



BIBLE SUNDAY 2014: ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO ENGAGE WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Many parishes offer a Children's Liturgy of the Word as part of weekly worship. There are varied and excellent resources available for supporting this ministry. Catholic Bible Sunday can also provide a great opportunity to encourage all parents to make a habit of sharing the Scriptures with their children. Here are some ideas and principles that you might find useful:

1. Make time to share the Scriptures

Scripture *can* become part of a regular conversation between you and your child. But it's crucial to allow for opportunities. Look for touch-points during the day or week. For most children, you can try to include the Bible as a bedtime story and for older ones who read personally at bedtime, consider buying them a children's version of the Bible appropriate to their age.

Talk about the Bible stories at important feast times (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension, Lent etc.). Pick up on the Bible stories that children are hearing at school through Assembly time or in their R.E. classes. All of this helps to keep Scripture alive as a topic of conversation and reflection in a family.

2. Pick up on symbols

Having symbols, pictures and reminders around your home works well to remind of Bible stories. A simple crucifix, statue or image can provide a topic of conversation. If you decorate your house for Christmas, Easter or other times, include religious symbols as part of your tradition (e.g. Christmas Tree decorations or an Easter Garden).

Meanwhile, don't be afraid of symbols which are not explicitly 'religious' prompting Bible stories too (e.g. filling up a bath with water, serving bread, planting flowers etc.). You can always use the line, 'that reminds me of a story...'

3. Small is beautiful

Particularly for younger children, don't be afraid of retelling Bible stories very simply. This may mean missing some of the detail, but will introduce them to the basic elements. From here, you can paint additional 'colours' of detail and character upon retelling. Initially, though, think in 'headlines' rather than in paragraphs.

4. Look for visually stimulating materials

Children are growing up in an image-saturated world. The stories they read normally are highly visual in their presentation. Most children are used to stories which illustrate each section with a picture, rather than just one picture for a whole story, so keep an eye out for these. However, most children's Bibles tend to have one or two pictures per story. In this instance, try talking about the image as a starting point to re-tell the story.

5. Find stories with elements children can relate to

Children should grow into discovering every aspect of the Bible's content. A Children's Liturgy of the Word will help introduce them to many stories over the course of the years. But there are some elements which will prove very stretching for younger children. For these, why not start with stories about children or young people: Jesus lost in the Temple, the Feeding of the 5,000, David and Goliath, Jeremiah's call and the Annunciation. Or begin with animals – Noah and the Flood, Daniel in the Lion's Den, Jonah and the Great Fish, the Bethlehem Stable and the Good Shepherd.

Many older children love to discover stories about adventure, daring and danger – the Book of Judges is full of this! You can also find interesting re-written Bible stories for older children which focus on the more adventurous stories in the vein of 'Horrible Histories'.

Consider too that many Bible stories are focused on men (for lots of different reasons). It can be good for all children to read those stories focused on women too – try the books of Ruth, Esther, Judith; or Miriam (in Exodus) and Mary (through the Gospels).

6. Choose an understandable translation of the Bible

If you're looking for a Catholic translation of the Bible which is appropriate for younger children, try the Good News Translation – this is particularly written with simpler language and images, and is approved by the Church for use with children. Older children can begin to discover more accurate translations (such as the Jerusalem and New Jerusalem Bibles and the New Revised Standard Version) as they grow more confident with reading.

Format is also important. For younger children, find short stories with lots of images; for older children, there are many 'youth Bibles' and special re-tellings which have been adapted with children in mind. Catholic publishers and wider Christian publishers will stock many of these and feature them online.

7. Grow in your own knowledge!

Finally, of course it really does help if we have some basic familiarity with Bible stories ourselves before we share them with children. Retelling the stories with children is an excellent way of growing in our own understanding and confidence. And don't worry if your child asks a difficult question – this is something worth celebrating because it means they're engaging with the story! You can always say you're not sure of the answer, but you will try to find out together.

If you would like to grow in your familiarity with the Bible, the Catholic Bishops' Conference Scripture Working Group has many suggestions online of resources and websites to help you, available at www.thewordofthelord.co.uk

For additional resources in support of Catholic Bible Sunday please see: www.thewordofthelord.co.uk