

# Living Like Jesus: Encountering Others in Need

LECTIONARY-BASED CATECHESIS FOR RCIA  
FROM CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA & CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES



Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Relief Services have teamed up to offer a lectionary-based catechetical session for the period of the Catechumenate and Mystagoga. The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults prepares people for full initiation into the Catholic Church through a process of catechetical formation, Christian living in the midst of the community, integration into a life of prayer and worship and living the apostolic life. This session will help initiation leaders form candidates, catechumens and sponsors to understand how living the apostolic life includes reaching out to people on the peripheries of society, as Christ did.

We have highlighted three Sunday Gospel readings from lectionary cycles A, B and C that illustrate how caring for our neighbors who are poor and vulnerable is a part of Christian living. These examples are not intended to be limiting. This session could be adapted for use with other Sundays connected to themes of living as disciples or Catholic social teaching.

We also recommend incorporating an experience of encounter with poor and vulnerable people as a part of the session. Ideally, this experience would include service to your local community. It could also include hearing from a speaker or watching people share their stories through video.

*See the Preparation section below for details.*

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# Recommended Sundays

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We have included in the session guide a brief commentary for the facilitator about each of these readings.

## LECTIONARY A

- Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Matthew 5:1-12a
- Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mathew 22:34-40
- Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe: Matthew 25:31-46

## LECTIONARY B

- Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mark 8:27-35
- Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mark 9:30-37
- Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mark 10: 17-30

## LECTIONARY C

- Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Luke 6:17, 20-26
- Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time: Luke 14:1, 7-14
- Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Luke 16:19-31



The thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time of each year has been designated by Pope Francis as the World Day of the Poor. It is an opportunity for people to reflect on ways we can care for our poor and vulnerable neighbors.



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# Living like Jesus

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## Encountering Others in Need

### SESSION OUTLINE

Meeting time: 2-3 hours  
(depends on length of the encounter experience)

**Gathering** (15 minutes)

**Encounter** (varies)

**Reflection** (30 minutes)

**Catechesis** (30 minutes)

**Sending on Mission** (15 minutes)

### MATERIALS

- Audio-visual equipment and internet access
- Bible opened to the appropriate Gospel reading
- Copies of handout, "Encounter Others in Need at Home and Around the World" for participants

### VIDEOS

- "[Catholic Charities USA. Salt. Leaven. Light](#)" from Catholic Charities USA's YouTube channel
- "[Faith in Action Leads to Results](#)" from CRS' Youtube channel

Optional (review session for possibilities)

- Catholic Charities USA's Youtube Playlist "[Catholic Charities USA Poverty in America](#)"
- CRS' Youtube Playlist:  
Education: "[A Day in the Life of...](#)"



## PREPARATION

- Read through the session individually or as an initiation team and prepare all materials.
- This session includes an experience of encounter. Select and prepare for the experience that will work best for your group. Here are 3 options:

### 1. Participate in off-site community service.

Check with your local Catholic Charities office or another organization serving your local community to see whether they would welcome volunteers or whether you could meet with a staff member to learn more about the organization's work. You can visit [catholiccharitiesusa/network](http://catholiccharitiesusa/network) to find your local agency. Coordinate with participants in advance of the meeting about logistics like timing, attire and transportation. Arrange a meeting place where you can gather to debrief after the service experience. Allow at least an hour after the service experience to reflect together.

### 2. Invite a speaker.

If you aren't able to participate in service together, it can still be powerful to hear someone tell their story of encounter with people living on the margins of society, or to hear from a speaker willing to share his or her personal story of transformation. Check to see if a speaker from your local Catholic Charities ([catholiccharitiesusa/network](http://catholiccharitiesusa/network)) or Catholic Relief Services office (email [globalfellows@crs.org](mailto:globalfellows@crs.org)) would be available.

