

ECCLESIA
“The Joy of Love”

A Supplement to Living the Word – A Lectionary Based Catechesis for Young People

INTRODUCTION
(A Note to Catechists)

These notes focus on the theme of this Lenten Season of Ecclesia, namely, Pope Francis’s recent Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, (The Joy of Love), which calls on the Church to discover family life and marriage as a joy to be lived rather than a problem to be solved.

The notes are intended to be used in conjunction with the five Sessions given for the Weeks of Lent, as set out in the “Living the Word” Catechetical Programme, Year A.

“Living the Word” is aimed at children in Faith Levels 5 – 7, (ages 11 – 13). It can however be adapted for young people in higher Faith Levels.

Catechists are called to be creative and integrate the Ecclesia Supplementary Material as they see fit. They are called to use whatever they see meaningful and appropriate, from the Supplement, for the children in their group. This does, however, demand preparation and planning for each session.

WEEK 1: THE TEMPTATION IN THE DESERT
(See Page 5 of the Lenten Section in “Living the Word”)

- 1. Prayer Focus:** Your focus for each of the sessions in Lent should include:
 - A Purple Cloth
 - A Bible
 - A Candle
- 2. A Prayer Symbol:** Together with the Cloth, the Bible and the Candle, your focus should also contain a symbol, reflecting the theme for this week. Our suggested symbol is a **Stone** or a **Cactus**, reminding us of Jesus’ time in the desert. Explain your symbol to the group and begin your session with a prayer.
- 3. The Gospel Text: Matthew 4: 1 – 11**
(See pages 6 and 7 of “Living the Word”)
- 4. Life Experience: “Encounter in the Bathroom”** Read the story, ([see Attachment 1 below](#)), and then answer the reflection questions that follow.
- 5. Reflection:**
 - How did Kathleen Norris, in the above story, feel at the end of the first day at her new school? Why did she feel this way?
 - What are some of the weaknesses that divide family and friends?
 - How are we affected by these weaknesses?
- 6. Pope Francis says:**
 - In the family three words need to be used. I want to repeat this! Three words: ‘Please’, ‘Thank You’ and ‘Sorry’. Three essential words. (n.132)
 - Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life. (n.136)
- 7. Prayer:** Conclude with an appropriate prayer

ATTACHMENT 1: ENCOUNTER IN THE BATHROOM

Kathleen Norris, the prize-winning poet and spiritual writer, was a “Navy-Brat”, as the saying goes. She writes of the time she had moved with her family to Hawaii, where she had to attend a new school with other children of military parents. She was a new seventh-grader in a school where the other kids had been there together since kindergarten. These children “were less than receptive to a socially awkward, chubby, bucktoothed girl from the mainland who knew next to nothing about their world.” Yet by the midafternoon of her first day in the school, Norris thought that things might work out well between her and the other students.

But as she was sitting in a bathroom stall, she heard several girls enter the bathroom. To her chagrin, it quickly became obvious that they were talking about her, and in the most unflattering terms. They busily dissected her, mocking her hair, her weight, her shoes, her clothes, her voice, and her manner – until one of them noticed her shoes in the stall. “Omgod, she’s in here,” one of them whispered, and they fled.

Norris writes:

One of the hardest things I have ever had to do was to walk back into that classroom, knowing that three pairs of eyes would be watching me very intently. I did not then understand that those girls might feel some remorse. I did wonder if they would worry that I had recognized their voices. But I hadn’t been at their school long enough to do that. Every girl in that room was suspect to me. And a few minutes in the bathroom had taught me that it was decidedly “their” school, and that I was an unwelcome interloper ... I had to struggle with myself not to run away that afternoon. I did not do so because I am stubborn, and proud. I refused to let my enemies know – already they had become my enemies – how deeply they had wounded me.

