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# *Spiritual*

## *The Signs and Symbols of Faith*

*by Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD*

As catechists and teachers consider the appropriate methods to communicate faith to children, they also need to consider their own experience and spiritual formation. We have the great responsibility to guide and form children in the ways of faith. That means, of course, not simply giving them ideas but inviting them into the very faith that holds our hearts firm in the Lord.

All along the way of the catechetical and faith-formation journey, we need to reflect on how our own faith has unfolded and flowered in our lives. This enables us to enter the task of catechesis not just as a process of technical application—taking a formula of some sort and applying it in a particular setting. It helps us see the overall task and responsibility as one of sharing our faith. This must undergird whatever particular method we use in our teaching and communications.

Consider for a moment the children who are in grades three and four. They have already had some initiation into the faith. They already have a foundational experience: Jesus has been

presented to them. They have the very same foundational experience that we have had and continue to have—a kind of immediate presentation of the Lord who loves us and saves us and draws close to us.

*The basic experience of faith unfolds in signs and symbols.*

At this point in their faith formation, something new begins to happen. What is already given needs to be filled out. The same happened for us, and it remains with us as a permanent feature of our experience. I would suggest that what ought to happen for these eight- and nine-year-olds and what did happen for us (and still remains with us today) is an unfolding of the basic experience of faith in signs and symbols—in various ways of mediation. And it would be most helpful if we can retrieve this in our own experience and let it guide us as we guide the children. Let me explain this.

As very young children, we experienced the Lord as presented to us in a very immediate way. That

# Reflection

experience has been foundational for us for the rest of our lives. We have built upon that experience with the help of parents, teachers, and other believers. An important way that experience has been elaborated in our lives, beginning perhaps when we were in third and fourth grade, is through signs and symbols that gave us deeper insight into the fundamental relationship we have with God.

Consider for a moment the biblical scene of Jesus at Cana in Galilee, where he turns water into wine. Saint John says in his Gospel that this is first of the signs by which Jesus revealed his glory. The miracle reveals not just a kind of magical power. It truly is a sign that leads to fuller understanding of Jesus. The sign demonstrates the creative power of God in him, the compassion of God for his people in need, and the close presence of God in the Word made flesh.

As we recall and remember our own discoveries of God in Jesus by the power of the Spirit through signs and wonders, we will be able to assist our children in third and fourth grade to do the same.

## For Reflection

- What signs and symbols of Christian faith were significant for you when you were eight or nine years old?
- What vivid stories and images would you like to share with this age group that would help their growth in faith?

**Louis J. Camelli** is a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and pastor of Divine Savior Parish in Norridge, Illinois. He completed his theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome and obtained a doctorate in theology with a specialization in spirituality. He is the former director of ongoing formation of priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago and director of the Cardinal Stritch Retreat House, Mundelein, Illinois. In February, 2002, he received the Pope John XXIII Award from the National Organization for the Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC) for his contributions to the continuing education and ongoing formation of priests. He has authored numerous books on spirituality and also served as a writer and theological consultant for RCL's *Faith First* and *Faith First Legacy Edition* K-8 curriculum.

# *A Prayer for Guidance*

**Spirit of God**, we give you thanks and praise  
for the blessings you give us today through family and friends.  
Guide us as we prepare to be your catechists.  
Help us see **your constant activity** in our world  
so that we may lead our learners to you.

Today, guide us to see you  
in the **unconditional love** of parents,  
in the **spontaneous joy** of children,  
in the **wisdom** of all who have gone before us,  
in the **wonder** of new life all around us,  
in the special **call to teach**,  
in **quiet meditation** on your teaching,  
in our **compassionate service** to others.

Help us recognize you in all our daily activities  
so that all those we teach may see in us  
your **love and concern** for the world's people,  
and be moved to take up the work  
of **building your kingdom** here on earth.

*Amen!*

# Overview: Methods for Grades 3 and 4

The *National Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that growing in faith is a lifelong process. One of the first things to know about catechesis is that you and your young learners are on a journey together. Your experience as their catechist can also be one of growth in faith for you. This module begins by describing the lifelong faith journey and invites you to reflect on your own place in that journey. It is by being in touch with your own faith that you will best be able to share faith with your learners.