### 3. Share stories through video.

If you are unable to participate in service or hear a speaker, learn about the stories of beneficiaries of Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services through video. Review these playlists and choose a few videos to share with your group:

- Stories from the United States:  
Catholic Charities USA's YouTube Playlist: "[Catholic Charities USA Poverty in America](#)"
- Stories from Overseas:  
CRS' YouTube Playlist: Education: "[A Day in the Life of ...](#)"

## Gathering (15 minutes)

Gather all participants and provide any instructions for the encounter portion of the session.

### Opening prayer:

#### LECTIO DIVINA WITH THE GOSPEL READING

##### Explain:

Lectio Divina is a practice of meditating with Scripture. It typically includes reading Scripture multiple times and reflecting on it in different ways. In this adapted version of Lectio Divina, you will read and reflect on the Scripture passage twice.

**Begin** with the Sign of the Cross. Invite a person to read the Gospel passage.

After he or she reads, pause for a period of silence and then ask:

- **What word or phrase resonates with you?**

Invite a second reader to read the same passage. After he finishes, pause again, and ask:

- **What does discipleship look like, according to this Gospel passage?**
- **What does this Gospel passage mean for your own life?**

### Overview

##### Explain:

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus shows us that discipleship means reaching out to people who suffer. Pope Francis says,

“The Good News is no mere matter of words:  
it is about leaving ourselves behind  
and encountering others.”

(Urbi et Orbi Message, 2016)

Discipleship—or living out the Good News of Jesus in our daily lives—leads to encounter. Today we will reflect on this through Scripture and by participating in an encounter through **[insert example like participating in service, hearing a speaker, listening to stories on video]**.

- Offer a brief explanation about how this Gospel reading invites us to follow Jesus by caring for people living on the margins of society. Use the reflections provided in the Commentary section that follows.

# Lectionary Cycle A

## COMMENTARY ON GOSPEL READINGS FOR SUGGESTED SUNDAYS

### Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Matthew 5:1–12a

What do you hunger and thirst for? Power? Fame? Status? Riches? Control? Security? These are typical responses to a fundamental question, and they reflect a focus on self, as opposed to others. The world we live in often seems to encourage these responses. But in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to a different set of priorities. He invites us to hunger and thirst for something entirely different: righteousness, meekness and purity of heart, which are manifested in a life lived for others. And living for others should be directed toward those who suffer most, especially all who hunger, thirst and lack the necessities of life; those hoping for love and mercy; those who are mournful and seeking comfort; and those living amid violence but longing for peace.

### Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mathew 22:34–40

What do parents want most for their children? To be successful? To be responsible? To be happy? What God wants most for his sons and daughters is for them to be lovers: of God, of themselves and of their neighbors. This love God wishes for is not necessarily expressed in sentiment, nor is it primarily characterized by good feelings. Instead, it is shared through the choices we make for the good of others, especially our neighbors. And as Jesus stressed constantly, everyone is our neighbor, especially those most in need: immigrants and refugees, those who are sick or disabled, prisoners and those re-entering their communities, victims of violence and abuse, workers seeking dignified employment, and those longing for food for their table and a roof over their head.

### Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe: Matthew 25:31–46

*Note: On the Solemnity of Christ the King, many parishes participate in a national collection for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the anti-poverty program of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

When we encounter a homeless person on a street corner, images of fearful refugees fleeing violence, faces of those incarcerated behind bars or the uninsured seeking treatment in an overcrowded emergency room, what do we see? Somebody else's problem? A danger to avoid? People deserving of their plight? Or do we fail to see them at all, by averting our eyes? Jesus, however, calls them "brothers." And he goes even further, inviting us to see them not just as family, but as himself. So when we encounter the impoverished, the sick, the stranger, or the prisoner; instead of averting our eyes, let us remember that we are looking into the very eyes of the Lord.

