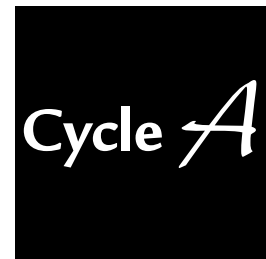


Lectionary-Based Resources for Youth Ministry

Sharing
THE SUNDAY
SCRIPTURES
with Youth



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Introduction

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1, NRSV)

Recognizing the Hunger

Today's youth are hungry. They are hungry for the word of God. They are hungry for the Good News of Jesus Christ. And many of them have not had a taste of it.

The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization, by the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry, challenges youth ministers to feed the hungers of young people. The document identifies the following hungers:

- the hunger for meaning and purpose
- the hunger for connection
- the hunger for recognition
- the hunger for justice
- the hunger for the holy

(Pp. 5–6)

By effectively sharing the word of God with young people, we can help them find purpose and meaning for their lives. They will discover that they are connected with God and with others through a faith community in which God's word is shared, explored, and lived. They will find that God recognizes the gifts of all persons and celebrates their worth. They will see that God's word really is Good News for the oppressed, and it offers the possibility of countering the materialism and consumerism that are rampant in our world. Finally, they will find that God's purpose is to make them holy.

Overview

The Lectionary

The lectionary contains the Scripture readings for all the eucharistic celebrations (Sundays and weekdays) of the liturgical year. The liturgical year, and consequently the lectionary, begins with the first Sunday of Advent. It continues through the Christmas season, after which Ordinary Time begins. Ordinary Time is interrupted by the seasons of Lent and Easter, then it resumes and continues to the end of the liturgical year.

The Sunday readings are divided into three cycles that rotate year to year. The Gospel of Matthew is used in Year A, the Gospel of Mark in Year B, and the Gospel of Luke in Year C. The Gospel of John has a special place in the Lenten and Easter seasons of all three cycles.

Each Sunday in the lectionary includes three readings and a psalm. The first reading is typically from the Hebrew Scriptures and is selected to relate with the Gospel reading. It often foreshadows something that will happen in the Gospel, and occasionally the Gospel even quotes it. The psalm usually complements the first reading and the Gospel. The second reading is from one of the letters of the Apostles. It is not chosen for its relationship with the other readings. Rather, it is intended to provide a semi-continuous reading of all the letters over the three-year period. You will find that it does not always relate easily to the other readings for the Sunday. The third reading is the Gospel, and it is taken from one of the four Gospels in the aforementioned fashion.

The resources in this book are based on the Scripture readings in the lectionary for the Sundays of the A cycle.

Why a Lectionary Approach?

Why choose the lectionary as the basis for a Scripture resource for teens? For many Catholics—including young people—exposure to the Bible comes primarily at Mass, when the Scriptures are read from the lectionary. For these Catholics, the activities in this book will review and reinforce the scriptural word they hear on Sunday. For those who do not attend Mass regularly, this book will put them in touch with the Sunday Scriptures and may even serve as an invitation to celebrate the Word with the community in the Sunday Eucharist.

Also, the Catholic lectionary offers an organized and thorough method for listening to God’s word as it comes through the Scriptures. The selection of Sunday readings for the three cycles of the liturgical year ensures that the principal portions of God’s word will be heard and considered over a suitable period of time.

At the same time, *Sharing the Sunday Scriptures with Youth: Cycle A* is not intended to be an alternative to the catechetical component of a youth ministry program, nor even as a substitute for the study of the Scriptures in a catechetical component. Rather, it is intended to be a Scripture-based supplement for ongoing catechesis and other elements of a youth ministry effort. This book can also serve as a connection between youth ministry efforts and Sunday liturgical celebrations in the parish.

The Activities Action-Centered

The Scriptures are most often experienced by reading them or listening to them and then having them explained. The resources in this book go beyond that method. By way of hands-on activities, the participants not only hear and understand God’s word but are actively engaged with it and are invited to respond in a personal way.