In this module you will engage in a process of faith reflection using three components: a DVD, this companion booklet, and a CD-ROM. See page 5 for an explanation of how these components complement one another. You began on pages 6 and 7 with a reflection on your earliest religious memories. On the next page an exercise will help you recall your spiritual, intellectual, social, and emotional development when you were eight or nine years old.

The body of the booklet is divided into four segments that parallel the divisions of the DVD.

- **The Faith Journey:** A brief overview of the life journey of faith
- **Sharing Sacred Scripture:** Suggestions for using Scripture in your catechesis
- **Sharing Our Catholic Tradition:** Ideas for introducing the Catholic Tradition to young children in ways that will help them to build faith concepts as they grow

- **Praying in the Classroom:** A reflection on the importance of prayer in your catechetical setting

Each segment in the booklet leads you through a four-page process to reflect on the DVD content and choose ways to apply the content to your catechetical setting.

1. **Introduction:** States the goal and objectives for the session and provides a question for personal reflection
2. **Looking Ahead—Presentation:** Includes a video overview and space to write questions and comments during and after viewing
3. **Looking Back—Reflection:** Includes three questions to check comprehension and offers a chance for group reflection
4. **Looking Beyond—Application:** Includes an opportunity to summarize new insights and apply them to a practical setting

There is an enrichment article at the end of each segment process that extends learning by exploring a topic related to the segment theme.

Catechists need the support and encouragement of other catechists. Try to participate in the learning process of this module in a group setting. If circumstances require that you work independently, find at least one other catechist with whom you can work and share your reflections.

**Barbara Kay Bowie** was a teacher, principal, catechist, early childhood writer and consultant, and college professor during her forty-five-year career. She writes on early childhood and religious topics for children, parents, and teachers and frequently speaks at local and national conventions. She is the president of Educational Expertise, LLC, that trains parents and teachers of young children in religious education and readiness skills. She holds a BA in Elementary Education from the College of Notre Dame and an MA and EdD from the Catholic University of America in Curriculum and Instruction.

# Sharing Sacred Scripture

Stories capture the religious imagination of young children. Appropriate Scripture narratives and related children's literature nourish the faith of third and fourth graders. As learners listen and retell the stories, they deepen their understanding of God and the events of the Bible. As they explore the Scripture stories, they are expanding faith language. The increasing knowledge of the stories of their faith helps them live the message of the story. This segment will help you appreciate the importance of Sacred Scripture in catechesis.

## Goal

To demonstrate suitable ways to use Bible stories and activities to build faith understanding

## Learning Objectives

- To name appropriate strategies for working with Scripture stories with eight- and nine-year-olds
- To identify different activities to reinforce the message of the Scripture stories
- To describe activities that involve learners in applying the Scripture stories to life

## Exercise

Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions. Then discuss them with another person or with a group.

What Bible stories do you remember from your childhood? Why do they remain with you today?

## Prayer

*God of life and love, in your goodness and wisdom you disclose yourself to us through the Sacred Scriptures. Give me the creativity to help your word come alive to the young people in my care so that they will respond to you in faith. I ask this in the name of your Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**By the power of  
the Holy Spirit,  
Christ must be  
proclaimed to  
every person  
and to all  
nations in every  
age so that  
God's Revelation  
may reach  
the ends of  
the earth.**

*NDC 16B*

**Watch Segment 2  
of the DVD  
or CD-ROM now.**

## Looking Ahead

This segment demonstrates how to introduce children to Scripture stories in ways that will help them remember and understand them more clearly. Below you will find an outline of the principal content of the DVD that accompanies this segment. You may wish to refer to this outline as you watch the DVD. Below the outline, there is space for you to jot down questions that occur to you during and after the viewing.

### Video Outline

- Strategies that connect biblical concepts with children's life experiences
- Ways the catechists actively involve the children in learning and applying Scripture stories
- Various ways in which children express their learning

### Comments and Questions

Use the space below to list questions, feelings, or ideas that occur to you as you view the video.

A large rectangular area with horizontal lines for writing, intended for comments and questions. It is divided by a vertical red line on the left side, creating a narrow margin. There are two binder holes punched on the left edge of the writing area.

# Looking Back

Reflect silently on one or more of the questions below and then jot down your response(s). Then share your thoughts with another person or with the group.