# Lectionary Cycle B

COMMENTARY ON GOSPEL READINGS FOR SUGGESTED SUNDAYS

## Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mark 8:27–35

Just who is Jesus, really? It's a question he himself asked his followers and a question many people today grapple with along life's journey. We hope that with grace, time and experience we'll enjoy an increasingly clearer picture of who Jesus is, in his mystery of being fully human and fully divine. But sometimes even those who are close to Jesus misunderstand who Jesus is and what he asks of them. Peter was able to clearly identify Jesus as the Messiah, but rejected the idea of a Messiah who suffers. We can do the very same thing. We can struggle with the notion of a suffering Jesus, especially when experiencing suffering ourselves. And when we do that, we can lose sight of Jesus' invitation to encounter him in the faces of others—the poor, the displaced, the mistreated—who suffer like him.

## Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mark 9:30–37

When we read about Jesus placing his arms around a child for all to see, we tend to think of it as a tender gesture, which it was. But Jesus was intentionally making a radical gesture as well. In his culture, children weren't valued in the same way they are today; they had little or no status in society. The child represents all people who are undervalued, overlooked as unimportant, or perceived as having little or no value—such as the poor, sick and needy. It was typical for such people to be dismissed then, as it is now. But Jesus challenges us to serve them in their need, embrace their inherent human dignity, and receive them as if we are receiving Jesus himself.

## Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mark 10:17–30

For a camel to pass through a needle's eye is impossible. But that's entirely the point! Jesus used this exaggerated image to drive home his message that those who follow him need to have a very different relationship with wealth than many others in the world around us, where a constant barrage of advertising tempts us to amass treasure on Earth by buying whatever we want. But just as Jesus challenged the rich man, so he challenges us to build treasure in heaven by selling what we have and giving to the poor. He is not challenging us to give just from our surplus—as an act of charity—but to give as an act of justice, since amassing riches denies the poor what is rightfully theirs.

# Lectionary Cycle C

COMMENTARY ON GOSPEL READINGS FOR SUGGESTED SUNDAYS

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Luke 6:17, 20–26

When, in the Beatitudes, Jesus insists that the poor, hungry, and weeping are blessed, he isn't romanticizing poverty and suffering. It is a grave injustice for anyone to be deprived of food, shelter, and other essential needs for a dignified life. Jesus knows the cruelty of injustice can hurt and can lead to the "weeping" he speaks about. He invites us to weep over the injustices that inflict our world, especially the greed and indifference that creates a widening gap between rich and poor. Yet Jesus invites us to do more than weep; he calls us also to act. We are called to encounter, share with, and serve the poor and hungry—that their tears might be replaced with a measure of hope and joy.

## Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time: Luke 14:1, 7–14

When we consider opening our homes and extending hospitality to others, who do we typically think of first? We probably think of friends, family, and neighbors—people whose company we enjoy and who make us feel happy and accepted. It's easy to share our love and hospitality with them, and our generosity is often repaid at a later time. And that's understandable. Jesus, however, invites us to extend our hospitality beyond those we normally think of and include those our world often neglects, overlooks or scorns: those on the margins from whom we should expect nothing in return, and who are sometimes dismissed as undeserving of our mercy. According to Jesus, they are deserving of our compassion, generosity and love.

## Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Luke 16:19–31

We might wonder: How could the rich man in Jesus' parable not even notice the presence of Lazarus, who sat on his doorstep covered with sores licked by dogs? Wouldn't his needs have been blatantly obvious to anyone who walked by? But maybe someone like Lazarus is easier to overlook than we might think. Fear, discomfort, guilt, racism and pride can warp our vision and blind us to human pain. We can easily be tempted to overlook, or even intentionally ignore, the hardships and sufferings of others in our world, our communities—even those on our very doorstep. That's why Jesus taught this parable: to invite us to open our eyes, and shake us from our indifference—that we might notice and respond to the needs of others with compassion, and extend a hand to help.



## Encounter (Time varies based on activity)

Facilitate an experience of encounter with people who are poor and vulnerable, through service at a local organization, listening to a speaker, a simulation or even watching a few stories on video. See Preparation section on page 2 or visit the USCCB website [wearesaltandlight.org](http://wearesaltandlight.org) for ideas.

