

# INTRODUCTION

Successful catechetics begins with consistent weekly lesson preparation: consulting the teacher guide, reviewing the scheduled lesson, and organizing supporting activities.

But your effectiveness as a catechist also relies on *you*. That is because you are the primary filter through whom children hear and experience each lesson. You are entrusted to turn text sharing into faith sharing. You are ideally positioned to bring the words of the faith into the daily lives of students.

Being fully equipped as a catechist, then, must include both preparing the lesson and preparing *you*.

So, what can you do to bring your best, most spiritually engaged self to class each week? How can you ignite your inner compassion, patience, kindness, humility, and Christian love? How can you increase the likelihood that you will present both a viable text lesson and a visible, human witness to Christ's constant care for each child?

Reflection stands out as a flexible, time-efficient, and easily accessible tool to achieve these goals.

In the pages that follow, you will find twenty brief reflections suitable for all catechists regardless of the lesson, the grade level, or the amount of catechetical experience you have. Each reflection is divided into three parts.

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**READ** the Christ-centered Scripture passage.

**EXPLORE** the passage by using the accompanying prompts to develop its meaning.

**APPLY** the passage in ways that can energize you and enrich the lesson of the day.

By including a ten-minute reflection in your weekly preparation, you create the time, space, and content that can refresh your thinking and awaken your catechetical spirit.

## 1. Calling the Disciples

**READ** ■ As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea. They were fishermen. He said to them, “Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. » **MATTHEW 4:18-20**

### **EXPLORE**

- Why would two men leave everything comfortable and familiar behind and follow a total stranger to do who knows what?
- In what ways might Jesus’ simple, confident approach have impressed Peter and Andrew?
- Is it possible there was a moment when Peter and Andrew thought about just ignoring this odd man and his puzzling invitation?
- Why did Jesus’ intriguing offer to make them “fishers of men” succeed in convincing Peter and Andrew to follow him?

## Pray

*Lord Jesus, help me to prepare a lesson that will encourage the children I teach to seek and find you in their daily lives.*

**APPLY** ■ Why would a room full of children quiet down and listen to you? Perhaps because you used Jesus' three-step approach.

**1. Display confidence.** Build self-confidence through solid preparation. Show that confidence by making eye contact, using a calm tone of voice, and clearly communicating what you plan to teach and how you plan to teach it.

**2. Promote interest.** Enlist student participation and keep them engaged by inserting elements of mystery, uncertainty, challenge, surprise, and humor throughout the lesson.

**3. Connect with children.** Make the lesson more about them, and so more real, by including examples clearly connected to their lives. Broaden lesson appeal by asking children what parts of the lesson gave them something to think about.

Include in your closing prayer an opportunity for children to offer, aloud or silently, their own concerns or needs.

## 2. What to Leave Behind

**READ** ■ “Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts, no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals or walking stick.”

» MATTHEW 10:9-10

## EXPLORE

- When Jesus sent his disciples out to proclaim the good news, what kind of unusual packing advice did he offer them?
- Picture the items that Jesus told the disciples to leave behind.
- Imagine what the disciples would have looked like if they had ignored Jesus' advice and carried along lots of belongings. What impression would their appearance have made on the people they met?
- In what ways might their baggage have distracted the crowds or themselves from their missionary message?

### Pray

*Lead me, Lord, to put aside all distracting thoughts and possessions so that I might better share and model your gospel message. Amen.*

**APPLY** ■ Before you head out to share the gospel with children, consider what items you have tucked in your tote bag that have no connection with the day's lesson. Then leave behind those things that will lighten your load but not your lesson.

Take a good look in the mirror. What you see is what children will see for the next hour. Will your clothes, shoes, coat, jewelry, your overall appearance, and even that tote bag possibly distract students or you? Make the adjustments that will allow everyone to focus more on the message than on the messenger.

Further improve your ability to center on the lesson and the children by leaving behind your "sacks" of leftover moods or concerns from home, work, or relationships.

Decrease distractions before your final group prayer by asking children to close their eyes. Then, slowly and softly, recite the Lord's Prayer together.

