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Background

Love: The Heart of God's Law

In his discourse to the disciples at the Last Supper (John 14–16) Jesus summarized the way of life his disciples were to live. Jesus' command was very clear: Love one another as he had loved them. They were to show their love for him by keeping his commandments. Living such a life was a sign of the indwelling, or presence of God—Father, Son, and Spirit—with them (see John 14).

Love is the center of the life of God. It is also the heart and foundation of human life (see 1 John 4:7–12). This should come as no surprise. Human beings, created in the image and likeness of God—who is love (see 1 John 4:16)—share in the very life and love of God.

The divine command to love is at the heart of God's Law. In the Old Testament the revelation of the Law is summarized in the Shema (see Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41). When Jesus was asked by the scribe which of the commandments was the greatest, he succinctly reminded the teacher of the Law what he already should have known: living the law of love, as witnessed by one's fidelity to the Covenant, is the source and foundation of holiness. It is the foundational behavior of living as a child of God.

More background: For further reading and reflection see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1420–1429, 1730–1742, 1776–1794, 1846–1851, 2013–2014, and 2052–2074.

FOR REFLECTION

*What difference does
it make that I follow
Jesus' word in my life?*

First Thoughts

Reverence

Reverence, one of the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, shapes our attitude of respect not only for God but for all created life. Find ways for the children to discover that all created life, especially human life, is sacred. Help the children develop a sense of reverence for one another as images of God. Having such a reverence for themselves is the foundation for true self-love (and self-respect). It is on this foundation that children can truly learn to love others as they love themselves. If children exhibit a lack of reverence and respect for one another in the classroom, invite them to rethink their behavior. Remind the children of the Great Commandment. Pray with them to the Holy Spirit for help in making better decisions.

Mistakes and Accidents

What are adult responses to the mistakes and accidents caused by children? Sometimes adults react, rather than respond, to such accidents and mistakes as if they were deliberate, consciously chosen harmful behaviors. It is important that we respond appropriately to children who accidentally break an object, run into and knock down another person, spill water, and so on. Our response assuredly will involve the children's learning from such accidents and mistakes by acknowledging the causes, accepting responsibility for the consequences, and making appropriate amends (for example, cleaning up).

Overview

FAITH FOCUS

The Great Commandment is a summary and the heart of all of God's commandments.

OBJECTIVES

After completing the chapter, the children, in an age-appropriate way, should be able to:

- Describe the experience of the ritual action of reverently listening to the word of God.
- Retell and share their understanding of the meaning of the Scripture story "The Great Commandment."
- Understand more fully and explain the role of the sacrament of Reconciliation in living the Great Commandment.
- Appreciate the difference that living the Great Commandment means for their lives and the lives of other people.
- Choose to do things that show they are living the Great Commandment.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Recording of instrumental music, and lyrics and music for a hymn related to the theme of the opening ritual
- Child's version of the Bible (optional)
- Pencils and crayons or markers
- Poster board or newsprint
- Scripture card "The Great Commandment"

ENRICHING

Here are several suggestions for enhancing the presentation of Chapter 2 and for helping families participate in the preparation of their children for the sacrament of Reconciliation:

- RCL's *Reconciliation* music CD, Song 5, "Pescador De Hombres/Lord, You Have Come"; Song 6, "I Have Loved You"
- RCL's *Reconciliation Family Guide*, pages 20–23
- Scripture play "The Great Commandment" on page 123
- **Children's Books**
 - Amos and Boris* by William Steig (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). The story of a mouse and a whale respecting their differences and making new friends.
 - Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by John Steptoe (Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard Books). An African tale giving insight into Jesus' teaching that what we do for the least, we do for him.
 - Sweet Strawberries* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor (Atheneum Books). A story about loving and treating other people with kindness.
- **Children's Videos**
 - Faith First Grade 2 video, Segment 3, "The Story of St. Clare"; Segment 4, Bible Songs, "This Is My Commandment."
 - Faith First Grade 4 video, Segment 4, "Moral Dilemma."
 - First Reconciliation* (St. Anthony Messenger Press/Franciscan Communications).



Visit the RCL sacraments web site by following the link titled "Sacraments" at www.FaithFirst.com.

Opening Ritual

Reverence for the Word of God

Gathering Procession

Play a recording of instrumental music or an appropriate hymn. Reverently hold a Bible (or the Book of the Gospels if available) in your hands at about eye level. As you process around the room, invite the children to process silently behind you to the prayer area. Upon arrival at the prayer area, invite the children to settle themselves and to become aware of God's presence among them.

