

Sharing
THE SUNDAY
SCRIPTURES
with Youth

❖ To Maria Hakowski Murawski,
my daughter,
who has shown me what it is like
to look into the face of God. ❖

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Lectionary-Based Resources for Youth Ministry

Sharing
THE SUNDAY
SCRIPTURES
with Youth



Maryann Hakowski



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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 for 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. 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 C 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 C* 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 C* 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 of 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 (3)

- ❖ Jer. 33:14–16
- ❖ Ps. 25:4–5,8–9,10,14
- ❖ 1 Thess. 3:12—4:2
- ❖ Luke 21:25–28,34–36

God’s Word

A major theme of the Scripture readings is “Waiting for Christ to return.”

Both the first reading and the Gospel talk about the coming of the Messiah, a promise found in Jeremiah and echoed by other prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Messiah will come from the line of David and rule with justice. The first reading talks about a promise that Christians believe is fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

The psalmist trusts in God so completely that he lifts up not only his hands and heart but his whole being. The act of lifting up reflects openness. The psalmist sees God as teacher and guide and asks to walk and talk with God.

The writer of the First Letter to the Thessalonians wanted to keep the Thessalonians from being discouraged when the Second Coming of Christ did not happen quickly, according to their schedule. Paul tells them that the best way to wait for the Lord’s return is to grow in love for God and for one another. Their love for one another ought to be as great as Paul’s love for them. Paul prays that God will strengthen their hearts to live holy and blameless lives, so that when Christ does return, they can rejoice with him.

All of today’s readings are caught between promise and fulfillment. The Gospel reading is full of anticipation and expectation, but we learn that the return of the Messiah may not be quite what we expect. The Gospel of Luke paints a frightening scene of strange signs in the sun and moon and of people scared to death. Instead of becoming “bloated with indulgence and . . . worldly cares,” we are invited to pray and to be prepared for the coming of the Son of God. Setting aside earthly cares is especially hard at this time of the year, when it is easy to get caught up in the commercialism of the season. The Gospel suggests that each day of our life is to be lived as if Jesus might arrive any minute.

Themes for Teens

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

- God keeps promises.
- We wait for Jesus.
- Learn how to wait.
- Lift yourself up to God.
- Grow in love.

Our Response

Activity Are You Open to Advent?



This activity is keyed to the readings as a whole. The following story invites the young people to reflect on their attitude as they enter the season of Advent. It asks them to be open to the spiritual gifts of the season and to prepare their heart for the coming of Jesus.

For this reflection it is ideal to have three bowls, one upside down; one upright, but cracked and filled with dirt; and a third, upright, clean, and

empty. You may want to pour water into each bowl as you read the story. Do not tell the teens that the water represents themselves. Allow them to draw their own connections from the story.

The Story of Three Bowls

The first bowl is upside down; nothing can go into it. When someone tries to pour something into this bowl, the liquid runs off. The second bowl is upright, but it has many cracks and contains some debris. Anything poured into this bowl becomes polluted or leaks through the cracks. The third bowl is clean and without cracks or holes.

The bowls can represent our attitude as we begin the season of Advent. Are we like the first bowl—close-minded, unable or unwilling to hear the Good News about the coming of Christ? Are we like the second bowl—filled with our own prejudices and experiences and, therefore, not able to take in what is being offered? Or, are we like the third bowl—open and ready to receive Jesus into our heart and mind this Advent season? (Adapted from Gargiulo, “God Gives Us Fresh Clay,” p. 19)

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.



- In today’s psalm we pray: “Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; / teach me your paths, / guide me in your truth and teach me.”
 - If God showed up one day at your school, what subject would God teach? Why?
 - How do you think God would teach?
 - What would your classroom be like?
 - Do you think your classmates would treat God the way they treat other teachers?
 - How would class be different?

Divide into small groups and create short skits entitled “A Most Unusual Substitute Teacher.” Share the skits with the entire group. Discuss what we can learn from Jesus, our teacher. (Ps. 25:4–5,8–9,10,14)



- Before your meeting starts, direct everyone into a room other than your regular meeting room. The room should be empty except for a few chairs and a large sign that says “Waiting Room.” Leave the teens in the room for 10 minutes without any instruction. Later, when you are all together, ask how they felt about having to wait. What did they do with the time while they were waiting? Finally, ask, “What are you going to do while waiting for Jesus?” Give each teen a small, bumper-sticker-size sign that says “Waiting Room,” and ask them to hang it in their room during Advent as a reminder to make good use of their time before the coming of Jesus at Christmas. (All readings)



- Give each young person a noisemaker like those used at New Year’s Eve celebrations. At your signal, invite them to yell “Happy New Year,” making as much noise as they can. Explain to the young people that the first week of the new year, according to the liturgical year of the church, is this week. Show them a copy of a liturgical calendar and compare it with a regular calendar. Explain the seasons of the church year and how we as Catholics prepare for the coming of Christmas during the season of Advent. (All readings)



- If your class or youth group meets weekly in the same place, consider setting up a crèche and adding a piece to it each week for the next eight weeks, through the Advent and Christmas seasons. This week place a figure in the crèche with a small sign on it that says “me,” and emphasize the need for the teens to place themselves in the Christmas story so that they can experience it on a deeper level this year. Let the young people decide, based on the readings each week, which figure to add to the scene. (All readings)

Second Sunday of Advent

Scripture Readings (6)

- ❖ Bar. 5:1–9
- ❖ Ps. 126:1–2,2–3,4–5,6
- ❖ Phil. 1:4–6,8–11
- ❖ Luke 3:1–6

God's Word

A major theme of the Scripture readings is “A call to change.”

