



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

700 King Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 1C7

Children's Liturgy of the Word Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Overview

The readings for this Sunday call us to courageous and persevering fidelity to Christ, even when faced with opposition or difficult choices.

The First Reading from Jeremiah introduces us to the prophet who, for speaking God's truth, is thrown into a muddy cistern. This story highlights the theme of courage in the face of adversity and the reality that following God's call can lead to suffering. Yet, it also shows God's faithfulness in delivering Jeremiah through the help of Ebed-melech.

The Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 40) echoes this theme of trust and deliverance, with the psalmist proclaiming, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry." It reinforces the message that God hears us in our distress and sets our feet on solid ground. This provides a foundation of trust in God's unfailing help amidst trials.

The Second Reading from Hebrews urges us to embrace the "race of faith" by shedding burdens and sin while persevering. It emphasizes Jesus as the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith," who endured the cross for the joy to come. This passage highlights perseverance and looking to Jesus for strength, reminding us that our struggles pale in comparison to his sacrifice.

Finally, the Gospel from Luke presents Jesus' challenging words about bringing "fire" and "division" to the earth. This "fire" represents the purifying and transformative power of God's love and the Holy Spirit. The "division" is not about promoting discord for its own sake, but rather the inevitable consequence when one chooses to embrace Christ's truth and values, which may differ from the world's or even from those of one's own household. This Gospel calls for radical fidelity to Christ, acknowledging that following him may require difficult choices that set us apart, but ultimately lead to true life.

Together, these readings paint a picture of the Christian life as a journey that demands courage (like Jeremiah) to speak and live the truth, perseverance (like running a race) to keep going despite obstacles, and unwavering fidelity (as Jesus demonstrates and calls us to) to choose God's way above all else. They assure us that in this journey, God is always present to hear our cries and deliver us, and Jesus is our perfect guide and strength. The "division" Jesus speaks of is the necessary consequence of choosing his truth, which purifies us and sets us on the path to holiness, even if it means standing apart from others.

Potential Key Words and Concepts for Children

Prophet: A messenger from God. Jeremiah was a prophet who told people God's message.

Courage/Brave: Being strong and doing the right thing even when it's scary or hard. Jeremiah was brave when he spoke God's truth, and Ebed-melech was brave to help him.

Trust: Believing that God will help us and take care of us, even in difficult times.

Perseverance/Keep Going: Not giving up, even when things are tough.

Division (from Jesus) means not fighting but making a choice. When we choose to follow Jesus and do what's right, it might mean we are different from others who choose not to follow him. It's choosing God's way over other ways.

Faithful: Being loyal and true to Jesus, always choosing to follow him.

Self-Reflection Questions

- † How do I help the children understand what it means to be brave or stand up for what is right, even when it's unpopular, in their own lives (e.g., at school)?
- † How did reflecting on these readings and preparing for the children's liturgy deepen my own understanding of courage, perseverance, and fidelity in my faith journey?

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The Liturgy

Procession from the main Church

After the opening prayer, when all are seated, the leaders come forward and stand facing the altar.

Dismissal

Priest: Today, you'll hear important messages about what it means to follow Jesus, even when it's not easy. Go with your leaders to listen to Jesus.

When most of the children have formed a procession, the leader with the book proceeds to the place of the celebration. The second leader usually walks behind the children. Upon arrival at the location of the celebration, the leader places the book on the prepared table.

Welcome

The leaders assist the children in sitting and preparing. **Begin with the Sign of the Cross.** Help the children think and connect their actions as they touch their foreheads, shoulders, and stomachs. The leader may say the following prayer in these or similar words.

Let us pray:

Pause for 5 – 10 seconds

Dear God, thank you for sending us your Son, Jesus. Help us to listen to his words today and to be brave and faithful followers, always trusting in your love.

Amen.

Invite the children to listen to the readings. Proclaiming all the readings is unnecessary; however, the Gospel is required.

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading

Jeremiah 38.4-6, 8-10

You bore me, a man of strife and contention, for the whole land!

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah.

The officials said to the king,¹ "This man ought to be put to death, because he is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm."

King Zedekiah said, "Here he is; he is in your hands; for the king is powerless against you."² So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes.

Now there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud. So Ebed-melech the Ethiopian³, an officer in the king's house, left the king's house and spoke to the king, "My lord king, these men have acted wickedly in all they did to the prophet Jeremiah by throwing him into the cistern to die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city." Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, "Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies."