Alternative 1: Reverently place the Bible (or the Book of the Gospels) in the prayer area. Invite the children to come forward and gather around the Scriptures. After they have gathered, invite the children to settle themselves and to be aware of God's presence among them.

Alternative 2: Invite the children to process from your room to an area in the church or chapel. Reverently hold the Bible in your hands at eye level and lead the children in the procession into the church or chapel.

Gathering Prayer

LEADER: Let us begin by praying the Sign of the Cross to remind us of our Baptism.

ALL: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

LEADER: God, our loving Father,
we gather around your word to us,
the Sacred Scriptures.
Prepare our minds and hearts
to listen to your word.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

Scripture Reading

Read aloud or invite a volunteer to read aloud the Scripture story "The Great Commandment" (Matthew 22:34–40) from the Bible. An adapted version of the Scripture story is found on page 14 of the child's book.

LEADER: Let us make the sign of the cross on our forehead, lips, and heart and ask the Holy Spirit to help us listen to the word of God.

READER: A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

ALL: Reverently sign their forehead, lips, and over their heart with the sign of the cross and then say,
Glory to you, Lord.

READER: Read the story aloud to the group.
Conclude the reading, saying,
The gospel of the Lord.

ALL: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Ritual

Play the instrumental version or the vocal version of the music used for the gathering procession. Then invite the children to come forward one at a time to reverence the Bible (or the Book of the Gospels). For example, the children may touch the book, kiss the book, or genuflect before the book.

Closing

LEADER: God, our loving Father,
today we show our reverence
for your word, the Sacred Scriptures.
Send us the Holy Spirit
to help us remember
and follow your word every day.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

We Follow Jesus

*God of love,
send us the Holy Spirit
to help us follow your word.*



OBJECTIVE

Experience the ritual action of processing with and reverencing the Bible and reflect on its meaning.

12 We Follow Jesus

Celebrate

Celebrate the Ritual

Lead the children in the celebration of the opening ritual, which is found on page 41 of this guide.

Reflect

Share the opening paragraph on page 13 in the child's book, and invite the children to describe what it was like for them to celebrate the ritual. Remember to be open to a variety of responses.

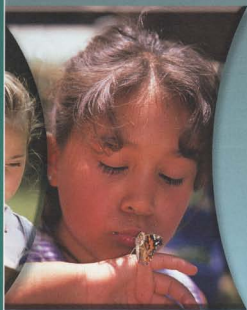
Discover

- Ask the children to open their books to pages 12 and 13. Invite volunteers to describe what they see happening in the photographs.
- Invite responses to the question "How do you show reverence at other times?"

Apply

Integrate

- Read aloud the final paragraph on page 13. When all have completed the activity, invite volunteers to share their responses with the whole group.
- Show and talk about the Book of the Gospels if it was used in the opening ritual. Explain to the children that the Book of the Gospels is carried in procession at the beginning of Mass. It contains the gospel readings that the priest or deacon proclaims both at Mass and at the communal celebration of Reconciliation. We show our reverence for God's word by standing and making the sign of the cross on our forehead, lips, and over our heart before we listen to the gospel reading.



Sharing Together

In the opening prayer we carried the Bible in procession. We gathered together and showed reverence for God's word. What was it like for you to show reverence for the word of God?

How do you show reverence at other times?

As Catholics we show reverence for the Bible, or Sacred Scripture. This means we show our love and respect for the word of God. Give one example of how we show reverence for Sacred Scripture.

We Follow Jesus 13

CONSIDER THIS . . .

Words of Reverence and Respect

Words can be clear signs of our reverence and respect (or lack of reverence or respect) for God, other people, and ourselves. Write the heading "Words Show Reverence" at the top of a piece of newsprint or poster board. Then from left to right make three columns with the subheadings "God," "Self," and "Others." Brainstorm with the children words and phrases that they might use to show their reverence and respect for God and list the words and phrases under the subheading "God." Repeat the process for "Self" and "Others." Display the completed poster in your gathering space. Invite and encourage the children to use the words and phrases daily. Be sure to include these words and phrases in your own dealings with the children during your time with them.

The Great Commandment

Sacred Scripture is the holy word of God. Read this Bible story. Discover what Jesus taught about showing our reverence for God, ourselves, and other people.