Invite the children to list what distracts them when they pray. Have them turn the list face down and try to pray **without** their usual distractions.

### 3. Shrewd and Simple

**READ** ■ “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves.” » **MATTHEW 10:16**

#### **EXPLORE**

- Why would Jesus give his disciples this counsel before sending them out on mission?
- What kinds of people might try to upend the teaching efforts of the disciples? What negative words or actions might they use?
- How do you imagine the disciples employed shrewdness in dealing with their detractors?
- Picture “simple” ways the disciples could use to share their gospel message.

#### **Pray**

*Gift me, Loving Father, with the wit and wisdom to turn potential trouble into valued cooperation for the benefit of all. Amen.*

**APPLY** ■ Not all your students will be waiting to greet you politely with a cheerful smile. Some might choose to distract you and their classmates throughout the lesson. Be prepared to outmaneuver their attempts by adapting Jesus’ suggestion to be both “shrewd” and “simple.”

Be “shrewd” by immediately including everyone in the day’s lesson with a gentle prayer or brief story about the importance of cooperation.

Reduce opportunities for disruption by simplifying directions. Offer a few, easy-to-follow steps instead of many complex ones.

Give “simple” thanks and encouragement to those who find ways to enhance the lesson.

Invite frequently disinterested children to take on “simple” positive roles within the lesson, such as lead interrogator, activity timer, tech expert, or whiteboard illustrator.

Choose from among the least enthusiastic a student to select a cause for which the class can pray at the end of the session.

## 4. Those Who Are Burdened

**READ** ■ “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.” » MATTHEW 11:28

### EXPLORE

- What kinds of daily labor were likely performed by those who gathered to hear Jesus?
- What additional, unique burdens do you think the disciples were carrying?
- Consider your daily “burdens”—job, childcare, finances, housework. When does the added challenge of being a catechist stretch your patience and good humor to the breaking point?
- How do student behaviors reveal their unspoken burdens?

## Pray

*Almighty Father, help me to frame today's lesson with words and actions that intentionally lift up and support all those students who are "heavy burdened."*

**APPLY** ■ Observe students as they arrive. Make a mental note of those who appear to be struggling to get through the day. Plan to respond to them with patience and understanding during the lesson.

Begin class with a simple demonstration of what happens when a burden is shared. Ask one student to carry a large stack of books for a short distance. Then divide the books among three students and note the reduced stress on the first student. Underline the importance of everyone sharing the "burden" as together you develop the day's lesson.

Within the lesson context, direct children to share an exercise, offer a collective prayer, or present a group response to how dividing the burden can lighten everyone's load.

End the class with quiet time: ask everyone to prayerfully consider ways to unburden a friend or family member.

## 5. Words, Words, Words

**READ** ■ "By your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned." » MATTHEW 12:37

### EXPLORE

- Jesus reminds us of the importance and power of our words. What gospel words of Jesus do you remember from your childhood that touched you in a lasting way?

- What quotes from Jesus have you sometimes shared with others to help calm or support them?
- Think about the words you use to open a lesson. Do they welcome and affirm or simply call the class to order?
- Can you remember times when your words inspired or challenged children or when your words caused them to disengage?

### Pray

*Dear Jesus, please lead me to discover and deliver words that both touch the heart and meet the needs of the children I teach. Amen.*

**APPLY** ■ Open the lesson with sentences built on words meant to welcome and include. For example, reluctant students might be put at ease if they heard you say: “Raise your hand if you think today we should work on a *long, dull, difficult, boring* lesson.” When no hands go up, say, “I agree! So instead let’s decide to make the lesson as *interesting and easy to understand* as we can.”

Follow up by printing several key words from the lesson on a whiteboard. Reducing the lesson to a few simple terms immediately makes the lesson more manageable for everyone. Those words can help children to relax and stay focused. Those same words give you a visible outline for both implementing and summarizing the lesson.

Your careful selection of key words can positively affect the lesson experience for you and your students.

Before closing with the Lord’s Prayer, ask children to say that prayer silently and pick out two words they think are most important. Briefly share their responses. Then, with those words in mind, recite the prayer together slowly. Take note of how thinking about individual words can alter and enrich how you pray.