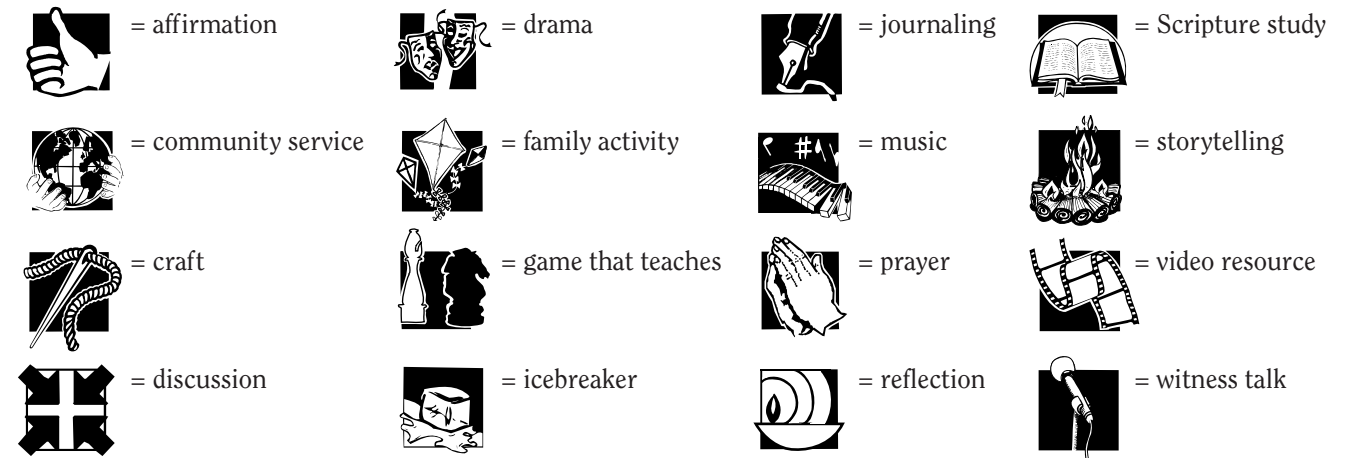
Relevant

The activities in *Sharing the Sunday Scriptures with Youth: Cycle A* make every attempt to be authentic both to the Scriptures and to the experiences of teens living in contemporary U.S. society. With the vast experiential differences among teens of different parts of the country in mind, as well as differences in age, race, and socioeconomic status, I chose activities that relate to needs, questions, concerns, and celebrations most common to all.

The scriptural themes on which the activities are based are chosen from the Sunday readings as a set rather than on a line or phrase from just one of the readings.

Diverse

This book employs a wide variety of activities and learning methods. The following list identifies each type of activity, along with a distinguishing icon. The icons will help you quickly locate a particular type of activity that you might want to use. Some activities are a combination of more than one type.



The Format The resources for each Sunday are set up in the following sequence:

Initial Information

Each set of resources begins by identifying the Sunday of the year being considered, the lectionary reading number to help one find the readings for that Sunday in the lectionary, and the Scripture citations for that Sunday.

God’s Word

The “God’s Word” section contains a major theme drawn from the readings and a brief synopsis of the readings. Also included in this section are several additional themes called “Themes for Teens,” which connect with the lived experience of today’s teens.

Our Response

“Our Response” includes one specific, detailed activity with all the information you will need to prepare and facilitate it with a group of young people. This activity is usually based on the major theme that is drawn from the Scripture readings. Also included are several pithy activity ideas for alternative activities that are related to the suggested themes and connected with one or more of the Scripture readings.

