

LESSON 27: Jesus at Prayer

AIM

To help the children learn the importance of prayer in their lives from Jesus' own example and teaching (4.4.6, 4.5.4, 4.5.5)

OUTCOME

Learners are familiar with the life and teaching of Jesus, and the implications of these for their lives

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Discuss the importance of **communication in a relationship** between people - friends, parents, families. Point out that talking and listening are the two most important factors for closeness to develop between people. We get to know each other better and more intimately by sharing our thoughts, dreams, likes and dislikes. Relationships are often kept alive in spite of the distance that might keep people apart. Discuss how this is achieved. Letters, phone calls, telegrams and emails make the other person feel closer and more present in one's life. Prayer keeps our relationship with God closer and more alive.
- 2 Jesus came to earth to do his Father's work. During this time, Jesus kept his loving **relationship with God** alive by talking and listening to his Father. Jesus' friends often saw him talking to his Father. They could not help but see how much Jesus loved him. They knew that whenever they couldn't find him, he'd be praying in some quiet place. They also knew that if he was faced with an important decision to make, he would pray more earnestly, wanting to know what God's will was, so that he could follow it.
- 3 **Bible Search:** Invite the children to find out what Jesus' friends wrote in the Gospels about him praying [Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 6:45-46 Luke 3:21-22, 5:15-16, 6:12] , and what he taught them about prayer [Matthew 6:1-9, Matthew 7:7-11, Luke 11:1-13, Luke 18:1-8, Luke 18:9-14]. You could divide the class into groups giving some of them Jesus' example to study, and others his teaching. Get feedback from the groups before summarising
- 4 **Jesus taught us to:**
 - Pray in a quiet place, unseen [Matthew 6:6].
 - Insist on what we are asking for [Luke 11:8].
 - Believe in the power of prayer [Luke 11:9-13].
 - Plead for what is right [Luke 18:1-8].
 - Pray in humility [Luke 18:10-14]
- 5 Jesus told us that **God hears our prayers** and responds when the time is right. We learn to listen and understand when he says to us - to use the title of the song we sang in LESSON 27, *Be Still and Know I Am with You*. Conclude the lesson by singing this song, or *Father, I Place into Your Hands*



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Bibles (3)
- * 🎵 *Be Still and Know I Am with You* or *Father, I Place into Your Hands* (5)
- * Bible (6)
- * 📖 Copies of the worksheet (8)(9) ⇨

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 6 **Experience:** The most moving moments when Jesus prayed to God were when he was in the Garden [Matthew 26:36-46], and when he was nailed to the cross [Matthew 27:32-56, Luke 23:33-49].

Feeling deeply sad: “The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me.”

Feeling afraid: “Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me.”

Feeling abandoned: “Father, why have you forsaken me?”


Asking for forgiveness: “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Surrendering his life: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Help the children see that we often share Jesus’ fears and feelings in our lives. We do pray when:

- we experience deep sorrow.
- we feel afraid, knowing something bad is about to happen..
- we feel sad, alone or rejected.
- we cannot find forgiveness in our heart for those who hurt us.
- we know we cannot do it alone, and place ourselves, our lives, in God’s hands.

- 7 Lead the children to see that **prayer is a response** to God’s love and presence in our lives. Prayer celebrates God’s love for us and our relationship with the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Prayer means different things to different people. (One of the main tasks of a religious educator is to help the learners build a relationship with God through prayer. Through the early grades we therefore teach them the different forms of prayer: traditional prayers, spontaneous prayer, prayer with music, prayer with actions, group prayers, Scripture prayer, and so on.

- 8 **Writing a GREAT Prayer:** The exercise on prayer in the worksheet can help them learn how to compose their own prayers.  ⇒

- 9 **Prayer Patchwork blanket:** See the worksheet.  ⇒

Writing a G-R-E-A-T Prayer

The G-R-E-A-T prayer formula encourages us to compose our prayer in FIVE sections:

Greeting - Reason - Emotion - Action - Thanks

- ♥ The first step is the **greeting**. Address God in a familiar way, for example, as Father or Mother God, Lord, Creator.
- ♥ The second part is the **reason**. Say why you are praying. You may, for example, be needing help or giving thanks for blessings.
- ♥ The third part is the **emotion**. Explain to God how you feel - worried, happy, afraid, excited.
- ♥ The fourth part is the **action**. Ask God for what you want - good health, help with something, a favour for someone else.
- ♥ The last part is **thanks**. Give thanks for all God's help in the past, the present and the future.

