

The Spirit of Mercy

"Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven" (Jn 20:22)

Session Plan

1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit – *use one of the prayers to the Holy Spirit to begin the session.*
2. Introduction and Demonstration – *introduce the theme of and lead them in the demonstration.*
3. Worksheets – *if you have a large group, split off into smaller groups to do the worksheets.*

Worksheet 1: Love God – Love Your Neighbour

The purpose behind this worksheet is to illustrate how Jesus lived a sinless life by loving perfectly. Sin is, at root, a failure to love which causes a damaged relationship. Lead the young people to reflect on the different relationships in their life using the categories provided (our relationship with God, with our family, our friends, those we find difficult and those in need).

Going through the examples A to E from Jesus's life, decide which relationship they fall into. After each one, invite the young people to think of another way in which they could demonstrate love in that relationship in their lives.

Whilst focussing on love, this worksheet will also prove to be an examination of conscience to highlight the areas of sin in our lives that need God's healing.

The correct answers are: C, D, A, E and B.

Worksheet 2: WWJD?

Invite the young people to consider these two scenarios. The purpose of the worksheet is to bring to light what criteria we use for making decisions. Are we swayed more by public opinion, the attitudes of our friends, the values from the media – or by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ?

It is important to point out that Jesus died as He lived: by offering Himself in love. It was this most loving act that sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God.

4. Break
5. Confirmation Service – *gather as a whole group to recap the content of the first half and to describe how the theme of is evident in the Confirmation service.*
6. Saints – *present the two saints to the young people, reminding them that they will be choosing the name of a saint for the Confirmation service.*
7. Prayer Time – *lead the young people in a reflective time of prayer as described.*

Background Reading

Paradise Lost

In the last session, we looked at how everything was in the beginning, how everything was good, how God created us out of love because He is love and how we are invited to live in His life in love. The story of creation has the great image of Adam walking in the cool of the evening with God. God and Man enjoyed each other's company in a world of peace and calm. Why, then, do we not always experience this peace and calm? Why don't we always see God's presence in our life? Why is our world marked by so much suffering, war, conflict and death? Why do I experience some of this pain in my own school, my family and in my own heart? This sad reality is what we call 'sin'. It's a small word, but in the middle of the word is one letter which explains what so much of sin is about: 'I'. Sin is when I try to make myself the centre of everything, when I think only of myself, when I refuse to think of other people's needs, when I refuse to listen to God. I turn away from those who love me and try to grab what I want. It's not a new problem. We see how Adam and Eve fell into the same trap in being tempted by the Devil. The Catechism teaches that the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language but affirms 'a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of Man' (CCC 390).

The Fall

The Devil has many names in the Scriptures. The Hebrew name most commonly applied to him is 'Satan' which means the 'opponent', the 'adversary'. He is the one who does not want us to have what God wants to give to us and the one who tries to disrupt our relationships. When Adam and Eve gave in to Satan's temptation in the garden, they experienced many new things that God had never intended for them. First, they felt shame before one another. They could no longer stand before one another naked. They feared what the other was thinking about them and so they covered themselves with fig leaves. Secondly, they became afraid of God. When God called to them in the garden, they fled and hid. Thirdly, they began to experience disharmony in creation. They had to kill animals to live, work the land with the sweat of their brow, experience suffering in childbirth and endure disease and death.

None of this was God's invention but these are things that came into being because of our sin. The Catechism teaches:

'Scripture portrays the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness. They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image ... The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken; visible creation has now become alien



and hostile to Man. Because of Man, creation is now subject 'to its bondage and decay' (Rom 8:21). Finally... death makes its entrance into human history' (CCC 399-400).

Reflecting upon this breakdown of creation, the Church points out that

'when Man looks into his own heart he finds that he is drawn towards what is wrong and sunk in many evils which cannot come from His good Creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as His source, Man has also upset the relationship which should link him to his last end; and at the same time he has broken the right order that should reign within himself as well as between himself and other men and all creatures ... for sin brought man to a lower state, forcing him away from the completeness that is his to attain' (LG 13).

Death does not have the last word!

All of us can relate in some way to the tragic effects of sin. Since the first sin was committed by our earliest ancestor and because sin continues today, we say that we are all affected by 'Original Sin'. In other words, we are all sinners. Maybe we are not axe-murderers but every sin damages us. It damages our relationship with other people and damages our relationship with God. We have to recognise this sad truth in our life and there are some things which seem to go wrong time and time again. Thankfully, this is not the end of the story. Sin does not have the last word and death does not win out. Pope Benedict teaches, 'God did not give up. On the contrary, Man's "No" was the decisive impulse that moved Him to manifest His love in all of its redeeming strength'.

The Good News

There is a beautiful line in John's Gospel which is worth learning: 'God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son so that those who believe in Him may have eternal life' (Jn 3:16). God's Son is given the significant name 'Jesus' which means 'God saves' (Mt 1:21). He saves us from sin, from death and from the Devil. Yes, even when we were sinners, God – Who is all powerful and Who has never ceased to love us – has in His mercy given us His own Son Who took onto his shoulders all of the world's sin and all of our own sin and defeated it by His Cross and Resurrection.