There was a man who taught people about the commandments. He asked Jesus this question, "Teacher, what is the most important commandment?"

Jesus answered, " 'Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second commandment is like the first, 'Love others as much as you love yourself.' "

BASED ON MATTHEW 22:34-40

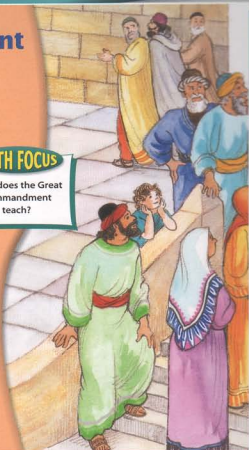
FAITH FOCUS

What does the Great Commandment teach?

OBJECTIVE

Tell the children the Scripture story about the Great Commandment and help them understand the meaning of the story for their lives.

14 We Follow Jesus



Teach

Connect

- Recall the opening ritual experience of showing reverence for the Bible. Explain to the children that reverence is one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit that enables us to honor and respect God and all people.
- Introduce the Bible story by reading aloud the opening paragraph on page 14 of the child's book, focusing on the word *reverence*.

Discover

- Ask the children to open their books to pages 14 and 15. Invite volunteers to describe what they see happening in the illustration.
- Read aloud the "Faith Focus" question. Ask the children to discover the answer as they listen to the Bible story.

Reflect

Read the "Faith Focus" question again and invite volunteers to respond. Summarize by reading the sentence at the top of page 15 and invite the children to respond to the question.

Apply

Integrate

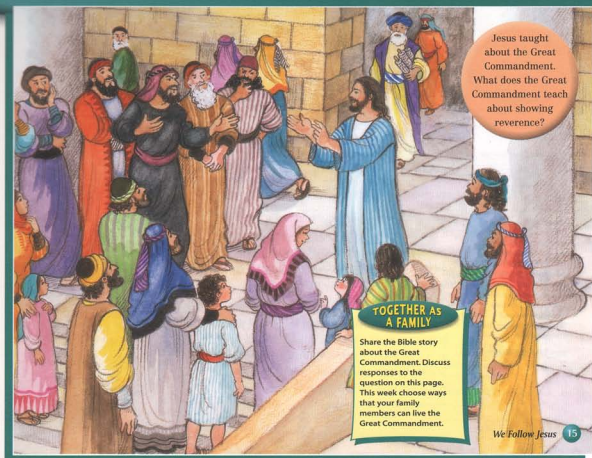
- Help the children understand that our love for God and for ourselves and other people are connected.
- Invite volunteers to share their understanding of reverence by completing these sentences:
I show reverence for God when I _____.
I show reverence for others when I _____.
I show reverence for myself when I _____.
- The additional activity "The Great Commandment," found on page 50 of this guide, can also be used.

Choose

Write the headings "Love God," "Love Yourself," and "Love Your Neighbor" on the board or on newsprint. Invite volunteers to list, under each heading, ways that they can show their love for God, for themselves, and for other people. Encourage the children to choose one of the ideas listed on the board and do it this week.

At Home

Invite the children to share the "Together as a Family" activity with their families.



CONSIDER THIS . . .

The Great Commandment and the Shema

Jesus' reply to the scribe reminded the inquiring scribe that he should already have known the answer to his own question. Jesus restated the ancient Jewish profession of faith, the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41). The Shema summarized the Law for the Israelites and was recited twice daily. Many Jewish families today write the words of the Shema, which begins "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" on a small parchment scroll, or mezuzah. They place the mezuzah on the right doorpost of their home, touch it with their fingers and then kiss their fingers when entering or leaving the home. This serves as a sign and a reminder of their love and fidelity for God and their commitment to live the Covenant.

Living a Holy Life

FAITH FOCUS

What is the sacrament of Reconciliation?

WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR

The crucifix reminds us that Jesus' dying on the cross shows his love for his Father and for us. We see the crucifix in our church. We also see the crucifix in the reconciliation room. The crucifix reminds us of the way that Jesus lived the Great Commandment.

OBJECTIVE

Explain the role of the sacrament of Reconciliation in living the Great Commandment.

The Great Commandment tells us that we are to love and respect God, ourselves, and all people. We do what the Great Commandment tells us when we live the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments help us to love and respect God. The last seven commandments help us to love and respect ourselves and others.

God gives every person the gift of a conscience to help us know the commandments. Our conscience helps us to know what is right and what is wrong. It helps us to know what God wants us to do and not to do.