1. What strategies have you used to introduce or reinforce Scripture with children? What new strategies did you observe in the video that you will incorporate into your catechesis?
2. In what ways did the catechists in the video help the children comprehend and apply the message of the Gospel stories?

## Comprehension

## Application

3. One of the catechists in the video speaks of the importance of engaging young people in their learning. Which activities in the video do you feel were most creative in helping children engage in learning through discovery?

## Remember . . .

### Explore Scripture.



### Work in groups.



### Invite independent discovery.



### Ask thinking questions.



### Teach with your goal in mind.



### Connect Scripture with life.



### Invite reflection on experience.



### Use movement activities.

apture stories helps children deepen  
e below will help you develop  
apture stories.

**Stories** / **Language and Meaning**

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## Stories

language and build meaning  
 low's Mite. (See Luke 21:1-4 or  
 eative activity that would engage  
 hem relate its meaning to their

### What Will I Change?

*In this space write one thing you will do differently as a catechist because of what you learned in this segment.*

*this space write one thing you will*

o differently as a catechist because  
f what you learned in this segment.

# Scripture Storytelling

by Barbara Kay Bowie

Children love Scripture stories. The drama and vivid images in these stories stir their imagination. They are also attracted to the goodness they see in particular characters or actions. All of these images increase the store of knowledge about God's activity in their lives.

Scripture stories provide learners with vivid examples of everyday happenings. Dinner is served, storms rage, festivals are celebrated, births are anticipated, deaths are mourned, and God is shown to be present in all. The Bible offers children images and language about God, Jesus, and all God's people. They are beginning to wonder about Moses' question to God, "What is your name?" and to develop an answer to Jesus' question to the Apostles, "Who do you say that I am?"

Different aspects of a familiar story will appeal to children at a particular age. Third and fourth graders enjoy figuring out solutions to problems. When they hear the Bible story of the paralyzed man, they may identify most with the people's dilemma of finding a way for Jesus to heal the

paralyzed man. They admire the solution of cutting a hole in the roof to accomplish the task of getting the man into Jesus' presence. The story demonstrates to the learners that God encourages us to use our thinking with regard to everyday concerns.

Third graders enjoy the stories from the Acts of the Apostles which show members of the early Church struggling to follow the way of Jesus. Fourth graders, with their greater capacity for logical thinking, enjoy discussing the story of the rich young man and the story of the prodigal son who is welcomed back by his father.

Both eights and nines identify with the dramatic actions and vivid images in the stories of Jesus. They enjoy the images of the swine running over the cliff, the nets bulging with fish, Jesus sleeping on the rough sea, and the centurion humbly pleading for Jesus' help. Of course they are attracted to the miraculous aspect of some of these stories. But they are also attracted to the love and compassion

*Eights and nines  
are attracted  
to the love and  
compassion  
of Jesus.*

of Jesus. We can point out to them the source of those miracles—the love and compassion of our God revealed through Jesus.

Each time these stories are repeated, learners are being drawn into the mystery of Jesus' life and message. Although they cannot understand the mystery of this person who is both human and divine, through these stories they are building concrete images of what the Son of God said and did. With practice, catechists can develop the techniques that bring the characters and message of the Scriptures alive. Enthusiastic voices, appropriate gestures, and props help hold the learners' attention, reinforce learning, and ensure that the stories increase their knowledge and relationship with God.

Using Scripture stories in simple prayer services helps children respond with praise and thanksgiving to the

wonderful stories of God. Read the stories reverently from a real Bible or the children's lectionary when you use them in liturgical prayer. You will then be modeling for them the way in which they will encounter the Word of God in the Sunday Eucharist.

Choose Scripture stories carefully for learners of this age. Emphasize stories that support their increasing experience of belonging, community, and service. Stories of compassion and healing help them increase still further their capacity to see the world through the perspective of others.

Helping eights and nines understand Scripture stories is challenging for catechists. You will need effective questioning strategies to guide the learners in their thinking. Questions focusing on what the Scripture story said, what it means, and how we live its message lead the learners to a deeper understanding of their faith.

### *For Reflection*

- Think of a time when you heard a Scripture story told in a powerful way. What was the story and why did it have such a powerful effect on you?
- What did you learn in this article that could make you a more effective storyteller?