Strategies and Contexts

The resources in this book can be used in many ways and in many settings. Select the way that appropriately addresses your setting and best engages your group of teens. Here are some possible uses:

- as starting points for weekly youth group meetings
- as Scripture-related supplements for youth group meetings
- as a general resource for planning retreats and lock-ins, or as quick ideas for meetings
- as aids for youth ministers who grapple with the Scriptures themselves, to ease their fears of using Scripture-related activities with young people
- as Scripture- and liturgy-related supplements for high school religion teachers, especially in courses on the Scriptures, the Mass, or the liturgical year
- as a homily help for pastors preparing for youth liturgies or any parish liturgy

Advantages Using a lectionary-based resource with an activities approach has a number of advantages, including the following:

Excites Catholic youth about Scripture study. Most teens could think of at least ten things they would rather do than read the Bible. This book provides a variety of fun, exciting, and challenging ways of experiencing the Scriptures.

Engages youth with the Scriptures. The Bible is a whole library of books of different literary forms, so it can be intimidating at first glance. Most teens have no idea where to begin or even why they should open the Bible. The activities in this book give young people a taste of what is inside the Bible and an invitation to read more.

Promotes a lifelong habit of spending time with the Scriptures. Experiencing God's word in a more personal and meaningful way can encourage young people to make the Bible a lifelong companion.

Introduces the Scriptures as a tool for building relationships with God and others. The Scriptures include wonderful recipes for how to live in relationship with others and how to relate to God. Teens are always struggling with relationships. They are often pulling away from parents and moving toward peers. This resource pays special attention to relationships with one's self, others, and God.

Encourages adults who work with youth to spend more time with the Scriptures. Many adults working with youth—especially volunteers—are intimidated by anything related to the Scriptures or prayer. A synopsis of the Scripture readings for each Sunday is provided to familiarize such persons with the readings and to help them use the learning activities to open the Word with young people.

Makes spending time with the Scriptures exciting and meaningful. Approaching the Scriptures with a sense of adventure invites teens to unlock the mysteries found there. With some guidance and creative ways for unlocking these mysteries, teens will be encouraged to delve into them to find meaning for themselves.

Explores symbols and rituals found in the Scriptures. Taking part in the activities in this book, especially the prayer experiences, allows young people to experience the rich symbolism in the passages they read. They will discover, firsthand, connections between Catholic rituals and rituals portrayed in the Scriptures.

Helps young people experience the Scriptures as good news in a world filled with bad news. Young people today are in great need of hope. They see many reasons for despair as they look around at their families, their communities, and their world. The Scriptures can help them discover and celebrate the goodness in themselves and others as well as the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Begins with the Bible message. Many youth Bible programs begin with critical issues facing youth and try to weave the Bible in where they can. This resource is different in that it *begins* with the Scriptures and relates its message to developmental, relational, and societal issues in the lives of teens.

Enables teens to make connections between the Scriptures and their own life. The Scriptures come alive when they find expression in life. The activities in this book engage teens and help them actively apply the Scriptures to their own experience.

Proclaims the Good News effectively and enables young people to proclaim the Good News in return. Sharing the Scriptures with young people is only the beginning of evangelization. Jesus preached the word to his disciples, related it to their lives, and taught them how to share it. This resource helps young people find the language and the courage to share the Good News with others.

Limitations Using a lectionary-based approach to exploring the Scriptures with youth has some limitations. First, a strict lectionary-based approach—one that always uses the resources for the current Sunday—may not match the needs and circumstances of a particular group of young people at a particular time. It may be necessary to look to another Sunday's readings—or even a Scripture passage not in the lectionary—for a theme and activities that speak to a current happening.

Second, the Scripture readings chosen for the three cycles of the Catholic lectionary do not encompass all the readings in the Bible. Studying only the Scriptures included in the lectionary ignores a number of books in the Bible, especially some of those in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Finally, the resources found here are by no means designed to replace the liturgy of the word at Mass. And though it may be true, unfortunately, that many teens do not attend liturgy on Sunday, this sharing of the Scriptures should be a means of inviting them back to Mass rather than a replacement or excuse for missing Mass.

The Challenge In her book *Fashion Me a People*, Maria Harris suggests that the key to Scripture study is knowing the Word, interpreting the Word, living the Word, and doing the Word (pp. 60–61).