The word of the Lord.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

¹ Zedekiah: the last king of Judah, and the uncle and successor of Jehoiachin. Relying on the poor advice of his counsellors, Zedekiah committed to an ill-advised rebellion against the Babylonian empire. His decision led to the final destruction of the kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and Jeremiah advised the king to surrender, as the Babylonian conquest was divinely ordained (Jer 27:1–22). Zedekiah asked Jeremiah three times for help (Jer 37:1–10, 16–21; 38:14–28), but he chose to listen to his advisors. The king proved too weak to accept the prophet's call to offer no resistance to the Babylonians.

² Zedekiah is weak. With the briefest of reactions to the charges against Jeremiah, Zedekiah opts out of the action. In essence, he tells the officials to do what they will; it is out of his hands.

³ An Ethiopian eunuch, prominent in the service of the palace of Zedekiah, and who provided timely aid to the prophet Jeremiah during his incarceration.

R. Lord, make haste to help me!

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry. **R.**

He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure. **R.**

He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord. **R.**

As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God. **R.**

Second Reading

Hebrews 12.1-4

With perseverance, let us run the race that is before us.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

Brothers and sisters:

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every weight
and the sin that clings so closely,
and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,
who, for the sake of the joy that was set before him
endured the cross,
disregarding its shame,
and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.
Consider Jesus, who endured such hostility against himself from sinners,
so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.
In your struggle against sin
you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

The word of the Lord.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

Gospel

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Luke 12:49-53

I did not come to bring peace, but rather division

Jesus said to his disciples:

“I came to bring fire to the earth,

and how I wish it were already kindled!

I have a baptism with which to be baptized,

and what stress I am under until it is completed!

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division!

From now on five in one household will be divided,

three against two and two against three;

they will be divided:

father against son and son against father,

mother against daughter and daughter against mother,

mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law

and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

The gospel of the Lord.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

Adapted Liturgy of the Word for Children

First Reading

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

A Story of Courage

Leader: Our first reading today is from the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet, which means he was a special messenger from God. Sometimes, telling God's message was very hard, and people didn't want to listen. Let's hear what happened to Jeremiah.

(Read Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10 in a simplified, engaging way, focusing on the narrative of Jeremiah being thrown into the cistern and then rescued. You might say something like):

"There was a prophet named Jeremiah. God asked him to tell the people some difficult truths, and some powerful leaders didn't like what Jeremiah was saying. They thought he was making people lose hope, so they said to the king, 'This man should be put to death!'

So, they took Jeremiah and threw him into a deep, muddy pit, a cistern, where there was no water, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud! It was a very scary place to be.

But then, a kind man named Ebed-melech heard about it. He went to the king and said, 'My lord king, these men have done a wicked thing to Jeremiah! He will die of hunger in that pit!'

The king listened to Ebed-melech and told him, 'Take three men with you and pull Jeremiah out of the cistern before he dies!' So, Ebed-melech and the men used old rags and ropes to pull Jeremiah out of the muddy pit. Jeremiah was saved because someone was brave enough to help him!

What did we learn from Jeremiah's story?

Even when things were very difficult and scary, Jeremiah trusted God, and God sent someone to help him. It takes courage to do what is right, even when others disagree.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 40.1, 2, 3, 17
God Hears Our Cry

Leader: Our Psalm today reminds us that God always listens to us, especially when we are in trouble. Let's say it together.

Leader: I waited patiently for the Lord; he heard my cry.

All: I waited patiently for the Lord; he heard my cry.

Leader: He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

All: I waited patiently for the Lord; he heard my cry.

Leader: He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.

All: I waited patiently for the Lord; he heard my cry.

Leader: As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!

All: I waited patiently for the Lord; he heard my cry.

Leader: This Psalm reminds us that God is always there to help us, just like God helped Jeremiah. We can always call out to him.

Leader: Our next reading is from a letter called Hebrews. It talks about our lives as a race, and how we can run it well by looking to Jesus.

(Read Hebrews 12:1-4 in a simplified way. You might say something like):

"Imagine you are running a race, and all around you are many people cheering you on! These are like all the holy people who have lived before us, who showed us how to follow God. So, let's get rid of anything that slows us down, especially sin, and run the race that God has given us with patience.

And as we run, let's always look to Jesus! He is the one who started our faith and helps us finish it. Jesus himself went through many hard things, even the cross, but he did it for the great joy that was waiting for him. He didn't let the shame stop him, and now he sits at the right hand of God!

