoken (show the map and list of languages), but we all fall under the same umbrella which is Zimbabwe, we are one nation. All these are Zimbabwean languages let us learn from each other.

Narrator: They all understood each other and the two apologized and they became friends. Love, peace reconciliation are evident - no discrimination in any way even in the way we use our languages. We are all one and God’s children. How do you want to show love and compassion? (Let the children suggest what actions they would like to take as they leave the program)

Animals: The main five animals found in Zimbabwe are elephants, lions, leopards, buffalos, and rhinoceroses. Search pictures of those animals in magazines, journals or the internet. Show the pictures of each animal and invite the children to name them. You may also have placards with the names and ask the children to match the card with the picture. Invite the children to draw the animals.

Culture: Mat made out of reed or sisal is a very common craft in Zimbabwe. Bring some materials to guide the children in the making of a small mat. It can be made by weaving the reed, or recycling papers or plastics. Or even, let the children draw mats and color them to be taken home.

Prayer

Thank you, God of Joy for being compassionate to us and for healing us. Help us to depend on you for everything as we grow in reading your word and prayer. We thank you for always meeting us and our parents as well as our country in every point. Amen.

This material is part of the worship service and educational resource for the 2020 WDP annual celebration.

For further information, please, contact:
World Day of Prayer International Committee
475 Riverside Drive Room 729
New York, NY. 10115. USA
admin@worlddayofprayer.net - http://worlddayofprayer.net