## Reflection (30 minutes)

Gather participants together after their encounter (service, listening to a speaker or watching a few videos) and invite them to reflect on the encounter and how it connects to their faith and today's Scriptures.

### Ask:

- What resonated with you most from your experience or the stories you heard?
- What did you find most challenging?
- What are some of the local and global issues that this experience or these stories raise?
- Reflect back on the Gospel reading. What does this passage mean to you in light of our experience of encounter today?

# Catechesis (30 minutes)

## Explain:

In Jesus' public ministry, he spent time preaching about and spending time with people on the peripheries of society: those who were sick, lame and considered disgraced. He encountered people who most others preferred to avoid. As disciples of Christ and members preparing to be fully initiated into the Church, this is the example we are committing to follow. The Catholic Church has developed teachings based in Scripture and Tradition about how we can follow Christ's witness and care for people who are poor and vulnerable in our world through works of charity and social justice. This body of teaching is known as Catholic social teaching. The USCCB has identified seven themes of Catholic social teaching. All are grounded in our belief that every single person is created in the image and likeness of God, and so has inherent human dignity. It is not earned and cannot be taken away, and every person around the world deserves to live in conditions that respect their human dignity. (Genesis 1:26-27)

We think of charity and justice as complementary—as the **“two feet of love in action.”** For more resources that can be shared with participants about how the Church understands on charity, justice, and Catholic Social Teaching, visit [usccb.org](http://usccb.org) and search for “two feet,” or “Catholic social teaching.”

## OPTIONAL

Show video: [“CST 101: Life and Dignity of the Human Person”](#) from CRS' YouTube channel.

## Explain:

The Church in the United States lives out the witness of Christ by caring for people on the margins locally and around the world.

### CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA

Catholic Charities agencies across the country witness the love of Christ by helping people in need and by serving their communities. Catholic Charities USA is a national organization that offers support to member agencies, provides disaster relief and promotes poverty-reduction through research and legislative reform.

- Show video: [“Catholic Charities USA. Salt. Leaven. Light.”](#) from Catholic Charities USA's YouTube channel.

### CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

CRS helps the poorest and most vulnerable people in 100 countries around the world in the name of Catholics in the United States. It's the official humanitarian agency of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

- Show video: [“Faith in Action Leads to Results”](#) from CRS' YouTube channel.

## Sending on Mission (15 minutes)

**Distribute handout:** “Encounter Others in Need at Home and Around the World.” Give participants a chance to reflect on issues facing their local community and the global community, and how they might get involved through our Catholic agencies.

### Ask:

- In the video, “Faith in Action Leads to Results,” Cardinal Dolan says that we don’t reach out to people in need because they’re Catholic, we do it because we’re Catholic. As someone who is preparing to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church, how does this resonate with or challenge you?
- How might you live the Good News by encountering others in need in your own life?
- What are some needs facing your local community? How do these issues relate to your global community? What’s one way you might help show Christ’s love to people at home and around the world who are struggling with these issues?



## Closing Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...

Loving and gracious God,

When the obedient widow had given her family's last bit of flour to Elijah, **You fed them.**

When you called your sons and daughters out of bondage, **You fed them.**

When faced with the hunger of the 5,000, With nothing save a few gracious handfuls offered up by a child, **You fed them.**

Time and again, you have foreshadowed the bread of salvation By nourishing us with the bread of this world.

Lord, you filled the fishermen's nets to bursting.

Fill us to bursting.

Fill us with compassion for our sisters and brothers.

Fill us with the grace that pours forth from your loving heart.