Think about how much Jesus endured from people who were against him. If you remember what he went through, you won't get tired or give up in your minds. You haven't had to suffer as much as Jesus did, not even to the point of shedding your blood in your fight against sin."

Leader: What does this reading tell us? It tells us that following Jesus is like running a race. We need to keep going, even when it's hard, and always look to Jesus as our example. He went through so much for us, and He will help us too!

Gospel

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Luke 12:49-53

Jesus Brings Division for Truth

Now, let's hear from Jesus himself in the Gospel of Luke. Sometimes, Jesus said things that sounded a little surprising, but they had a very important meaning.

(Read Luke 12:49-53 slowly and clearly):

"Jesus said to his disciples, 'I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'"

The gospel of the Lord

Children: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Wow, those are strong words from Jesus! What do you think he meant by "fire" and "division"?

(Allow for a few simple responses, then explain):

When Jesus talks about "fire," he's talking about the passionate love of God and the Holy Spirit, which cleans and changes everything. It's a fire that helps us get rid of what is bad and become more like God.

And when Jesus says he came to bring "division," he doesn't mean he wants families to fight and be unhappy. Instead, he means that when we choose to follow him, it might sometimes cause differences with people who don't understand or don't want to follow Him. It's like when you choose to do the right thing, even if your friends want to do something wrong. That choice can create a "division" because you are choosing God's way.

Jesus knew that his message of truth and love would challenge people, and some would accept it, and some would not. This might even happen within families.

Reflection

The leader may offer this reflection in these or similar words. Remember the amount of time available to return to the main assembly. The leader may wish to reduce the number of questions. An excellent place to begin is the question:

What did you hear? All the children a few minutes to respond.

Leader: Today, we heard about Jeremiah, who was brave even when he was thrown into a muddy pit. We heard about running the race of faith and looking to Jesus. And we heard Jesus say that following him might sometimes cause "division."

What does all this mean for us?

It means that being a follower of Jesus is not always easy. Sometimes, we might have to be brave, like Jeremiah, and stand up for what is right, even if it's unpopular. Sometimes, we might feel like we're running a long race, and we need to keep our eyes on Jesus to help us keep going.

Sometimes, our choice to follow Jesus might mean that we are different from others, even people we love. For example, if our friends want to do something that we know is wrong, and we choose not to do it because we want to follow Jesus, that's a kind of "division." But it's a good division because it means we are choosing God's way.

Jesus wants us to be faithful to him above everything else. He wants us to love God with all our hearts, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. When we do this, we are truly following Him, and He will always be with us, helping us to be brave and strong.

Can you think of a time when it was hard to do the right thing?

What did you do?

How can we be brave like Jeremiah?

What does it mean to "look to Jesus" when things are hard?

How can we show that we are faithful to Jesus in our daily lives?

Following the reflection, the prayer leader invites everyone to stand to profess their faith. Recite the Creed or use the sample below to ask the children to respond.

The Creed

Depending on the time, a simple profession of faith may be made (see below).

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who gave his life for us?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and gives us everlasting life?

All: I believe.

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leaders may begin the intercessions by announcing the needs they know. The leader may need to repeat and paraphrase the petition and conclude it with the cue for the response: we pray. All respond to each petition by saying, "Lord, hear our prayer." Sample intercessions are below.

Leader: Now, let's offer our prayers to God, who always listens to us. The response is: Lord, hear our prayer.

1. For our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, and all bishops, that they may courageously lead us in faith, we pray to the Lord: All: Lord, hear our prayer.
2. For all families, that they may grow in love and support each other in following Jesus, even when it is difficult, we pray to the Lord: All: Lord, hear our prayer.
3. For all those who are brave and stand up for what is right, especially when it is hard, we pray to the Lord: All: Lord, hear our prayer.
4. For ourselves, that we may always trust in Jesus and run the race of faith with perseverance, we pray to the Lord: All: Lord, hear our prayer.
5. For all those who are suffering or in need, that God may hear their cries and send them help, we pray to the Lord: All: Lord, hear our prayer.

The leader may invite other intercessions from the children.

Leader: God our Father, you are always near to us and hear our prayers. Listen to these prayers we offer through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.

Ask the children to return to the main assembly. Ask them to return quietly and think about what they have heard and are now doing. Be mindful of children having difficulty finding their families.

Liturgy adapted for Children.

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Acknowledgments:

LECTIONARY SUNDAYS AND SOLEMNITIES

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