Once you've learnt to write your prayers with this formula, you'll be able to talk to God in your own words without having to write them.

(Idea from Patricia Mathson, 1992, Creativities, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press)

Prayer Patch-Work Blanket

The whole class takes part in this exercise. Each learner writes a prayer with the G-R-E-A-T formula on a piece of paper (10x20cm), which has been shaded in colours previously. Make a big frame with florist ribbon or any other strip of paper and stick all the prayers inside the frame, on one of the boards or walls in the classroom, making an imitation of a patch-work blanket. Keep the display for a while; it'll remind you of the power of prayer.

LESSON 28: Gestures in Prayer

AIM

For children to understand the meaning of gestures used in prayer and to learn about the gestures used in worship by other religions (4.2.9, 5.3.5, 6.2)

OUTCOME

Learners show familiarity with some signs and symbols in Christian prayer and worship and in other religions.



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Action rhyme (4) ⇨
- * Hymns used in the local parish (5)
- * Flashcard BE STILL, candle, Bible, box, cloth, tape recorder, soft instrumental music (10)
- * 🎵 *Be Still and Know* (10) ⇨

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1 **Talk about body language:** We express how we feel and our attitude towards something or a situation by our posture and expression, by the way we stand, sit, or look. Invite the children to mime: boredom, excitement, respect, joy, disinterest, and any other attitude you like.

2 **Discuss gestures in prayer:** In prayer we express our inward feelings and attitudes towards God, ourselves and others. Sometimes we use bodily gestures to help us in this expression. Ask the learners to name some of the gestures or actions they have seen in worship, for example, at Mass. Explain that these actions reflect our reverence, respect, humility, joy, and so on.

3 **Some Gestures:** Illustrate and explain the following gestures.

SIGN OF THE CROSS – We make this sign with holy water when entering the church. The gesture reminds us of our baptism and of Jesus dying on the cross for us. Tracing a cross on our foreheads, lips and heart before the Gospel is read, expresses the intention that the Word of God will be in our thoughts, words and desires.

GENUFLECTING – In the old kingdoms and even today, people bow down or go down on one knee to salute their king or queen. We express our humility in the presence of God by going down on one knee facing the tabernacle, which contains the Body of Christ in sacramental form.

STANDING – As a sign of welcoming and recognition, people stand up in the presence of a superior or a person worthy of great respect. Similarly, we stand at certain moments in the liturgy, for example, during the Gospel, to express the respect we owe to God, and our readiness to serve.

KNEELING – When kneeling we pray in rest and quietness. It expresses our feeling of reverence as creatures in the presence of our Creator.

HANDS JOINED – This posture is a way of gathering ourselves in heart and mind in readiness for prayer which requires that we cease all outward activity.

HANDS UPLIFTED AND SPREAD APART – This express openness to receive and joyful thanksgiving for the Spirit of God to live within us.

PROCESSION – People sometimes move together in procession, often accompanied by singing, and by dancing, especially in the African tradition. During the *Gospel Procession* a group of people bring the Bible to the altar amid joyful singing and dancing, announcing and proclaiming the word of God. In the *Offertory procession* special offering songs are sung and a group of people dancing bring the gifts of bread and wine to the altar, as well as any other symbolic gifts relevant to the celebration.

- 4 **Action Rhyme:** Teach the following action rhyme. The learners repeat each line after you.