Our challenge is to enable young people to experience the Word, grapple with its meaning, connect it to their own life, share it with their peers, and find the courage to respond to the God revealed in it.

Being a minister of the Word to young people is challenging, but it is eye opening and exciting, too. One cannot help but be changed in experiencing the Scriptures through the eyes of a young person.

One of my favorite Scripture passages is the one in which Jesus feeds the hungry with both the word of God and bread and fish, blessed and shared.

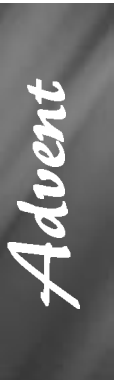
We need the word of God, blessed and shared, to fill our hunger. May God bless you in your ministry and nourish you and your young people as you share the word of God together.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us. (John 1:14, NRSV)

Advent



First Sunday of Advent



- Scripture Readings**
(1)
- ❖ Isa. 2:1–5
 - ❖ Ps. 122:1–2,3–4,4–5,6–7,8–9
 - ❖ Rom. 13:11–14
 - ❖ Matt. 24:37–44

God's Word

A major theme of the Scripture readings is “Get your act together.”

This Sunday in our liturgical year is a Sunday of beginnings. It marks a new year, in which we will focus on learning about Jesus through the Gospel of Matthew. It is also the beginning of Advent, the time of the year when we prepare for and wait for Christmas, the celebration of the coming of Jesus.

In the first reading, Isaiah encourages the people of Israel and gives them hope by describing an exciting new world. It is a vision of hope and peace. People of all nations will look to God for guidance and obey God's commands. We will have no war and no guns. People will not kill other people. Nations will not try to destroy other nations. Tools once used for war will be used to grow food.

This Sunday's psalm almost sounds like a pilgrimage psalm to be prayed on the way to the house of the Lord. As in the first reading, peace is a strong theme. In the third verse, we pray for peace in our nation, but also in our own community and home. We offer a blessing to all we meet, “Peace be within you.”

The reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans is a wake-up call. Night is over. The sun has come up. It is time to “cast off deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” Children of light do not quarrel or grow jealous of one another. They do not drink or use others dishonorably. Paul is telling the Roman Christians that they need to live their lives as if the end time and God's judgment is already here.

The Gospel reading is a little scary. We feel an urgency. Things can change at any minute. We need to be alert and ready for anything. The people in Noah's day continue to live unprepared. They are surprised by the flood and perish. The challenge of Jesus in the Gospel is to be awake and ready. The reading describes two people working in a field side by side. One goes, and the other is left behind. Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. We need to wake up and take a critical look at how we live our life. It is time to make a change—for the better.

Themes for Teens The following themes from the Scriptures relate to the lives of teens:

- Peace be within you.
- Hang out in God's house.
- Walk in God's ways.
- Wake up!
- Get your act together.

Our Response

Activity Now Is the Time



This activity gives the young people a sense of the urgency found in today's Gospel reading and encourages them to reconsider their priorities.

Divide the teens into groups of six to eight. Put a large poster on the wall where everyone can see it. The poster should say:

- Someday I will . . .
When I get around to it, I will . . .
- When I get some time, I will . . .
- When I'm not busy, I will . . .
- Now is the time!

Give each group a 3-minute egg timer. Ask the teens to pass it around their small group. When each person gets the egg timer, he or she has three minutes to complete one of the sentences on the poster. When the sand runs through the timer, the teen who has it must stop talking and pass it to the next person. If the young person finishes before the sand runs out, he or she needs to tell the group a little more about their answer.

The Gospel reading reminds us that none of us know how much time we have left in our life and that we must live each day the way God wants us to. It is good to stop now and then to reorder our priorities.

Activity Ideas

The following activity ideas also relate to the Scripture readings. You may want to read the passage(s) indicated as part of the activity.