The first reading is full of joy and triumph. Jerusalem is told to take off the dark clothes of mourning and to put on the splendor of God. Baruch recounts the return of the exiles to Jerusalem and their celebration. The promise is fulfilled. The prophet tells everyone to stand in the highest place and see all that God has done, the good all around them. We do not need to climb the closest mountain, but we need to live our life with our eyes open so that we can see God's glory all around us.

Have you ever taken God for granted? The psalmist hasn't. The Lord *has* done great things for us. Do we respond with joy? This psalm reflects the triumphant homecoming described in the first reading. The psalmist celebrates what God has already done and looks forward to future blessings.

In this letter written in captivity, Paul thanks the Philippians for their support, and urges them to grow in love and to be ready for Christ when he comes. Prison has not dampened the writer's enthusiasm for Christ, and he urges the Philippians to keep up the good work they have started as they wait for the return of Jesus Christ. We, too, are urged to value what really matters in our life, to sift out the unimportant from the important. It is not the wrapping paper or the tinsel, the Christmas TV specials or the holiday sales, or the cookies and Santa Claus that really matter. What we hold in our heart—our love for God and family and friends—is what really matters.

The Gospel reading echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah and sets the stage for the ministry of John the Baptist. Last week the psalmist asked us to walk in God's path. Today the Gospel writer describes John the Baptist as clearing a straight path for God. John is a bridge between the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and the coming of Jesus. This reading gives us a sense of history by naming the political leaders of the day, and it points to the dramatic change that will occur in the world with the coming of Christ. In order to prepare for his coming, we are called simply to recognize our sins, repent, and be forgiven. In a holiday filled with receiving, the Gospel reading asks us to repent, to prepare, and to hope, so that we may be a light to all peoples.

Themes for Teens

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

- Walk the walk of God.
- Change your life.
- Be open to change.
- Hear the voice in the desert.
- Keep up the good work.

Our Response

Activity Change Your Life



This icebreaker is keyed to the Gospel reading. It is designed to get the young people thinking about ways they can make changes in their own life. They are urged to answer the call of John the Baptist to repent, to prepare, and to hope.

Have the teens each bring a one-dollar bill to the meeting. Ask them how they can make change for their dollar. If they cannot make their own change or get change from someone else, allow them to make change with coins you provide.

Read the Gospel reading together. Invite the young people to make the connection between the icebreaker activity and the reading.

For each quarter, ask them to think of one way that they can repent this Advent. For each dime, ask them to think of one way that they can be more hopeful this Advent. For each nickel or penny, ask them to think of one way that they can better prepare for Jesus' coming at the end of Advent.

Remind them that we can work for change ourselves, seek the help of others in our efforts to change, and call on God to help us change.

Encourage the teens to keep the coins in their pocket or purse through Advent as a reminder of John the Baptist and his call to change.

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.



- John calls us into the desert and urges us to make the time to pray. Ask the young people to brainstorm some ways to bring prayer home to their family during Advent. Urge them to be creative and to think of ways to involve every member of their family—such as incorporating crafts with prayers for children, creating a prayer book to send to Grandma, or lighting a candle on the Advent wreath. Compile a booklet or a list of the teens' ideas and send one home to each family. Encourage the teens to have family prayer time every day, or at least twice a week, during the rest of Advent. (Luke 3:1–6)



- This week's readings urge us to praise God for deliverance, to take joy in the great things God has done for us, to grow in love, and to make straight the path. This season of the year is filled with so many distractions that it is often hard to find God. Ask the teens to answer the following questions in their journal: What if the Son of God arrives and no one even notices? What are you going to do to tune out some of the distractions of the season and tune in Jesus? (All readings)



- After reading today's Gospel, ask, What is the real reason for this season? Give the teens a variety of craft supplies and ask them to make Advent cards instead of Christmas cards to send to friends and family members. The wording on the cards should say, "Jesus is the reason for the season." Avoid using commercial symbols of the season; instead, cut out nativity scenes from last year's Christmas cards and use them to decorate the Advent cards. (Luke 3:1–6)



- Ask the teens to make a list of things they need to do or buy before Christmas Day arrives. Tape all the lists together to make one long list. Next, ask the teens to help John the Baptist make an Advent list. What would be on John's list? Start with ideas gleaned from today's Scripture readings. (All readings)