WEEK 2: THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS
(See Page 10 of the Lenten Section of “Living the Word”)

1. **Prayer Focus:** Your focus for each of your sessions should include your Purple Cloth, a Bible and a Candle.
2. **Suggested Prayer Symbol:** Your prayer focus could also contain **Incense**, which could be lit at the time of your prayer as a sign of being present to the Holy One. Explain your symbol and begin with a prayer.
3. **The Gospel Text: Matthew 17:1 – 9**
(See pages 11 and 12 of “Living the Word”)
4. **Life Experience: “A Mountaintop Experience”**
Read the story, (see Attachment 2 below), and then answer the reflection questions that follow.
5. **Reflection:**
 - Edmund Hilary became an overnight celebrity. What did he do with this fame that he achieved so rapidly?
 - What are some of the things we are called to do to make our families stronger.
 - Where and when are you able to listen to God and listen to others?
 - How can we make God present in the world?
6. **Pope Francis says:**
 - The family is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show others respect, to help one another and to live as one. (n.276)
 - In the family we learn closeness, care and respect for others. (n.276)
 - The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters, which deepen communion, God has his dwelling place. (n.315)
7. **Prayer:** Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer

ATTACHMENT 2: A MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE

One of the greatest mountaintop experiences ever recorded happened on May 19, 1953. That was the day when Edmund Hillary and his native Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, reached the top of Mount Everest. They were the first two people ever to be literally on top of the world, somewhat like Peter, James and John. After Hillary had climbed Mount Everest, he became what most people think they desire most of all in life: he became an overnight celebrity. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth. His name became a household word, which to most Scandinavians is even better than being knighted. He achieved celebrity status as his name appeared as a logo on sleeping bags, tents, and boot laces. You can't do better than that.

Edmund Hillary could have tried to live in his little dwelling of success for the rest of his life. But he knew better. He knew that life is not really lived on top. So what did he do? He went back to little, out-of-the-way Nepal. Back to the Sherpas, whom he had grown to know and appreciate and respect and love. And he used his fame to bring them help.

In a speech given some years ago, Hillary recounted how an elderly Sherpa from Khumjung village, the hometown of most of the Sherpas on his Everest ascent, had come to him a few years after that expedition and said, "Our children lack education. They are not prepared for the future. What we need more than anything is a school in Khumjung." So Hillary established the Himalayan Trust and in 1961 a three-room schoolhouse was built in Khumjung with funds raised by Hillary. In its first decade the fund focused on education and health. Since then, the trust has built twenty-seven schools, two hospitals, and twelve medical clinics, plus numerous bridges and airfields. They are also involved in the reforestation of valleys and slopes in many areas of Nepal.

Hillary spent more than half the year traveling the world, raising money for the trust and supervising its various projects,. And he has continued to do this for more than thirty years. Many people today don't know Edmund Hillary. He's no longer a household word – He's certainly no match for Jennifer Lopez or Eminem – and you won't find him endorsing products. His monument is not written on plaques or sewn on clothing labels, but in the countless hearts of happy children. After his fifteen minutes of fame with the world, he has eternal fame with a grateful people and a loving God.

WEEK 3: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL
(See Page 15 of the Lenten Section in “Living the Word”)

- 1. Prayer Focus:** Your focus for each of these sessions in Lent should include your Purple Cloth, Bible and Candle.
- 2. Prayer Symbol:** Your prayer focus should also include a symbol reflecting the theme for this week. Our suggested symbol is a **Jar of Water**, symbolizing the living water offered by Jesus, leading to growth and new life. Explain your symbol and begin your session with a prayer.
- 3. The Gospel Text: John 4:5 – 42**
(See pages 16 and 17 of “Living the Word”)
- 4. Life Experience: “The Coffee will Always be Free”**
Read the story, ([see Attachment 3 below](#)), and then answer the reflection questions that follow.
- 5. Reflection and Sharing:**
 - In the story, what risk did Harry take? Why was his action risky?
 - How do we treat people who are different?
 - In what ways are we called to be peacemakers at home, at school among our friends?
- 6. Pope Francis says:**
 - Patience takes root when I recognize that other people also have a right to live in this world, just as they are. (n.92)
 - The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil. Somebody must have religion enough and morality enough to cut it off and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love. (n.118)
- 7. Prayer:** Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer

ATTACHMENT 3: THE COFFEE WILL ALWAYS BE FREE

Fr William Bausch writes:

A priest friend of mine, Fr Vincent, is stationed at a parish in Manhattan. Every morning he would have breakfast at a little deli downtown. An every morning, he would see the same crowd who also started their day at that deli. One day, Fr Vincent walked into the deli and introduced himself to the crowd, then asked everyone there to also introduce themselves to each other. In doing so he was just hoping for a more friendly atmosphere in the place – and it worked.

But interestingly, it worked for everyone but the owner. All he would reveal of himself was his name, Harry. After a few weeks, all the regular customers had become friends and Fr Vincent continued to pressure Harry to reveal a little more about himself. Finally after much persuasion, Harry decided to take a risk. He reluctantly announced to all that Harry wasn't his real name; it was Hazim, and he was from Baghdad, Iraq.

The risk which Harry took was considerable. He could lose his customers – the majority of whom were Jewish – and his business he had spent so many years building up. You see, this was at the time when Saddam Hussein was a real threat to world security, and he had missiles trained on places like Tel Aviv. Tensions between Arabs and Jews were running high. Naturally, all the customers in the deli froze when Harry announced his national origin. No one said anything, but people drifted out one by one.

The next morning, as Fr Vincent was shaving, he heard a radio report that the U.S. had begun bombing Baghdad. Father Vincent dropped what he was doing and ran to the subway, hoping to reach the deli before Harry opened that morning. Above all, he wanted to reassure the man of his friendship and love – and perhaps even protect him from the crowd.

As Fr Vincent rounded the corner to the deli, he saw the regular morning crowd lining the sidewalk, waiting for Harry. When Harry arrived, he hesitated, almost turning back. Why had he taken the risk of revealing his real name? But while he was deciding what to do, all of Jewish customers ran toward him and surrounded him with hugs and words of affection and encouragement. He wasn't the enemy; he was Harry. Wiping a tear from his eye, Harry said gruffly, "You know, you still have to pay for the doughnuts. But from now on, the coffee will always be free."

WEEK 4: JESUS HEALS THE BLIND MAN
(See Page 20 of the Lenten Section of “Living the Word”)

- 1. Prayer Focus:** Set up your focus using your Purple Cloth, the Bible and the Candle.
- 2. Prayer Symbol:** Your focus should also contain a symbol reflecting the theme for the week. Our suggestion for this week is to include a number of **Tea-lights around your Focus Candle**. If your group is small enough you might like to have each member of your group light a tea-light and place it on the focus. This would symbolize that Jesus is the light of the world and that his light has overcome the darkness.
Explain the symbolism to the group and begin your session with a prayer.
- 3. The Gospel Text: John 9:1 – 41**
(See pages 21 and 22 of “Living the Word”)
- 4. Life Experience: “More Beautiful than Ever Imagined”**
Read the story, ([see Attachment 4 below](#)), and then answer the reflection questions that follow.
- 5. Reflection and Sharing:**
 - What was the tension experienced by William and his guests at the celebration of his wedding?
 - Who are the people who are really blind?
 - What is the greatest blindness of all?
- 6. Pope Francis says:**
 - Each must set aside all illusions and accept the other as he or she actually is: an unfinished product, needing to grow, a work in progress. (n.218)
 - No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed – families need to constantly grow and mature in the ability to love. (n.325)
- 7. Prayer:** Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer.

ATTACHMENT 4: MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN EVER IMAGINED

When William Montague Dyke was ten years old, he was blinded in an accident. Despite his disability William graduated from a university in England with high honours. While he was in school, he fell in love with the daughter of a high ranking British naval officer, and they became engaged.

Shortly before the wedding, William had eye surgery in the hope that the operation would restore his sight. If it failed, he would remain blind for the rest of his life. William insisted on keeping the bandages on his face until his wedding day. If the surgery was successful, he wanted the first person he saw to be his new bride.