- Ask each teen to bring a calendar from home, or at least a calendar of the month of December. Mark the Sundays of Advent on the calendar. Talk with the young people about how Advent is a time not just for waiting but for doing. Encourage them to measure the days until Christmas not in "shopping days" but in Advent days. On each square of the calendar, urge the teens to write one act of kindness, a Scripture reading, a prayer, or a way to be more peaceful. Encourage them to put their Advent calendar in their room and to follow through on what they have written. (All readings)



- As a youth group project, create a globe of the world using papier-mâché or other materials. Encourage the teens to be creative. Be sure the globe has a slot in the top and is hollow inside. Ask the young people to write prayers for peace around the world. After sharing prayer, they can place their prayer inside the globe. Invite others in your parish or school community to add prayers for world peace. (Isa. 2:1-5; Ps. 122:1-2,3-4,4-5,6-7,8-9)



- After reading today's Gospel, ask the young people to reflect on the following questions in their journal:
 - Do you know what time it is?
 - Are you missing out on the important things in life?
 - Do you live each day as if it is your last?

(Matt. 24:37-44)



- Give each teen a Youth Stand Against Violence Hotline card. The cards are available from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, 3700-A Oakview Terrace NE, Washington, DC 20017-2591, phone 202-636-3825. Urge the teens to keep the card in their pocket until they need it for a friend or for themselves. (Isa. 2:1-5; Ps. 122:1-2,3-4,4-5,6-7,8-9)

Second Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings (4)

- ❖ Isa. 11:1-10
- ❖ Ps. 72:1-2,7-8,12-13,17
- ❖ Rom. 15:4-9
- ❖ Matt. 3:1-12

God's Word

A major theme of the Scripture readings is "Radical change."

Today's first reading is from a part of the Book of Isaiah often called the Emmanuel prophecy. In it Isaiah sees something new and exciting springing from the stump of the family of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David, to whom God made a promise of a son who would be an everlasting king. This shoot, or offspring, would blossom into something extraordinary. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit will rest upon him, and he will see us as we really are. He will be concerned most of all with the poor. He will wear justice as others wear clothing. The change envisioned will be so radical that what was once thought unthinkable will happen. So much peace and harmony will exist in the world that the wolf and the lamb will be able to hang out together. Cows and bears will be able to raise their calves and cubs together. And snakes won't bite little children. The love of God will cover everything like an ocean. This root, our Savior, will be a beacon for all to see.

The responsorial psalm is written as a prayer for a new king. It celebrates the first reading with a prayer that the root of the tree of Jesse will flourish and grow. When justice flowers, the poor and the lonely will be comforted. Again we see God's word spreading from sea to sea. The last verse blesses God's name because of everything God has done for us.

The writer of the Letter to the Romans tells the community that they ought to sacrifice their own wants and needs for the sake of the rest of the community, using the life of Jesus as an example. Paul believes that the best demonstration of Christian life is our ability to live together in harmony and to care for the needs of the rest of the community.

The Gospel reading presents John the Baptist as a person who does not beat around the bush. He tells everyone, "Reform your lives!" Matthew sees John's preaching as a fulfillment of the role of Isaiah, who also talked about making a straight path for the coming of God's Kingdom.

What John wore and how he dressed appears strange to us, but Matthew's audience would recognize that he looks and acts like Elijah, an Old Testament prophet who also came to preach repentance. John baptizes the people who come and confess their sins. However, some Pharisees and Sadducees get a tongue-lashing when they come to be baptized. John tells them that getting baptized is not just for show; they must be serious about what they are claiming by being baptized. Christian baptism is a sign of conversion. We cannot just change on the surface; we must have a change of heart.

John points to the One far greater who is coming. This Savior will baptize not just with water but with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Themes for Teens

The following themes from the Scriptures relate to the lives of teens:

- Root yourself in faith.
- Make a radical change.
- Accept one another.
- Don't just go through the motions.
- Get on the straight path.

