

## INTRODUCTION

---

This book provides a complete but flexible format for celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with children. It offers a framework for every Sunday of the Year and the major feast days, which can be adapted to suit the age and needs of a particular group. It provides a step by step guide for those preparing Liturgy of the Word for children, and can be used as a resource to stimulate new ideas.

### WHAT IS CHILDREN'S LITURGY?

It is the Liturgy of the Word suitably adapted to make it relevant to the lives and experiences of young children. It gives them the opportunity to understand the Gospel message and participate in the Eucharistic celebration at their own level.

### WHERE DOES IT TAKE PLACE?

The children celebrate the Liturgy of the Word in a room set apart from the main congregation. The setting should be relaxed and comfortable, with some carpet for the children to sit on, or an informal arrangement of chairs. A simple altar with candles and a special place set aside for proclaiming the Word of God help the children appreciate that this is a special time. The leader and helper(s) are responsible for preparing the room and making sure that everything is in the right place before the beginning of Mass, and for rearranging the room afterwards.

### WHEN DOES IT TAKE PLACE?

The children should be present at the beginning of the Mass until the end of the Introductory Rites, when the priest invites them to leave for their own celebration. They are brought back into the assembly immediately after the Prayers of the Faithful by a member of the liturgy team or the congregation.

The time available for the children's liturgy depends on many factors, including the length of the individual homily and how much of the adult celebration is sung instead of spoken. Getting the timing right comes with practice and experience. Each liturgy found in this book takes approximately 25 minutes from the introduction to the

closing prayer. This can be adapted to meet individual circumstances and needs.

### WHO WILL LEAD THE LITURGY OF THE WORD FOR CHILDREN?

Often catechists will lead the children's liturgy. Actually, all that is required to lead is a desire to help children take a more active part in the celebration of their faith. Many young parents are willing to help with children's liturgy, which benefits all the younger children in their worshipping community. Teenagers or older parishioners can become involved, as well as anyone who enjoys teaching or leading groups of young people.

Ideally each session should have at least two leaders: one to guide the children in prayer and discussion; and a suitable number of "helpers" according to the group size, who assist with the activity, the singing, and any general organization. Those who will be involved with the children's liturgy should meet regularly to discuss and prepare liturgies, and to organize activities and artwork.

Here is the typical order used in this book for a children's Liturgy of the Word:

### WELCOME

Greet the children warmly and introduce yourself to anyone who might be new or visiting the group. The atmosphere should be as relaxed and friendly as possible, so that the children feel happy and at home. To set newcomers at ease, it is sometimes helpful to explain briefly that the children have gathered to listen to God's word and to praise him in their own special way.

### INTRODUCTION

This allows you to set the scene and to introduce each liturgy to the children. Often it provides an opportunity for some initial discussion and to make any explanations which might be necessary to help the children understand the Gospel of the day.

### SIGN OF THE CROSS

Blessing ourselves reminds us of being welcomed into God's family at our baptism. Making the Sign of the Cross helps us to remember that we are all

brothers and sisters in the one family of God, which has gathered together to worship and praise him. A small dish of holy water can be passed around for the children to bless themselves.

#### **LIGHT THE CANDLES**

Providing a simple altar helps to make both the room and the liturgy special, and fosters an attitude of prayer and respect. A white cloth, a crucifix, and some candles are sufficient, and the children can be encouraged to bring flowers to decorate their altar. For reasons of safety, the candles should be lit by an adult while the children listen to a reading, sing a song, or say a prayer (suggestions are given for each liturgy). Use this time to settle the group and to remind them that Jesus is the “light of the world,” who speaks to us all through the Gospel or scripture readings which they will listen to. We can be like candles, sharing the light and warmth of God’s love with everyone we meet.

#### **SAYING SORRY**

Children first learn the importance of forgiving and being forgiven in their own families. “Sorry” is a word which is familiar to even the youngest child. Reconciliation with God and with each other is a cause for celebration in the whole community. As members of God’s family we depend on each other, because whatever we do or say affects everyone who is united by God’s love. It is important to build a sense of trust in Jesus, and confidence in his boundless mercy and forgiveness. We all have a need to admit the mistakes we have made, and to ask for forgiveness, without dwelling on negative feelings of guilt or failure.

