

Catechist Formation Session Objectives

Cat 103: Life of Christ

Session 5 – Jesus Enters Jerusalem

Background Material

- Matthew 19-25
- Dr. Ted Sri, 'Mystery of the Kingdom', Chapter 8-9.
- Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, RSVCE, Matthew edition.

Session Goal:

This session will closely examine Jesus' teachings concerning marriage, the end times and the Last Judgment. We will also discuss the story of the Rich Young Man and the moral demands of the Christian life.

Three questions adults might have about this topic. *What life-issues do I need to connect with in the people at my session?*

1. What do Jesus and the Catholic Church teach about/divorce/marriage/and remarriage?
2. When is the world coming to an end?
3. What happens at the Last Judgment?

Essential Points for the Teaching. Add in sub-points as needed. *What points need to be made explicit and cannot be left to chance?*

A. Recap of the Previous Session.

1. Jesus establishes His kingdom through supernatural signs, miracles and healings.
2. St. Peter declares Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, the new King.
3. Although Peter declares Him to be the Christ, Jesus predicts His passion death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

B. Highlights of Matthew 19-25:

Read Matthew 19-1-12

Note where Jesus is, moving from Galilee (north) to Judea and Jerusalem (south), toward His death.

1. The Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus over Moses' teaching on divorce. Jesus teaches that:

Jesus avoids the trap set by the Pharisees. The Pharisees have begun to plot to kill Jesus so they set a trap for Him by asking "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" If Jesus answers 'yes', He can be accused and discredited before the people for taking a too liberal a stance on the Mosaic Law. If Jesus answers 'no', He runs the risk of inflaming Herod, being imprisoned and beheaded like John the Baptist.

Jesus avoids the trap by sidestepping those options and turns the trap back on them, asking "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and ...become one?'" (vs. 4-5). Jesus takes them back to the beginning and restores marriage to its original integrity.

- a. Marriage was designed by God at creation.
- b. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman.
- c. In marriage, God permanently unites the couple, a union that cannot be divided by man.
- d. Divorce was only permitted by Moses because of man's hardness of heart.

Why Moses commanded divorce: Jesus explains to the Pharisees that it was never a command of Moses but rather Moses "allowed you to divorce your wives." This was done "for the hardness of heart" of the people, to regulate a situation that had gotten out of control, namely that some were abandoning and/or killing their wives so they would be free to marry another woman.

- e. Divorce and remarriage, except in the case of an unlawful marriage, is adultery.

Jesus goes on to say if a divorced person remarries, he or she commits adultery and puts himself forward as the new authority that they are to listen to.

With regard to the meaning of “except for unchastity...”:

Refer to a concise view of the conflict in the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible’s essay, “Jesus on Marriage and Divorce,” pp. 51 (Ignatius Press, 2000; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville). See also CCC 2380-2391.

Marriage represents the union between Christ and the Church. (Ref. Eph. 5:31-32 and CCC 1602-1617). Marriage is:

- an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves mankind – CCC 1604
- images God’s covenant with Israel – CCC 1611
- an efficacious sign of Christ’s presence – CCC 1613
- signifies and communicates grace, as the sacrament of the new covenant of Christ and the Church – CCC 1617

Therefore marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the new covenant.

2. In His encounter with the Rich Young Man, Jesus calls him to total renunciation for the Gospel.

Read Matthew 19:16-26.

This is a key passage in John Paul II’s encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*.

- a. The question posed by the Rich Young Man connects the doing of good with obtaining eternal life (v. 16).
- b. Jesus directs the man to a Person, the One who is the source of goodness itself.

Jesus responds by directing the man to the One who is Good, which ironically enough, is Jesus Himself (v. 17).

Morality is first and foremost about a relationship with Christ.

- c. Jesus challenges the man to go beyond keeping the commandments and strive for moral perfection (v. 21).
- d. Moral perfection comes by abandoning that which keeps us from God and by following the Person of Christ (v. 21).

3. In Matthew 20, Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven:

Read Matthew 20:1-16

- a. Belongs to God and is His to share with others as He sees fit.

The vineyard is Israel. The harvest time is The Last Judgment. The employer is God. The first group represents those God reached out to first: Israel, and in particular in this parable, their religious leaders. The later groups represent, in order, the tax collectors and sinners (outcasts among the Jews); the Samaritans (half-Israelites); and finally the Gentiles, who come in as it were at “the eleventh hour”.

The householder/God is just in giving the first workers the wage they had contracted for. His mercy is evident as he gives the others what they need to love on, even though they arrived late on the scene. In the same way, God is just to those who were His from the beginning, and shows great mercy in allowing others to enter into the family later. The kingdom is God’s to give, Jesus says, and we must not be critical of His generosity.

God has not limited the kingdom to Israel, even though she was called first. Anyone who trusts in God’s mercy and forgiveness will be welcomed, even if he comes “at the eleventh hour” like the later workers in the parable: the tax collectors and sinners Jesus associates with, or the thief on the cross, even the Gentiles, who will be coming before long.

Some of those who appear great in this life – those Jewish leaders, for example - may be least in the Kingdom of Heaven, or may not enter at all. In contrast those who pour out their lives for God, will be great in His kingdom.

Read Matthew 20:20-28

- b. Is built on service, not power.

Read Matthew 20:29-34

- c. Is exercised through the pity and compassion of Jesus.

Define ‘pity’.

Read Matthew 21:1-11.

4. At the beginning of Holy Week, Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem as the new King and Son of David. Jesus:

Read Zechariah 9:9-10, 1 Kings 1:32-46 and 2Kings 9:13 to better understand the significance of the way Jesus enters Jerusalem.

The prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, who has arrived in the person of Jesus, are being fulfilled. Zechariah 9:9 is the source of the verse Matthew quotes in verse 21:5. In it, Zechariah portrays the coming of the messiah riding humbly on an ass and yet triumphant and victorious; he shall command peace to the nations and have universal dominion.

- a. Is hailed as the messianic Son of David.
- b. Drives out all those engaged in selling and buying in the Temple area.

Read Matthew 21:12-17.

- c. Heals the blind and lame in the Temple area.
- d. Raises the indignation of the chief priests and scribes, setting off the dramatic tension between Him and the religious leaders that would lead to His execution.

This is the content and drama of Matthew 21:23 to 23:38

Read Matthew 24:1-35

5. In the discourse on the Mt. of Olives (Olivet Discourse) of Matthew 24-25, Jesus announces:

Note that Jesus has left the temple area and is conversing with His disciples.

- a. The destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem and end of the Old Covenant.

Destruction of the Temple: Jesus condemns the Temple because the house of God has “become forsaken and desolate” (Mt. 23:38). It houses wicked leaders and has become a center for sin and rebellion. The Temple also represents the Old Covenant, in which God’s presence was focused in an earthly place. God is now present in His Son and will be present, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, in all of His people – the Church, which is the spiritual temple build from “living stones,” the Christian believers

Signs of the End of the Age: There will be many signs of the coming of Jesus. False messiahs and prophets will deceive many people. There will be wars, famines and earthquakes and the disciples will be

persecuted and killed. There will be a great increase of wickedness and distress. The sun and moon will be darkened and stars will fall from the sky. The Temple will be desecrated. Finally, the sign of the “Son of Man” will be seen in the sky and God will gather His elect.

The above imagery should be interpreted as Jesus foretelling the end of the age of the Old Covenant. Note: Jesus’ prophecy, like many biblical prophecies, points not just to one or more events in history but also to events at the end of time. References in Matt. 24 to Jesus’ earthly “coming” to Jerusalem and His prediction of the destruction of the Temple are inextricably woven together with references to the future coming of the Son of Man at the end of the age and the Last Judgment. At that time, this world will be destroyed and replaced by the eternal dwelling place of God’s heavenly kingdom. The first, literal/historical meaning in turn points to a future, more perfect fulfillment which is the anagogical sense of the passage.

- b. The Second Coming of the Son of Man.
- c. The importance of being faithfully prepared.

Note Jesus’ call to be watchful and faithful in Matthew 24:26-51. Jesus said to keep watch and be ready so as to be found doing what God gave you to do (Reference also Luke 21:34).

Also, Jesus did not mean for His followers to try to predict exactly when the end will happen. In fact He said that He will come when He is not expected. Only the Father (not even the angels or the Son!) knows the time.

Note the parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25:1-30. Explain the parable: The wise bridesmaids anticipate a delay and stock up on oil for their lamps. The foolish ones came unprepared and did not have oil for the journey. When they finally arrived at the banquet they were not recognized at the door and were not allowed to enter. This tells us that we must be watchful in anticipation of Jesus’ return, which will be unexpected, and we must prepare for it. Note that the general preparedness is required, not one that takes us away from daily activity or even from sleeping. All were asleep in the parable, yet some still were ready.

- d. The criteria for the Last Judgment of all people.

The Last Judgment: Matthew 25:31-46

Separating the sheep from the goats. The King will separate the sheep from the goats on the basis of their care for those in need, and therefore their care for Christ in those others. The “sheep” are destined for eternal life, which is the kingdom prepared for them since the creation of the world; and the “goats” are headed to punishment in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Connect when Jesus said, “I was hungry” (or thirsty, or sick, etc.) with the poor and needy of the world. The people at the time did not see Christ in the poor, the strangers, the imprisoned, etc., so they did not reach out to them.

This parable teaches us how we need to live while we wait for Jesus’ return. We should be busy taking care of others in need, seeing Christ in them and treating them accordingly.

6. In summary, we read in Matthew 19-25:
 - a. Jesus restores marriage to God’s original plan in Creation.
 - b. Jesus calls His disciples to moral perfection and holiness.
 - c. Jesus announces the establishment of the New Covenant, seen in His Olivet Discourse.

Questions for Discussion.

- A. Divide the participants into small groups. Based on the evidence in the text, have them answer the following questions:
 1. Who is Jesus?
 2. What is Jesus’ Kingdom?
- B. Have them report their discussion to the large group. Some answers could include the following
 1. Who is Jesus? – Evidence from the text
 - a. Has the authority to teach about the nature and purpose of marriage.
 - b. The source of the moral life.
 - c. Concerned with the heart, even if that gets Him in conflict with the religious establishment.
 - d. Has a power over the universe that has not been fully revealed.
 - e. The One who will judge all nations.
 2. What is Jesus’ Kingdom? – Evidence from the Text

- a. Is exclusively the domain of God.
- b. Concerned with moral perfection and holiness.
- c. Will be fulfilled in the future.

Closing Prayer

After gathering everyone for prayer, quietly proclaim or have them meditate on the following themselves:

Matthew 24:36-42.

36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 For as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 In (those) days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. 39 They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be (also) at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

Have each participant silently reflect the need to avoid complacency in the spiritual life. Ask them to ask Jesus for the grace to be able to 'stay awake' in the spiritual life, not putting on that back-burner what needs to be the priority. End with some time for intercessions and the Hail Mary.