Our Response



Activity Prepare the Way, Pray Along the Way

This prayer, which beautifully picks up the themes of the readings as a whole, can be read together as a group or sent home with the young people for reflection.

God,
there is no other source
of comfort and peace than you,
you alone.
You alone are mercy and justice.
You alone have called me beyond myself
to proclaim your coming.

My path is filled with distractions,
but you call me to see forward clearly,
to unclutter the way
and build a highway for you—
singing all the way!

Every day this Advent,
may I answer faithfully to you
and be the bold prophet
that you ask each of us to be.
Help me be more daring
than I have ever been before,
to withstand ridicule and mockery
and risk everything
that is comfortable and easy.
While the roadway may be dangerous,
the finish line is victory unsurpassed!

You come into my life
and take away my fear.
You lead and feed me
with all that I need.

I hear what you announce to me—
peace, kindness, truth
and justice.
All you have promised,
and all comes from your hand.

May I know your strength
while I prepare your way—
safe travel for all of us. Amen.

(Haas, *Praying with the Word*, pp. 16–17)

Activity Ideas



The following activity ideas also relate to the Scripture readings. You may want to read the passage(s) indicated as part of the activity.

- Challenge the teens to find creative ways to share John's message to "prepare the way for the Lord," such as slipping handouts into the songbooks your parish uses for Mass, decorating their locker at school with signs; making cards for each family member; sending e-mail to youth groups in other states; giving out free shopping bags at the mall with the message, and so forth. (Matt. 3:1–12)



- Invite the young people to decorate Jesus' family tree, a Jesse tree. The ornaments will represent the many people in the Bible who waited faithfully for Jesus to come. The teens will need to make ornaments to represent the following people: Adam and Eve (an apple with a bite missing); Noah (an ark); Abraham (a dagger with a bundle of sticks); Joseph (a multicolor coat); Moses (tablets of the Ten Commandments); Jesse (a tree); David (a crown); Solomon (a temple); Jonah (a whale); Joseph (a saw and hammer); and Mary (a lily). (Isa. 11:1–10; Matt. 3:1–12)



- What does it mean when we say, "If you want peace, work for justice"? Look through a week's worth of newspapers and identify places in our society and world where justice is sorely lacking. Challenge the young people to find small ways in which they can work for justice in their community. (All readings)



- John told the Pharisees that they must change on the inside, not just on the outside, in order to really embrace Jesus. At this time of the year when teens are busy buying and wrapping gifts, encourage them to unwrap the gift of themselves and take a good look at what they find inside. Ask, What do you need to change about yourself as you wait for Jesus to come at Christmas? (Matt. 3:1–12)

Third Sunday of Advent

Scripture Readings (7)

- ❖ Isa. 35:1–6,10
- ❖ Ps. 146:6–7,8–9,9–10
- ❖ James 5:7–10
- ❖ Matt. 11:2–11

God's Word

A major theme of the Scripture readings is "A different kind of Messiah."

Isaiah continues to describe the incredible transformation that will take place when the Messiah comes. He will restore the earth and restore the people. The dry land of the desert will burst into bloom. Those who are weak will become strong. All who suffer disabilities will be made whole. A suffering world will see the glory of God and rejoice.

The psalmist recognizes our dependence on God and calls on God to be with us. The verses show God's faithfulness to those who suffer injustice and to those in need—the hungry, the stranger, the captive.

Today's second reading is a lesson in patience. It comes from the Letter of James, which is a book of advice, similar to the Hebrew Scriptures' Book of Proverbs. We are a society that wants everything fast: fast food, news bites on Web sites, instant success. But we have much to learn from being patient. The writer of the Letter of James describes how the farmer must wait patiently for the earth. He compares this to how we must wait patiently for the coming of the Lord. When we grow impatient, we sometimes take it out on one another. The writer also does not want people to be discouraged or to fear being abandoned by God as they wait.

What do we expect of Jesus, the Messiah? Do we expect him to be like a Santa Claus who gives us everything on our list? In today's Gospel reading,