God also gives every person the gift of a free will. This means that we can choose to live or not to live the commandments. When we live God's commandments, we live a holy life. We show that we belong to God. We are children of God.



16 We Follow Jesus

Teach

Connect

Recall the children's responses to the question on page 15 of their books. Then invite the children to open their books to pages 16 and 17 and talk about what they see in the photographs. Present the first paragraph on page 16.

Discover

- Print the words *conscience*, *free will*, and *sin* on the board or on newsprint. Read the words aloud. Present the second and third paragraphs on page 16.
- Read aloud the "Faith Focus" question and present the text on page 17. Help the children discover the connection between living a holy life and the sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Emphasize the difference between a sin, a mistake, and an accident.

Reflect

Discuss with the children what it means to follow their conscience and choose to live the commandments.

Apply

Integrate

- Invite responses to the question on page 17. Focus on the meaning of the word *reconciliation* and help the children understand that in this sacrament we are not only forgiven our sins but also receive the grace to grow as children of God and live holy lives.
- Explain that when we keep the Great Commandment, we are keeping the Ten Commandments as well. Have the children review the Ten Commandments on pages 65–67.
- Present "What We See and Hear." Explain that Jesus lived the Great Commandment.
- The additional activity "Conscience," found on page 50 of this guide, can also be used.

At Home

Point out the "Together as a Family" activity. Encourage the children to ask their families to do the activity with them this week.

Jesus gave us the sacraments. The sacraments make us sharers in God's own life. We receive the grace to grow as children of God and live a holy life.

Penance is one of the sacraments. This sacrament is also called by other names. It is called the sacrament of Reconciliation. We can celebrate this sacrament together with other members of our church family and the priest. Or we can celebrate it individually with the priest.

We celebrate this sacrament for the first time before we receive First Communion. In this sacrament we are forgiven the sins that we commit after we are baptized. We sin when we freely choose to do what we know is against what God wants us to do. We also sin when we choose not to do something we know God wants us to do. Every sin hurts our friendship with God and with other people.



TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

Share responses to the question on this page. This week choose ways that your family members can better live the Great Commandment. For example: If family members hurt one another, show how much you truly care for one another. Talk about what happened and reconcile with one another.

Why do we celebrate Reconciliation?

We Follow Jesus 17

CONSIDER THIS . . .

Forming a Good Conscience

A well-formed conscience helps us decide correctly whether a choice is in accordance with God's Law or against it. But a well-formed conscience does not just happen. It needs to be developed. Here are a few things that can be done to develop a good, or well-formed, conscience: (1) Read and listen to God's word, the Scriptures. (2) Examine the choices Jesus made. (3) Study the teachings of the Church and learn from the example of the saints. (4) Ask the Holy Spirit for understanding, courage, and wisdom. (5) Take part in the celebration of the Eucharist and receive Holy Communion regularly. (6) Celebrate Reconciliation regularly. (7) Seek the advice of a wise spiritual director, or companion. Fostering the development of these habits in young people in age-appropriate ways is the responsibility of parents, pastors, and catechists.

What Difference Does This Make in My Life?

Jesus gave us the sacrament of Reconciliation. When we celebrate this sacrament, we are made friends again with God and with one another. We receive the grace to live the Great Commandment.

MY FAITH CHOICE

Talk with someone about one thing that you will do this week to live the Great Commandment.



Name someone who is living the Great Commandment.

Tell what the person is doing that makes a difference.

Tell how you can live the Great Commandment.

Tell how that will help you make a difference.

18 We Follow Jesus

Connect

Summarize

Recall with the children the two parts of the Great Commandment: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; love others as you love yourself. Emphasize that as followers of Jesus we are called to live the Great Commandment.

Respond

Reflect

Share with the children examples of ordinary people who serve the community, for example, firefighters, teachers, crossing guards, and so on. Point out how the Holy Spirit helps people live the Great Commandment through their daily work.

Discover

- Present the opening paragraph on page 18 to the children.

- Invite the children to think about ways they might live the Great Commandment. Have the children complete the activity. When they have finished, invite volunteers to share their answers with the whole group.

Choose

- Read aloud the faith choice activity.
- Expand the faith choice activity by discussing with the children something that they can do as a class to live the Great Commandment.
- Have the children turn to the back of their books and punch out the Scripture card "The Great Commandment." Or you may wish to give the cards to the children as part of the "Sending Forth Ritual." Encourage them to share their cards with their families.

