

SYLLABUS and TEACHER'S MANUALS

FOR

LIVING MY RELIGION SERIES

Book 4 : *Living for God*

BY

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THE LEPANTO PRESS

421 S. Lochsa Street

Post Falls, IDAHO 83854

2010

Reprint of the 1952 Edition - No Revisions Made

PRAYERS TO BE SAID BY TEACHERS

An Invocation

Teach me goodness and discipline and knowledge, O Lord: for I have believed Thy commandments (Ps. 118: 66) .

(An indulgence of 300 days).

A Prayer

O glorious Saint Catherine, wise and prudent virgin, thou who didst set the knowledge of Jesus Christ above all other knowledge, obtain for us the grace to remain inviolably attached to the Catholic faith, and to seek in our studies and in our teaching only the extension of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord and of His Holy Church both in ourselves and in the souls of others. Amen.

(An indulgence of 300 days).

The faithful who devote between a quarter and a half-hour to teaching or studying Christian doctrine may gain: An indulgence of 100 days; a plenary indulgence on the usual conditions twice a month if the above practice is done at least twice a month.

Nihil Obstat: John M. A. Fearn, S.T.D.

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: Francis Cardinal Spellman

Archbishop of New York

New York, September 8, 1950

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GENERAL PROCEDURE

I. REMOTE PREPARATION OF THE TEACHER

Realization of the Aim

TO HELP EACH CHILD LIVE HIS RELIGION

Do we see our objective point clearly? Coming straight down to our own room, our own group of boys and girls, our own present duty, are we quite clear as to exactly what we mean by helping each one of them live his religion as a Catholic child of eight, nine, or ten years should?

We know what we mean by living our religion. We are willing to own that anyone who really lives up to all that the Catholic Church believes and teaches is a saint. We have no doubt that his life of grace here will blossom into his life of glory hereafter.

(a) Help, Not Make

In the first place, let us strike out the word "make." It is not in our aim. The Lord Himself never forces the human will. Force is the last and the worst avenue that a teacher may take. We must be both firm and kind. We must respect God's gift of free will even while training that will to complete conformity with the holy will of God. Our aim is to help each child: steadily, earnestly, determinedly, lovingly, prayerfully help each one to live as a good Catholic child should. As to every child in our group attaining sanctity, we know that each one must become a saint somehow, some way, some day, here or in purgatory. If not, he will be lost: "Nothing defiled can enter heaven." We can help each child on his upward path. How far he manages to climb depends on many things, including the use he makes of his own free will. God's grace is never lacking. Cooperation with grace is what spells for each soul eternal success or eternal failure.

(b) Ways and Means

As to ways and means, let us set up a few norms to judge whether or not our boys and girls are living their religion. If they are, well and good; if not, we can plan accordingly. The interior life of the soul lies open to the eye of God alone. The exterior actions are all that we study. In setting up these norms we are

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considering exterior actions. "By the fruit, the tree is known"; if a child ranks well in the following test, we have every reason to hope that his soul is pleasing to God.

We do not have to go far afield to get these norms. They are clearly stated in the Catechism: know, love, and serve God.

(c) The Five-Point Program

Point I. Study

The pupil should study his Catechism, i.e., he should try to know his religion. He cannot practice it intelligently unless he does. He should honestly try to learn, try to understand explanations, try to pay close attention when instructions are given. This effort to know God and God's holy will is distinctly a part of serving God.

Point II. Prayer

1. ORAL PRAYER

The pupil should be taught to pray daily at regular times, e.g., in the morning, in the evening, at meals, before class. These prayers may be short, but they must be said reverently. The prayers usually recommended are: The Sign of the Cross; Morning Offering; Our Father; Hail Mary; the Creed; Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity; Act of Perfect Contrition. If these are scattered through the day, there is more probability of their being said with attention and devotion.

2. MENTAL PRAYER

The main idea behind any class exercise in mental prayer is to help the child to learn how to do it rather than to require him to pray at the moment. A class situation is rarely conducive to mental prayer. Nevertheless, mental prayer may be made during the school day, e.g., a moment or two of silence in which to examine one's conscience before repeating the Act of Contrition. There should be no quizzing as to what was said to God. We should require silence and reverence of attitude, no more.

We should encourage our pupils to make mental prayer at certain times: during visits to the Blessed Sacrament; before and after confession; before receiving Holy Communion, but especially after Holy Communion.

Point III. Devotions

1. OUR LORD UNDER ANY APPROVED TITLE, E.G., THE SACRED HEART.

Try to convince your pupils of the value of even one of the following acts so that they take it up freely and practice it steadily.

