

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the OCIA
Fifth Sunday of Lent • Year C • April 6, 2025

Catechist Preparation

Scripture

FIRST READING—ISAIAH 43:16-21

This passage is taken from the section of the Book of Isaiah described as the Book of Consolation (chapters 40–55), written as encouragement to the Israelites exiled in Babylon. It employs imagery from the Exodus out of Egypt and the creation story in Genesis to exhort the people to trust that God will not hold their sins against them but will rescue them.

SECOND READING—PHILIPPIANS 3:8-14

Paul describes himself as “forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead” (verse 13), which is exactly what Isaiah urges the ancient Israelites to do. Paul also writes about his former life before his conversion, describing it as “so much rubbish” (verse 8), or *skybala* in the original Greek, meaning the “excrement,” the scrapings and garbage left over from a feast, which is thrown out into the street and which dogs pick over.

GOSPEL—JOHN 8:1-11

The elders who bring the adulterous woman to Jesus symbolize the harshness of the Mosaic Law. Without condoning her sinfulness, Jesus confronts the elders, turns them away, and restores the woman’s sense of self-worth. She departs from Jesus reconciled to God, to her community, and to herself.

Church Teaching

We are fooling ourselves if we do not acknowledge that we are caught in sinfulness. Jesus’ command to go and sin no more is addressed to us. With Saint Paul, we look to the past only long enough to describe our former ways as rubbish, and we strain forward in Christ, accepting that we have been reconciled to God and one another.

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 433, 1440–1449

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 233–247

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 119, 296–310

Dismissal Session

(Approximately 20 minutes)

Have the space set with chairs in a circle. On a small table, place a purple cloth, a candle, a dish with sand, and a crucifix. When all are seated, light the candle and sit in quiet for a few minutes.

Discover

Invite the group to consider the different people from the Gospel. Use these or similar questions for reflection:

The Elders

What were they hoping would happen?

Why did they bring the woman to Jesus?

The Woman

What do you think she was feeling? Expecting?

What do you think would have been her response to Jesus?

Jesus

What do you think he thought about the elders?

What do you think he was writing on the ground?

Deepen

1. Ask the following questions, and invite the participants to reflect on them quietly before sharing their responses with one or two other people:
What is message of today's Gospel?
Who would be challenged by the message and in what way?
Who would be consoled by the message and in what way?
2. Invite volunteers to share their reflections with the large group.

Pray

Use the prayer from the participant page as the closing prayer: *Lord Jesus, we praise you, for you take away the sins of the world. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, restore us to friendship with your heavenly Father, and cleanse us from every stain of sin in the blood that you have shed for us. Raise us to newness of life for the glory of your holy name. Amen.*

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Extended Catechesis Session

(Approximately 45 to 60 minutes)

Readings

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalms 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

Welcome

Begin by welcoming everyone who is present, including sponsors, team members, and spouses who are joining the group. Rephrase one or two questions from the Dismissal Session, and invite the participants to share in small groups. Then ask several volunteers to share their reflections with the large group.

Engage

1. Lead the group in a discussion about the meaning of the following phrases:

- “To wipe the slate clean”
- “The past is the past; today is a new day.”
- “It’s the first day of the rest of your life.”

2. Ask the participants how the above phrases are reflected in today’s readings. Use the following as discussion points:

- Isaiah challenges the Israelites to let go of the past because the Lord is doing something new.
- Paul challenges the Philippians to look to the future; to pursue the call of Christ.
- Jesus shows great mercy to the woman and challenges her to go and sin no more.

Explore

1. Discuss the following points:

- Jesus is the foundational Sacrament of Reconciliation. He ate with sinners and outcasts. He forgives sinners and invites them to change their ways.

- In the Paschal Mystery, Jesus redeems us. He stretches out his hand to us.
- Baptism is our immersion into the Paschal Mystery. In Baptism we are claimed for Christ and incorporated into the Body of Christ.
- In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, we experience the saving grace of Christ. Through this sacrament, we experience the forgiveness of God, and we are reconciled to God and to God’s Church.

2. Highlight key points from **Church Teaching: God’s Reconciling Love**. Also highlight the **Key Terms** and **Voices of Faith** sections.

Apply

1. Encourage the catechumens and candidates to complete these statements:

From the prayer, discussion, and study for this Sunday, I understand the Church’s teaching to be . . .

I am challenged to live the message of this Sunday by . . .

2. Invite the catechumens and candidates and their sponsors to consider participating in a parish reconciliation service during Lent.

Pray

Use the prayer from the participant page as the closing prayer. Invite the participants to stand as they pray: *Lord Jesus, we praise you, for you take away the sins of the world. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, restore us to friendship with your heavenly Father, and cleanse us from every stain of sin in the blood that you have shed for us. Raise us to newness of life for the glory of your holy name. Amen.*