



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

BEADS OF DISCIPLESHIP: LITURGICAL ROSARY

The sacred seasons of the liturgical year invite us to remember and to celebrate salvation history, the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the presence of the promised Holy Spirit. Attentiveness to the Word of God, particularly the Gospel, and assimilation of the life-giving messages that it suggests, shape the soul ever more nearly into the likeness of Jesus. Imitation of Jesus leads to cultivating a personal prayer life, practicing ready obedience to the will of God, being driven by zeal for God's kingdom, offering acceptance of others, initiating forgiveness and healing, responding to human need, and placing one's self at the service of God and humankind.

In short, integration of the Gospel produces disciples of Jesus.

Parents and catechists facilitate discipleship by teaching children how to "break open" the Gospel; how to observe the Gospel figures, interact or dialogue with them, imagine themselves as one of the figures, or to ask Jesus what lesson he wants to teach them. Breaking open the Gospel helps children to meet Jesus, to observe his personality, his attitude, his approach to human persons, his way of responding in situations of joy, sorrow, support, or challenge, and to recognize how the Gospel applies to their daily lives.

The Rosary as a Christ-Centered Prayer

This article focuses on the practice of (1) determining life lessons from the Gospel, (2) converting them into Hail Mary beads, and eventually (3) combining a bead for each Sunday Gospel to create a rosary that reviews the liturgical year. Through contemplation, the rosary becomes a Christ-centered prayer that echoes the liturgy. In both prayer forms, Jesus is the intersection point, the source of transformation and the goal of discipleship.

"A Jesus Message"

Multiple messages are present in each Gospel story. Most often, because listeners bring to the liturgy the context of their current life experience, each hearer connects with a particular message that might differ from the next person in the pew. For example, consider the Gospel of the mustard seed (Luke 17:5-10), a story that focuses on faith and faithful servants. Tell the children that they will be asked to give one "Jesus Message" after they listen to the story. **A "Jesus Message" is a simple sentence that begins with the name of Jesus and states a message that emerged in the Gospel story.** The sentence may use the words of the Gospel text or may be composed of the child's words. A child might say, "Jesus used the mustard seed to show how powerful faith is" or "Jesus claimed that a little faith goes a long way." Another student might focus on the servant and report, "Jesus advised us to be generous with our service." Yet another might share: "Jesus said that faithful servants do more than they are obliged to do," or "Jesus suggested that doing our duty is a minimum expectation," or "Jesus said that when we have done all that we have been commanded, we should say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done only what we were obliged to do.'"

Initially children will need their parent or catechist to isolate specific character traits that Jesus is teaching in the Gospel, but they will quickly catch the freedom to express a Gospel message into a life lesson that can shape them into disciples if they practice it.

Consider the following examples of Christ-like character development and use them to prime the pump.

- John's Gospel suggests that Jesus wants believers to give second chances as he did for Peter (John 21:15-17).
- In the story of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19), Jesus taught us the value of saying "thank you."
- The story of the paralyzed man (Luke 5:17-26) might suggest that Jesus asks us, like the Scribes and Pharisees, why we hold onto life-blocking thoughts.
- When meditating on the story of the son of the widow of Naim (Luke 7:11-17), a child might conclude that Jesus desires us to help others without being asked.
- John 4:1-30 might be that Jesus is happy when we tell the truth like the woman at the well did.
- Matthew suggests that Jesus commanded us not to judge other people (Matthew 7:1).
- Jesus taught us to treat other people the way that we want to be treated (Matthew 7:12.)
- Jesus he reminded us to depend on God's providence to take care of us rather than worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6: 26-34).
- Jesus gave us an example to love our enemies and to pray for people who hurt us (Mat. 5:43-48) and he advised us to keep our good deeds secret instead of bragging or showing off.

The Name of Jesus

"Jesus Messages" from Gospel stories can be transferred into Hail Mary beads to form scriptural meditations that aid contemplation and imitation of Jesus. In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, researchers suggested a method of incorporating "**who clauses**" that highlight the person and teachings of Jesus. The commission reminded us that the first part of the Hail Mary originated with Gabriel and Elizabeth: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus." The traditional second part of the Hail Mary, "Holy Mary, Mother of God..." emerged much later in church history. Consequently, the researchers suggested that a purely scriptural Hail Mary bead would be created by concluding the first part of the prayer with a "who" clause that reveals something of Jesus. This is in keeping with Mary's purpose for the rosary- to form Christ within souls. (A variety of rosaries that incorporate this contemporary style are available in *Mary's Beads of Transformation*, Liguori Publications, 2003).

To create a meditation bead **use the "Jesus Message" from a Gospel story as a "who clause."** To the first part of the Hail Mary, **insert the relative pronoun "who" between the name of Jesus and the words of the "Jesus Message."** For instance:

"Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus, **who used the mustard seed to show how powerful faith is.**"

"Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus **who claimed that a little faith goes a long way.**"

- Transfer ten "Jesus Messages" into beads and create a decade of the rosary. Accumulate one bead for each Sunday throughout the year and create a liturgical rosary.
- If interest exists for a family project or class project, keep paper circles on hand to record each "Jesus Message" bead. Then on a project tent, poster board, wall or bulletin board background, build a liturgical rosary one bead at a time.

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Dr. Patricia McCormack, IHM, a former Catholic schoolteacher and catechist, is a formation education consultant, an author of several books as well as the **Parent Partnership Handbook** feature of *Today's Catholic Teacher*, and director of IHM Formative Support for Parents and Teachers, Arlington, VA. She speaks and writes frequently on topics of child formation.