To help the children learn to ask for God’s forgiveness, a variety of prayers, readings, and simple songs set to familiar tunes are suggested. The following activity is also helpful. Write out the word “SORRY” on a large piece of paper, using a different color for each letter, and display this in the liturgy room. Then write out the words of the sorry prayers found on page 343, each in a different color corresponding to one of the letters of the word “sorry.” Have each child choose a “sorry color” by referring to the large word “SORRY” displayed, and say the prayer that corresponds to that color.

#### **GLORIA**

Every Sunday we gather together as one family to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. The Gloria is a prayer of praise which can be spoken or sung, but whatever format is used, it should always be joyful. You can vary the form of the Gloria from week to week using the different prayers and songs suggested. The Gloria is not said during the seasons of Advent or Lent.

#### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

The Liturgy of the Word is, by its nature, an occasion of worship. To mark the proclamation of God’s word, the children joyfully sing or say an acclamation together. You can use the suggestions given in each setting, or replace this with a Gospel acclamation that is familiar to your group.

#### **GOSPEL**

This book provides a Gospel or reading for every Sunday and major feast day of the Church’s year. These follow the lectionary, which details the Gospel and readings which are to be used for a particular Sunday or feast day. The lectionary follows a three-year cycle—Years A, B, and C—and each new liturgical year begins on the first Sunday of Advent.

A copy of your parish’s ordo or lectionary will contain a liturgical calendar, which is the easiest way to find out which Sundays of the Year or feast days are celebrated on which dates. The texts provided in this book are adapted for children, that they might enjoy listening to the word of God and understand its meaning more fully. Occasionally, one of the other Sunday readings is used if the Gospel is difficult for children to understand, and it makes the message clearer or better conveys the theme of the day. The Gospel can be read by an adult or one of the older children in the group. The important thing to remember is that the reader should proclaim God’s word, and proclaim it well. This requires preparation and practice.

To help the children appreciate that Christ himself speaks to us through the Gospel, a special place should be set aside for proclaiming the word of God. This might be as simple as a specially designated place to stand, or a particular chair to sit on. The end of the Gospel should be marked by a

final response, to tie in with the format of the adult liturgy.

#### **DISCUSSION**

After every Gospel, a series of questions are provided to help prompt a brief discussion and to encourage the children to share their understanding of the word of God. These questions and answers are there to guide and help the leader to direct the children's thoughts, and to clarify the Gospel message. The level of discussion should be geared to the age range of the group, appreciating that older children may gain more from this part of the liturgy than younger children. Good preparation of the discussion and enthusiastic delivery are essential to encourage the children to participate and respond in a lively and enjoyable way. It is important to give every child an opportunity to participate in the discussion, and to appreciate whatever they might say, never forgetting that everyone's contribution is valuable.

#### **ACTIVITY**

The activities suggested aim to help the children retain the stories, understand the various themes, and remember the Gospel message. The activities are intended to be a joyful expression of worship and can be adapted to suit the needs of individual

groups. The time available for completing the activity is often very short, so it is important to be well organized and to have as much as possible prepared in advance.

Appreciate the children's efforts and don't expect perfection. Allow them to make the artwork their own special gift to God. Their finished work can be taken home, or displayed somewhere in the church and shared with the whole community.

#### **CREED**

Our faith is expressed in the words of the Creed. Saying it helps the children confirm their faith, and unites their celebration with that of the adult congregation. A simplified version of the Creed which uses language more appropriate for young children can be found in the "Songs" section of this book. (Older children may prefer to use the adult version.)

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

The closing prayer is linked to the theme of the day and included at the end of each Liturgy of the Word. The children should be encouraged to sit quietly for a few moments of prayer and reflection, in preparation for rejoining the adult congregation to celebrate the gift of Jesus in the eucharist.