Jesus took on our death so that we may take on His life. We come before Him and we press our wounds against the wounds of Jesus on the Cross. We give Him our sins and He gives us His life. None of us deserves this great gift of mercy but this is God's gift to us. It is the pledge of His love for us. Through Christ, all those damaged relationships with God, with one another and with ourselves can be healed. John Paul II wrote, 'The Good News is Christ who was crucified, died and is risen: through Him is accomplished our full and authentic liberation from evil, sin and death; through Him God bestows "new life" that is divine and eternal' (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 44). Pope Benedict teaches, 'Christ's entire mission is summed up in this: to baptise us in the Holy Spirit, to



free us from the slavery of death and to open Heaven to us, that is, access to the true and full life that will be a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy' (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 12). Again, he reminds us that 'Jesus

was revealed as the One who came to baptise humanity in the Holy Spirit: He came to give to men and women life in abundance (Jn 10:10), eternal life, which brings the human being back to life and heals him entirely, in body and spirit, restoring him to the original plan for which he was created ... The purpose of Christ's existence was precisely to give humanity God's life and His Spirit of Love so that every person might be able to draw from this inexhaustible source of salvation' (Benedict XVI, *Angelus Message and Homily*, 16.01.08).

Claiming Salvation

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and plays a key role in helping to show us where there is sin in our life and gives us the grace to open our hearts, say sorry, receive healing and to begin again with God's strength. We experience this in our baptism when we are washed clean of Original Sin and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation which allows us to access God's mercy every time we fall. These sacraments show us that although salvation has been won for us, the work of salvation is on-going in us and it is through Him that this salvation becomes our salvation.

Key Points

- The harmony of God's beautiful creation was disrupted by Original Sin, a fault line which now runs through all humanity, affecting us all (CCCC 73-78).
- Sin disrupted our relationship with God, with one another, with ourselves, and with creation.
- God was not prepared to consign his creation to loss; He intervenes with His mercy, unfolding His salvation (CCCC 79-81).

Confirmation Service

In the Confirmation service – in fact, in every service in Church – we hear readings from the Bible. But this is different to when we read the Bible at other times. When we hear the Word of God in Church it is Jesus Christ speaking to us directly. Throughout history, God has never stopped speaking to His people. Even when we sinned and separated ourselves from Him, He always reached out to us through prophets and saints, holy men and women.



We hear in the Scriptures the story of the God Who never gives up on us. His mercy impelled Him to speak to His children. In the Gospel reading, which will be proclaimed either by a priest or a deacon, we will hear about Jesus Christ, Who came to heal our sins and unite us back to our Heavenly Father through the power of His Spirit of mercy.

Demonstration

Just not quite right ...

What to do

Split the group into teams of no more than four. Give each team a box of corn flakes, some milk, a bowl and a fork. The teams have to compete with one another to see who can finish their bowl of cereal first – including the milk!

Explanation

It is both difficult and strange to eat cereal with a fork. It is possible but something tells you that it's not quite right. It is not normal to eat cereal in this way. The same is true for human life. We may not be axe murderers but there is something in us that does not like it when we see injustice, violence, greed, selfishness and nastiness in the world and in our relationships. When we see these things we sense that something is 'not quite right'. That something is called sin.

Sin does not feel right in the world because it separates us from God, from each and from our real selves (made in the image of God). But God knows sin does not feel right in us, so He sent His only Son, Jesus, to come and deal with it for us.

Love God – Love Your Neighbour

When we sin we put ourselves first. We don't love God and love our neighbour. In other words, it damages our relationships. Jesus is the most loving person who ever lived. Look at the examples below of how Jesus. Which relationship do they fit into? Try to think of your own example of how to love someone in that relationship.

A

On the night before He died, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples. He said that He no longer considered them servants but friends. He also said that you can show no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends. Jesus did just that the very next day.

B

One day Jesus met a man suffering from leprosy who had to live outside the city. He asked Jesus to heal him. "Of course I want to," Jesus said, and healed him. From that point Jesus had to live outside the city because people were so shocked that He touched a leper.

C

Whenever Jesus had been busy serving people He went off to a lonely place and spent time in prayer with His Heavenly Father. He made sure He prayed especially before making a big decision, like choosing His disciples and dying on the cross.

D

When Jesus was a young boy His parents lost Him. They found Him in the Temple speaking with the priests. Afterwards He went home with them and lived under their authority. As the Commandments teach, He honoured His mother and father.

E

As Jesus was suffering on the cross, people came to watch. Some of them insulted Him and mocked Him. For all of them Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing".

	Letter	My Own Example
Loving God		
Loving My Family		
Loving My Friends		
Loving Those I Find Difficult		
Loving Those In Need		

WWJD?