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- 1) Aspirations, especially those which are indulgenced.
- 2) Short acts of thanksgiving, love, adoration, etc.
- 3) Short visits known as "tiny holy hours."
- 4) Offering Holy Communion of reparation for the sins which wound the Sacred Heart.
- 5) Asking parents to enthrone the Sacred Heart in the home.
- 6) Thinking often of what Our Lord said and did.
- 7) Trying to let Our Lord be a real influence in their lives.
- 8) Considering Our Lord as their best friend and going into the church to tell Him all about sorrows and joys.

2. THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY UNDER ANY APPROVED TITLE.

The pupils should learn to love our Blessed Lady as their heavenly Mother. They should say some little prayers daily in her honor, and they should wear either the cloth scapular or the scapular medal. The method of reciting the Rosary should be known.

In this connection the teacher is advised to explain to the class the meaning and value of the Family Rosary. Urge the children to explain the Family Rosary to their parents and to try to influence their father or mother to introduce the practice into their home.

3. THE ANGELS

Each child should be taught to know and to love his or her guardian angel. Most children take to this devotion very easily. St. Michael is another well-loved angel friend.

4. THE SAINTS

Each child should be encouraged to have a special devotion to his or her patron saint. The teacher can readily suggest other saints for special devotion; e.g., St. Patrick, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Aloysius, and, of course St. Joseph. Each locality and each nationality have their own favorites in this regard.

Point IV. The Mass.

The obligation to assist at Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation binds under pain of mortal sin. Carelessness with regard to this law opens the door to many evils. There may be a child who is habitually absent from Sunday Mass. Such a case should be placed in the hands of the pastor.

If the pastor has made a rule that all children assist at Mass on all school days, we should enforce the ruling; but we should do it kindly. We should stress the value of the Holy Sacrifice, the fact that Our Lord

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is offering for us the same sacrifice as that of the cross, and the manifold blessings which flow from offering the Holy Sacrifice with the priest every day. This plan is far more effective than stressing the "thou shalt" side of the matter. It is a fact, and a sad one, that some adults seem almost to dislike the Holy Sacrifice. They say, "I had to go every day as a child, rain or shine; I won't go at all now." Behind those words we sense that force was used unwisely; and, quite possibly, that force was accompanied by pietistic nagging.

If the pastor leaves the children free with regard to week-day Mass, we should follow his leading. We should help the children to learn about the Holy Sacrifice in such a way as to revere it. Then they will wish to go every day if they can. Anything and everything which arouses real devotion to Our Lord tends to arouse devotion to the Mass. If this freedom is wisely handled, it is solidly good, even though it may seem less effective. Going to Mass because one really wants to go, begets a habit.

Point V. The Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist.

1. PENANCE

Weekly confession is good because it helps boys and girls to live up to their religion as nothing else can, save the daily, reverent, and intelligent assistance at Mass during which Holy Communion is fervently received. In some parishes, however, weekly confession for all the school children may not be practical; then the pastor makes a ruling which should be followed. It is our duty as teachers to uphold the pastor's ruling wisely and loyally. The responsibility for the administration of the sacraments in the parish is the pastor's.

We should concentrate on helping our pupils to realize the value of frequent and fervent confession. In doing this, we should use the means at hand: careful and accurate instruction, encouragement, and good example. Small children are not likely to commit mortal sin. Their great enemy is deliberate venial sin, especially if that venial sin has become habitual. We should help our pupils make use of the sacrament in such a way as to cleanse their souls from sin and to advance in virtue. Let us stress Penance as a means of grace and, therefore, an aid to growth in holiness.

Sometimes we stress too much the one fact that sins are forgiven in the sacrament of Penance. We need to emphasize that through this sacrament God restores or increases sanctifying grace. Also peace of soul flows out of a good confession. Reconciliation with God and with our neighbor brings joy inside the soul and outside it also. Our sins

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harm us, but Penance heals and renews. If our mind is puzzled or our conscience troubled, the priest instructs us; and his teaching adds greatly to the many good things gained in the sacrament, because his knowledge of our soul makes his words fit our case as other people's words rarely can. Then, too, God bestows grace on the priest to help those who seek aid in the sacrament of Penance. God knows our needs.

2. THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

In urging daily Communion, the teacher will have prudent regard for the physical limitations of young children and due respect for the wishes of their parents. Let the little child understand that mother knows best. Often there are practical reasons that militate against the laudable devotion of daily Communion and, on this account, there should be no risk of conflict between the religious ideal and the good judgment of conscientious parents. Ordinarily there should be no difficulty in promoting Sunday Communion for children in this grade.

