

I. RELICS

LESSON PLANS FOR THE CONSECRATION

OBJECTIVE:

To teach children that saintliness is marked by the presence of God's grace in a human being; that this grace is physically present in the body, even after death; that we honor the relics of a Saint because they are truly a part of the Saint and because God's grace continues to dwell within them.

To teach the stories of the three Holy Martyrs whose relics are or will be sealed into our altar during the Service of the Consecration.

You'll also need to learn the life stories of these three specific martyrs.

NOTES FOR VARYING AGE & GRADE LEVELS:

The younger the age level, the more important the tactile demonstration is; for the youngest children, this image will likely be the primary means of understanding the holiness of relics, while for the oldest ages, the demonstration is mostly fun and delicious.

Older students can be taught with more words - with younger children, a skeleton sketch of the conversation will happen, but with older children, the conversation can unfold in a more detailed and complex way.

THE PLAN

I. OPENING CONVERSATION:

Instructor should pose questions, and let students answer. Receive their answers and contemplate them aloud, discussing all of the ideas. If the kids are going in the wrong direction, after several ideas it's ok to say, "I was thinking of another idea..." to re-direct.

How does a person become a Saint? Are they just born holy?

Over time, they put themselves in a place to be transformed by God's grace (via a life of prayer, of love for God, of asceticism and participation in the sacraments, etc.)

We say that people are filled with grace; sometimes we can see it in their eyes! Have you ever seen a person whose eyes were filled with light or with love?

We pray that the Holy Spirit will 'abide in us'. Is that literal and real? (Yes, that's literal. We receive Jesus Christ in Holy Communion (literally) and we pray that He will live in our hearts. God's grace is not just figurative: it actually resides inside our bodies. Just as we are both spiritual and physical, God's grace is also intangible but also quite real and has a real presence in our bodies.)

God's grace is literally present in the bodies of saintly humans -- and in you!

2. HANDS-ON DEMONSTRATION:

Materials: pound cake or waffles with syrup (pancake syrup flavored strawberry or maple, etc. Color is a plus, though maple is a big favorite). Any wonderful food product that would taste good with syrup soaked into it will work. Bring plates & napkins too.

Demonstration: Show the kids the 'body' of the cake or waffle. Pour syrup over the top, and let it soak in. Cut open the cake or waffle, and examine the parts that are dry vs. those soaked in syrup.

Discussion: The syrup is like the grace of God; it flows over us and penetrates our souls and bodies. The cake/waffle is not the same after it has been penetrated by the syrup: like God's grace, it permanently transforms us. A Saint's body is soaked in God's grace, and the Holy Relics are different from plain old bodies -- the grace remains.

Taste the syrupy cake/waffle. It's sweet and delicious -- like the spiritual fragrance of relics!

3. DEEPER CONVERSATION:

Relics contain the grace of God.

The body is not some awful prison in which the soul is contained. The body is good, and is truly a part of who a person is: you are your soul and your body.

When someone dies, their body is still part of them, left behind. We treat bodies with respect and love. When the body also contains the grace of God, we venerate it.

Bodies should smell terrible as they decay, but some Saints' relics will exude a sweet-smelling fragrance, and sometimes they will even exude myrrh (a sweet-smelling oil.) God is letting us know that He loves His Saints and that He is with us and they are with us.

In the early years of Christianity (and of course, still through the present day), many Christians were persecuted and killed for their faith in Christ. Forced to worship in secret, they met in catacombs, underground burial places, where they celebrated the Eucharist on the graves of the Martyred Saints. When the persecutions ended and the Church was allowed to exist openly, the tradition of celebrating the Eucharist over the graves of Martyrs continued as Holy Relics were placed in the Altar tables of consecrated churches. In this manner, we always remember that the Church is built on the faith and blood of the Holy Martyrs.

Tell the students the stories of the three Holy Martyrs whose relics have been or will be sealed into our altar. We recommend that you paraphrase the biographies -- there is likely not time in class to read the entire thing aloud. Indeed, students often appreciate a dramatic, spontaneous narration.

One final thought, as you discuss their deaths: if a Saint is filled with God's grace, how much more does God run to fill His Martyrs? At the times of their deaths, we often see that these Saints were calm and courageous -- this is surely indicative that God was present with them. He responded to their faith and selflessness by filling them with the peace of the Holy Spirit, giving them the strength to withstand tortures. Because the Martyrs are seen to be filled with grace at the time of their death, their relics are known to surely contain grace.

FINAL POINT: THE RELICS OF THESE MARTYRS ARE or WILL BE SEALED IN OUR ALTAR FOREVER. NOW WE HAVE A SPECIAL CONNECTION TO THEM. THEY WILL PRAY FOR US, AND WE CAN ASK FOR THEIR HELP.