What would Jesus do? Read the scenarios below. For each situation write down how you think Jesus would respond.

Sarah has been bullying Louise, a girl in her class. She didn't mean for it to happen. What started off as a joke got nastier and nastier. All Sarah's friends thought it was funny and Sarah enjoyed their admiration. Today Sarah saw Louise crying in the toilets. She feels really bad, she didn't mean for things to go this far.

WWJD?

All of Jack's friends are going to a party this weekend. Jack's mum has told him he can't go because he is behind with his coursework. He decides to tell his mum that he is going to his friend Ben's house to work on his course when really he is going to go to the party. Jack's mum believes him. He's never lied to her before; she even buys him a treat to reward his efforts.

WWJD?

Prayer Time

You will need:

Examination of Conscience (see separate sheet)
Bowls of water (one for every eight young people)
Hand towels
A display with an icon / crucifix / image of Jesus and some candles
Device for playing music
Song to play during prayer action

Suggested songs:

"Father, I have sinned" by CJM Music

"Come to the water" by John Foley (or a more contemporary version by Matt Maher)

"Coming Back" by Ben Cantelon

1. Invite the group to join you in making the sign of the cross.
2. "Sin is no good. It separates me from God and it stops me from being my true self, which is made in the image of God. Therefore, it's important that we recognise our sins so we can see where we need God to heal us, forgive us and 'make things right again' between us. This is why we have the sacrament of Confession. We confess our sins so that Jesus can heal us of them, restore our relationship with Him and make us our true selves again."
3. Invite the young people to close their eyes or to focus on the image of Jesus.
4. "We are now going to do a short 'examination of conscience', which means we're going to reflect on our lives and recognise where we've not loved as we know we should have."
5. *Prayer action:*
As the music plays, the young people will come up to a bowl of water and write one sin that they would like Jesus's forgiveness for. Once they have done this they return to their seat and thank God for His great mercy.
6. *Closing Prayer:*
Lord,
Help us to recognise the sins in our own lives that separate us from You.
We thank You for Your Spirit of mercy,
because it means we can come to You with our sins and weaknesses,
knowing that You will never turn us away.
You will always welcome us with joy, forgiveness, love and healing.
Spirit of mercy, we thank You.
Amen.

Examination Of Conscience

How are things at school? Do I fight for attention, and put myself first?

Have I followed the crowd, even when I know what they were doing was not good for me?

Have I brought other people down and laughed at people to make myself more popular with others?

Have I been jealous of other people? Do I struggle to want the best for people who, I think, are better off than me?

Am I holding a grudge against someone?

How are things at home? Am I selfish around the house and refuse to offer my help when it is needed? Do I always wait to be asked?

When I have helped, have I always done so graciously, or have I sulked and complained?

Have I been impatient with my brothers and sisters?

How am I with myself? Do I like myself?

Have I tried to hide who I am, when I am around other people?

Have I been pretending to be someone I am not?

How am I with God? Do I make enough time to pray?

Have I stayed quiet about my faith, when I should have spoken up about it?

Have I failed to see God in other people, and in the situations in my life?

Do I look at people in the way God does, or am I judgemental and unforgiving?

Saints

Saint Augustine (354-430)



Saint Augustine lived in the fourth and fifth centuries and was the bishop of Hippo in northern Africa. Before his conversion, St. Augustine says that his life consisted of loose living and worldly ambitions. His mother, Saint Monica, prayed greatly for his conversion. When he finally found God he felt such contentment and peace that wrote “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You”.

The final part of his journey into Catholicism was prompted by Saint Ambrose. He was greatly attracted by his preaching but was slow to become Christian because he was afraid that he wouldn't be able to lead a good life.

Eventually, the moment came when he was talking to a friend, Alypius. While some children were playing nearby, he heard the voice of God inviting him to read from the Bible. The verse he read encouraged him to leave his old life behind and cling to Jesus Christ. He began to cry floods of tears. His heart was filled with relief and all shadows of doubt had been driven away.

Blessed Josephine Bakhita (1869-1947)

Josephine Bakhita was born in Sudan in the middle of the nineteenth century. At the age of nine she was kidnapped by slave traders and treated extremely cruelly. She was bought and sold five times and suffered greatly at the hands of her owners. She bore 144 wounds on her body because of the beatings she received.

It was only while she was owned by an Italian family that she came to know Jesus Christ. Despite all of the 'masters' she had known, He was a different kind of 'Master', a Master who was good and who loved her. More than that, He had suffered and died for her. From then on she no longer depended on her earthly masters for happiness. She rejoiced in her true Master, Who created her, knew her, loved her and would never leave her.

In 1890 she became a Christian and in 1896 she became a religious sister. There she lived her life consecrated to God until she died in 1947. Pope Benedict wrote about her life, saying that she had discovered true hope in Jesus Christ. Not just for a better master but *the* Master. She was consoled by the promise that she would live with her true Master in heaven: “I am definitively loved,” she said, “and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good.”