Fill us with obedience to your last commandments:

**To go forth into the world**

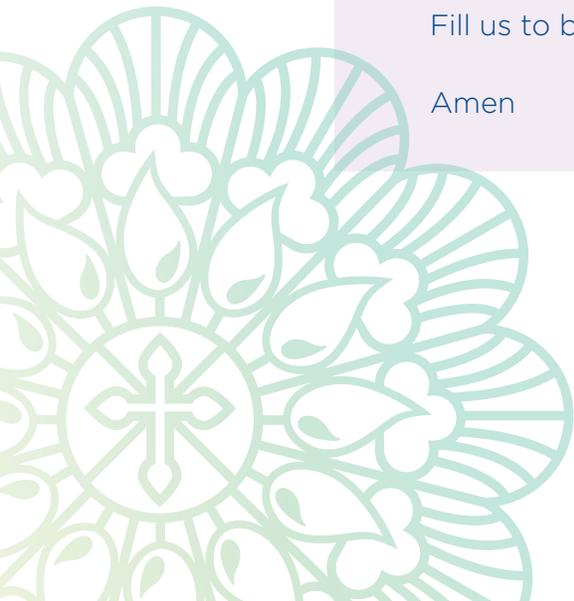
**To do for others as you have done for us**

**To feed your sheep.**

So many are hungry,  
And we are hungry too.

In our weariness, our complacency, our cynicism,  
We have grown hungry for your compassionate spirit.  
Fill us to bursting.

Amen



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# Encounter Others in Need

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## at Home and Around the World

The Catholic Church in the United States reaches out to people on the peripheries of society through **Catholic Charities in the United States** and through **Catholic Relief Services around the world**.  
[catholiccharitiesusa.org/get-involved](http://catholiccharitiesusa.org/get-involved) | [crs.org/get-involved](http://crs.org/get-involved)

Here are examples of issues our Church responds to locally and globally, and ways you can get involved:

### HUNGER

795 million people around the world, just over **1 in 9 people, were undernourished** in 2014–16.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, 49 million Americans—1 in every 6—are food insecure, which means their ability to access and consume nutritious food is limited. CRS and Catholic Charities agencies help meet the daily needs of people who go hungry, while also supporting them with the resources to gain consistent access to healthy food for the long term. **Help feed the hungry ...**

**Locally:** Prepare meals for a homeless shelter or collect items for a food pantry.

**Globally:** Host a Helping Hands meal-packaging event or participate in CRS Rice Bowl for Lent.

### REFUGEES

There are **21.3 million refugees worldwide** who have fled their home countries, half of whom are under 18.<sup>2</sup> CRS assists refugees who are fleeing their home countries and as they resettle in other countries overseas. Catholic Charities helps resettle refugees who have fled to the United States. Both agencies provide refugees with resources like housing, translation and job placement. **Care for refugees ...**

**Locally:** Welcome a refugee family by providing mentors to help them become a part of your community.

**Globally:** Advocate for policies that assist refugees fleeing their home countries. Catholics Confront Global Poverty, an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and CRS, provides resources about how to advocate for the Church's teaching on international issues.

### WORK

In local and global economies, a **lack of jobs that pay a fair wage** makes it difficult for people to support their families. In the United States, Catholic Charities provides job training, educates people about financial management and advocates for living-wage jobs. Overseas, CRS helps provide similar training and supports projects and industries that promote ethical trade, so that workers receive fair wages and work in safe conditions. **Support fair labor practices ...**

**Locally:** Offer resume building, job search, and interviewing skills at a local Catholic Charities site, or in your parish.

**Globally:** Buy ethically traded products—coffee, food and crafts made by people living overseas who are paid a fair wage for their work—or host a fair trade sale at your parish.

### EMERGENCY AND DISASTER RESPONSE

**Vulnerable people are hit hardest** in disasters. CRS is immediately on the ground when a natural disaster strikes overseas. And Catholic Charities is on the front lines of relief efforts at home. Both agencies support immediate relief and long-term recovery. **Help people facing emergencies ...**

**Locally:** Receive disaster preparedness training through Catholic Charities so they can respond to natural disasters.

**Globally:** Host a fundraising event at your parish for a global emergency.

1. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, "The State of Food Security, 2015," [fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf](http://fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf)  
2. © 2017 Catholic Relief Services. All Rights Reserved. 17US186