At Home

Invite the children to share the "Together as a Family" page with their families.

Sending Forth Ritual

Bless the children and send them forth in peace. A more extended "Sending Forth Ritual" is found on page 50 of this guide.



Remembering Together

In this chapter your child learned about the Great Commandment. The Great Commandment teaches that we are to live a holy life. We are to love God with our whole heart and soul, and we are to love others as we love ourselves (see Matthew 22:34-40). In the sacrament of Reconciliation we receive God's forgiveness for our choosing not to live the Great Commandment. Talk with your child about living the Great Commandment. Use these or similar questions:

- How does our family help one another live the Great Commandment?
- Who are models for living the Great Commandment?
- How do we show we are sorry when we do not live the Great Commandment?
- How does our conscience help us to live the Great Commandment?



Sharing Together

Choose one of these activities to do together or design a similar activity of your own:

- Watch a favorite TV show together. Afterward discuss how the people in the show are living the Great Commandment.
- Have each family member write on an index card how your family can live the Great Commandment. Choose one thing that you will do together.

- Talk about ways your family can resolve to settle conflicts peacefully.

Visit the RCL sacraments web site by following the link titled "Sacraments" at www.faithfirst.com.

Praying Together

Pray this or a similar prayer at family meals or at other family prayer times this week:

God, our loving Father,
you gave us the Great Commandment.
Send us the Holy Spirit
to help us live the Great Commandment every day.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Getting Ready Together

This is an appropriate time to briefly review the parts of the rites of Reconciliation with your child. Go through the rite of Reconciliation that your son or daughter will celebrate. "The Individual Rite for Reconciliation" and "The Communal Rite for Reconciliation" are found on pages 52-63 of this book.

We Follow Jesus 19

CONSIDER THIS...

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning projects can model living the Great Commandment. Children can show their love for God by acknowledging that their own talents and the talents of other children in the group are gifts from God (love of God). They can also express their love for self by recognizing their talents, and their love for others by respectfully inviting others to share their talents by working with one another to complete the project. Implement this or another cooperative learning project: Invite the children to create a banner or mural that depicts people of all ages living the Great Commandment. Distribute poster paper or butcher paper and markers, crayons, and paints. Have the children work in small groups. Encourage a respectful sharing of ideas as the children work together. Display the banner or mural as a visual reminder of ways people can live holy lives by living the Great Commandment.

Additional Activities



The Shema

Many Jewish families today write the words of the Shema on a scroll and place it on the right doorpost of their home as a reminder of their love for God. Invite the children to write the words—"Hear, People of God, the Lord our God, the Lord is One"—on a piece of paper, roll it like a scroll, and put it on a doorpost of their home to remind them of their love for God and others.



The Great Commandment

Have the children work in groups of three or four to create skits that show how they can live the Great Commandment either at home or in school. You might assign each group the first or second part of the Great Commandment. Allow time for each group to perform its skit.



Loving Hearts

Provide the children with drawing paper, markers or crayons, scissors, and other materials that they can use for decorating. Have the children draw a heart, write their name in the center of the heart, decorate it, and cut it out. When all have finished making their hearts, collect the hearts, and put them face down on a table. Invite the children to come to the table, one at a time, and choose a heart. Encourage them to do something this week to share an act of kindness with the person whose heart they have chosen. By doing this the children will be practicing their living the Great Commandment.



Conscience

Many children are familiar with the classic tale and film *Pinocchio*. Invite the children to talk about Jiminy Cricket to help deepen their understanding of conscience. Teach the children the refrain to the song Jiminy Cricket sang, "And always let your conscience be your guide," to help them remember the importance of listening to and following their conscience to guide them in making good decisions. Be sure to emphasize the importance and responsibility of forming a good conscience. (See "Forming a Good Conscience" on page 47 of this guide.) If time allows, you may even want to view the video *Pinocchio* or that portion of the video where Jiminy Cricket sings about conscience.

Sending Forth Ritual

Play the recording of the instrumental version of an appropriate hymn from RCL's Reconciliation music CD. Then invite the children to gather in the prayer area. Once the children are settled, begin the ritual.

- ALL:** In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- LEADER:** May the Lord guide your hearts
in the way of his love
and fill you with Christlike patience.
- ALL:** Amen.
- LEADER:** Go in peace.
- ALL:** Thanks be to God.