Young children are apt to appear rather casual in their reception of Holy Communion. They move rapidly, smile readily and find it hard to control distractions. Spiritually, of course, they are near and very dear to the Heart of Our Lord. Far from manifesting concern for their seeming lack of devotion, we should envy them their holiness. Week by week they will learn much more from our reverent example than from unwarranted scoldings.

Let us remember, too, that a child's thanksgiving after Communion will be just as brief as his usual utterances at home, at play and at school. It isn't the length of prayer that counts nor its form of expression but the goodness of heart that speaks to God in few words or no words at all. Nevertheless, we strive to develop in our children a simple method of adoring, of thanking, of saying "I'm sorry" and of trustful petition for all needs. Our own thanksgiving after Communion will be enhanced if we offer it in union with the child-like thanks of these pure and innocent friends of Christ.

Penance and Holy Eucharist, frequently and fervently received, form a sort of sanctifying spiral: the more fervent the confession, the more fervent the Communion which follows it; and the more fervent the Communion, the more fervent the next confession. The more frequent these fervent receptions of the sacraments, the more swiftly the spiral climbs.

We try our best to help boys and girls to live up to the Five-Point Program; and then we leave the rest to God.

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II. PROXIMATE PREPARATION OF THE TEACHER

1. General Points to Keep in Mind

- a)* Read the matter in the textbook carefully.
- b)* Consult the Manual for additional aid.
- c)* Pray earnestly to God the Holy Ghost for light to know the sacred truths thoroughly and for wisdom to present them to the children in such a way as to do each one the most good.
- d)* Pray earnestly for grace to live your religion, to "live in the faith of the Son of God," every minute of the day, knowing that your example is a far more potent influence than any words which you may say.
- e)* Trust God and teach as well as you can.
- f)* Let nothing trouble or discourage you. Teachers may sow the heavenly seed in rough and stony ground. Often they think that they have failed. They, themselves, seldom reap the harvest. Some glad day Our Lord will let them know how good a thing it was to have labored in His vineyard.

2. General Method of Presenting Textbook Material

- a)* Know the story in the text and tell it.
- b)* Teach any word that may puzzle the child.
- c)* Discuss each illustration as it occurs in the textbook.
- d)* Read the text in class.
- e)* Question in order to be sure the text is understood.
- f)* Memorize the Catechism.
- g)* Have each child keep a project book.
- h)* Keep clearly in mind the fact that this is a lesson in Christian Doctrine—not a mere reading lesson. The main objective is comprehension. While it is desirable that every pupil should read the entire text, it is not essential, especially in the case of a child who has serious difficulty in reading other texts of his age level. Such boys and girls frequently understand what they hear read and discussed in class; comprehension is the main point.

In an average class there will be good, medium, and poor readers. Let the good ones carry the weight of the reading of the text. Call on the slower ones to re-read in answer to thought provoking questions or to tell in their own words the substance of what has been read. If and when necessary, let the slower

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group re-read and discuss the subject matter at the supplementary reading period.

- i) Question in order to see if the boys and girls really understand the matter read. In the day-by-day discussion of the individual text lessons, the Salient Points will be noted; but the teacher should formulate her own questions for this study of the meaning of the text.

The art of questioning is a great asset to every teacher. It is not an art but rather a skill which is acquired by thought and practice. The following hints may prove helpful:

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD QUESTION

- (a) It must have a definite purpose. One has a salient point in mind and questions to get that point drawn by the pupil from the subject matter or from the application of the subject matter to life.
- (b) Its form should help achieve that purpose.

Examples:

Good: (Supposition is that the pupils have read the story)

Who will tell us the story of the Roman Officer? Jerry.

(After he finishes—)

What did the officer say to Our Lord?

Why do you think he said that?

Did you ever hear those words before? When? Where?

Bad: Do you ever say those words? When? Why?

Bad: What did the noble Roman Officer say when he saw Our Lord coming to the officer's house to cure his servant who was paralyzed?

- (c) A good question presents a challenge.

Good: Did you ever see the Roman Officer's words in any other book? Where? Show them to us?

Bad: We can find the words the Roman Officer said in the Missal. Can't we?

- (d) A good question should arouse interest.

Good: Billy, was your father an officer? When? How many men did he command? Were Roman officers like American officers? Was this Roman officer called a captain? What was he called? Why? (Suggest looking up Centurion in the dictionary.)

Bad: Who can define the term "Roman Officer"?