I can kneel, I can stand	(Kneel, then stand)
I can stretch up tall	(Raise arms above head)
I can pray in so many ways	(Point to fingers one at a time)
I know God hears them all	(Nod head and smile)
I can dance, I can sing	(Dance around, pretend to sing)
I can whisper low	(Pretend to whisper)
I can pray in so many ways	(Point to fingers one at a time)
God always hears, I know	(Nod head and smile)

- 5 **Invite the children to sing** the hymns that are normally sung in their parish celebrations for the Gospel procession as well as for the Offertory.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 6 Plan a **Gospel or Offertory procession**. For your next class Mass organise a procession which will highlight the mass's theme. Children are very good at learning and performing these kinds of liturgical expressions.

- 7 **Gestures in prayer of other religions**

Explain the way other religions use gestures and actions in their prayers.

HINDUS pray the Puja each morning and evening as part of family routine. They wash before they pray and remove their shoes to stand in front of the home shrine. They bow with hands together and elbows bent, first to the shrine and then to the others. This gesture says: 'I bow to the spark of God that is in you'. They also worship in dances which tell stories of their gods. Each movement has a special meaning. The movement of the hands in dance is the most important expression.

MUSLIMS offer the Salah prayer ritual to Allah (God) five times per day. It helps the person feel close to Allah. There are rules about the words, actions and position of the body when praying. It must be said in a clean place and facing East toward Mecca, their holy place. They stand and bow, kneel and bend right down with the forehead and palms touching the floor and stay squatting with their hands on their knees. See ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY 9 below.

BUDDHISTS bow every day up to 108 times. Bowing is one of the most important rituals. It is done from standing position to kneeling and bowing right down, touching the floor with their foreheads and their palms facing up. Bowing is a sign of surrender, the giving up of the self. Chanting is done to help keep the mind away from other things. They sit on a round cushion facing the wall with knees bent and legs crossed.

JEWS wear the yarmulke during prayer to 'show respect for heaven'. They also wear their prayer shawl. Before reading the Torah they walk about in circles around the altar as the

people did in the Temple days. Another gesture is rocking back and forth while chanting or saying their prayers.

8 **Discuss** the similarities and differences in the gestures in prayer of the religions discussed above.

9 **Rak’ah:** The learners could perform the movements that accompany prayer in the Salah ritual. Every prayer time is divided into several parts called rak’ahs. A rak’ah is a set of words and movements. A description is given here, but it is advisable to have a Muslim friend, or member of the class, demonstrate it for you.

1. Stand at the edge of your mat, facing towards the city of Mecca in Arabia. Say aloud, or silently a prayer of your choice.
2. Raise your hands up to the ears.
3. Place your right hand on your left hand.
4. Bow from the hips, so that your back is horizontal to the ground. Put your hands on your knees.
5. Stand up straight as in 1.
6. Kneel on your prayer mat. Your forehead, nose, palms of both hands and your knees should touch the floor.
7. Straighten up, keeping your knees bent and the palms of your hands resting on your knees. After a short rest, go down again on the floor again as you did in 6.

10 **One-word Prayer meditation (Mantras)**

For this meditation you’ll need:

- a sign with the words BE STILL
- a candle and a Bible
- for the focal point in the centre of the space used for the meditation, put a nice cloth over a box with the sign and the candle.
- appropriate music for meditation (optional)

Gather around the focal point. Ask the children to sit around it, not too close together so they’ll not disturb each other. Invite them to keep their eyes on the focal point and breathe slowly in and out for a few times. Explain that a mantra is a special kind of prayer that opens our minds and hearts, to allow God to speak to us.

Start by repeating the following scripture verse softly three times - if possible, in song.

BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

Ask the children to do the same but with their eyes closed, or fixing them on the focal point.

After a while shorten the verse and say:

BE STILL AND KNOW

Shorten it a bit further and say:

BE STILL

Pause for a while to allow them to quieten themselves fully. Say softly: “Feel the quietness and peacefulness filling your mind and soul. If your mind starts to wander away repeat again in the quietness of your mind: BE STILL.” Play music softly while they quietly repeat the mantra. Say softly: “Speak to God in the stillness of your heart. Tell him about the things that make you happy.” Pause for a while. “Tell him about the things that make you sad. Ask him to guide you.” Pause for a while. Sing again gently **BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD**. To conclude, invite the children to join you in singing the whole song given below.

⇒

MATERIALS

*BE STILL AND
KNOW*

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.