The wedding day arrived. The many guests – including royalty, cabinet members and distinguished men and women of society – assembled together to witness the exchange of vows. William's father, Sir William Hart Dyke, and the doctor who performed the surgery stood next to the groom, whose eyes were still covered with bandages.

The organ trumpeted the wedding march, and the bride slowly walked down the aisle to the front of the church, as soon as she arrived at the altar, the surgeon took a pair of scissors out of his pocket and cut the bandages from William's eyes. Tension filled the room. The congregation of witnesses held their breath as they waited to find out if William could see the woman standing before him. As he stood face-to-face with his bride-to-be, William's words echoed throughout the cathedral, "You are more beautiful than I ever imagined!"

This story reflects, perhaps, our heart's desire and faith's promise: that one day, when the bandages that cover the eyes of our mortal minds and hearts are removed, and we stand face-to-face with Jesus Christ and see him for the very first time, we will affirm what faith has promised: "You are more beautiful than I ever imagined."

WEEK 5: JESUS RAISES LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD
(See Page 25 of the Lenten Section in “Living the Word”)

- 1. Prayer Focus:** Set up your focus using your Purple Cloth, the Bible and the Candle.
- 2. Prayer Symbol:** Your prayer focus should also contain a symbol reflecting the theme of the week. Our suggested symbol is a **Jar of Oil**. This symbolizes anointing that happens for healing, strengthening and confirming. It also speaks of a deepening of relationships. Explain your symbolism to the group and begin your session with a prayer.
- 3. The Gospel Text: John 11:1 – 45**
(See pages 26 and 27 of “Living the Word”)
- 4. Life Experience: “Who’s Packing your Parachute?”**
Read the story, (see Attachment 5 below), and then answer the Reflection and Sharing questions that follow.
- 5. Reflection and Sharing:**
 - How did a stranger, in a restaurant one day, surprise Charles Lamb and his wife?
 - In what practical ways can we show love and care for others in our families, among our friends and to strangers?
 - In what ways can we remember and show respect for those who have died?
- 6. Pope Francis says:**
 - Every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father; both are necessary for a child’s integral and harmonious development. (n.172)
 - Every crisis can be a new “yes” enabling love to be renewed, deepened and inwardly strengthened. (n.238)
- 7. Prayer:** Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer.

ATTACHMENT 5: WHO'S PACKING YOUR PARACHUTE?

The story is told about Charles Plumb, who was a U.S. Navy jet pilot in Vietnam. After seventy-five combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted in to enemy hands. He was captured and spent six years in a Communist Vietnamese prison. Plumb survived the ordeal, and he now spends his time lecturing on the lessons he learned from that experience.

One day when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said excitedly, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk! You were shot down!" "How in the world did you know that?" asked the amazed Plumb. The man replied, "I packed your parachute." Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. While he was recovering from his speechlessness, the man pumped his hand and said, "Well, guess it worked!" Plumb regained his composure and assured him, "It sure did. If your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today." And they parted.

End of coincidence, end of story? Not quite. You see, Plumb couldn't sleep that night. He kept thinking about that man. Plumb says:

I kept wondering what he might have looked like back then in a Navy uniform: a white hat, a bib in the back, and bell-bottom trousers. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said, "Good morning, how are you?" or anything because, you see, I was a fighter pilot, and he was just a sailor.

Plumb then began to think of the many hours that ordinary sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn't know.

Having thought long and hard about this meeting, Plumb now asks his audience when he lectures, "Who's packing your parachute?" his point is that everyone has someone who has packed their parachutes, who has blessed them, who had provided what they need to make it through the day.

Plumb points out that in fact he needed many kinds of parachutes when his plane was shot down over enemy territory. He needed his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute, and his spiritual parachute. He called on all these supports before reaching safety. Somebody had put them there, had richly blessed him, and he was grateful and determined to pass on that blessing.

Who blessed you this week? Who packed your parachute?