

THE WORD OF GOD: Choosing Discipleship

Lesson 1. Special Bible Study: The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Video: [The Beauty of the Cross](#) (4:54)

Reading of the day: **John 3:13-21**

References:

www.vemkar.us

Orthodox Study Bible: www.blueletterbible.org

For homework:

Mandatory item. 1 inch ring binder with a clear sleeve on the cover (required for personalization). This is meant to neatly collect all the work and materials of the year.

Life Application:

1. Disciples are active in their communities. Try following their example.
2. Pray and trust in the Holy Spirit.
3. Let the glory of the cross lead you.
5. Don't be shy to carry your cross with gratitude.
4. Learn the scripture and help others find answers there as well.

Memory Verse:

“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”

- John 3:20

Bible Study Lesson

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Զօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Բո՛ւ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Բո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zeas yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

For Students:

Life in the Kingdom (John 3:13-21)

13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

Questions:

1. Read Numbers 21:4-9. Why do you think God would use a snake as the tool to kill and to save? Has there ever been a time when you used something to help you or another that should not have been used for that purpose?
2. Jesus gives the example of the serpent being lifted in the wilderness by Moses, comparing it to His crucifixion (verses 14-15). Why would Jesus use this example? How does it relate to the cross?
3. Why is it so significant that John writes that, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (verse 16)?
4. John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible. What does it mean to believe? How do we believe? Is there a wrong way to believe?
5. Why would men prefer darkness to light (verse 19)?
6. What is truth? Is truth relative?
7. On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, how can we use the cross as a weapon against evil in our lives?

For the Teacher:

Background:

This Gospel reading is read on the Second Sunday after Christmas, on the Sixteenth Day of Easter and on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. In it, Christ alludes to His crucifixion and teaches that those who believe in Him will be saved (receive eternal life) from sin and death.

** Feel free to hand out the notes to students after the discussion.*

1. Read Numbers 21:4-9. Why do you think God would use a snake as the tool to kill and also to save? Has there ever been a time when you used something to help you or another that should not have been used for that purpose?

- a. *God uses people and object throughout the Bible, that we do not think should be used for God's plan. He uses Moses, who has a stutter; David, who was a shepherd; Peter, who a fisherman; and Paul, who was a Pharisee persecuting the Christians. God takes the very things that may be rejected by society and transforms them into instruments for His glory.*
- b. *A snake's bite could be compared to the sting of death and sin, also alluding to the serpent in the Garden of Eden.*

2. Jesus gives the example of the serpent being lifted in the wilderness by Moses, comparing it to His crucifixion (verses 14-15). Why would Jesus use this example? How does it relate to the cross?

- a. *Moses lifted an image of a serpent to cure the Israelites from deadly bites of poisonous snakes. This miracle-working image prefigured Christ being lifted on the Cross. As believers behold the crucified Christ in faith, the power of sin and death is overthrown in them. Just as the image of a serpent was the weapon that destroyed the power of the serpents, so the instrument of Christ's death becomes the weapon that overthrows death itself.*
- b. *Some traditions say that, if the serpent lay horizontally on the vertical pole, it is easy to see how this also was a visual representation of the cross. However, many traditions show the serpent being wrapped around the pole, and this is the source for the ancient figure of healing and medicine — a serpent, wrapped around a pole.*

3. Why is it so significant that John writes that, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (verse 16)?

- a. *At this time, the Jews believed that the Messiah was going to come and overthrow the Gentile government, establish a Jewish kingdom, make the Gentiles the slaves to the Jews and save only the Jewish people. John writes and explains that Jesus, the Messiah, did not come only for the Jews, but for all mankind. He was not sent to save only a certain group of people, but everyone who believes in Him, irrespective of their history, background, or blood.*
- b. *Follow up question: Does this mean that Christ also came for our enemies? For Turks, Azeris, and others? Yes, of course He did. We are called to be apostles and evangelists to these nations, even if they are our enemies.*

4. John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible. What does it mean to believe? How do we believe? Is there a wrong way to believe?

- a. *Believing is not a mental act, a psychological thought, or a statement of faith, but a lifestyle to be lived. It is not just good enough to say we believe, but we must demonstrate our faith in everything we do. This is what believing means for Orthodox Christians. Just saying we believe is not good enough, but, as we say today, we must put our money where our mouth is.*
- b. *John 3:16 says whoever believes, or has faith in Jesus Christ, will not die but have eternal life. St. James*

the Just, the first bishop of Jerusalem in his New Testament letter, teaches us about the harmony of faith and works, that invisible faith is no faith at all, that faith without works is a dead faith and does not save. He further makes a distinction between faith that is alive, working itself out, and a false version of faith that only adheres to a creed or set of beliefs. He writes, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.” (James 2:19)

- c. The wrong way to believe is just to think believing is a thought and not a way of living.

5. Why would men prefer darkness to light (verse 19)?

- a. When a cockroach sees the light, it runs away to the darkness. Many people act the same way because they are either embarrassed of their sins, do not want to change their life, or they are enjoying the sin they are in and are comfortable. Doing this prevents us from growing closer to Christ and becoming what Christ created us to be.
- b. Follow up question: Have you or do you know someone who has done something in darkness (bad) and when shown the light, refused to go into the light?

6. What is truth? Is truth relative?

- a. Christ is truth (John 14:6) and truth is unchanging. Truth does not change according to what we believe, feel or want it to be, but is constant, throughout time and culture. The world today thinks everyone has their own truth. This is not truth, but an opinion. Everyone has their own opinions and thoughts, but one person’s truth cannot be different from another person’s truth because truth, by definition, is a verified or indisputable fact, proposition, or principle.
- b. If we believe that Christ is truth, this means we must judge/measure everything against Christ – we must compare what we see, do, and learn with what Christ taught and how He lived.

7. On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, how can we use the cross as a weapon against evil in our lives?

- a. The cross has been transformed from a symbol of death, destruction, and fear to an instrument of life, resurrection and hope. Evil shudders at the sight of the cross, knowing that through the cross, evil has been defeated and will ultimately be destroyed. Demons fear the cross. Every time we make the sign of the cross on our bodies, we reaffirm our allegiance to Christ and His angelic army which wages war against the Satanic realm. Making the sign of the cross is a testimony and profession of faith that we believe (live a life) in Christ, belong to Him, and know that through the cross, death has been defeated and the resurrection of the dead is real and will be at Christ’s Second Coming.

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarrh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamgyhees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

At Home

Please complete the assignment and memorize by next class.

PERSONALIZED BINDER:

Three ring binder (share with parents to create this at home).

Directions: Use colored and/or printing paper to decorate a cover page for your binder and share some information about you. You can use stickers, cut-outs from coloring pages, photographs.

Information to Include (mandatory):

1. First Name and Last name.
2. Grade or name of the classroom.
3. Your or your family's favorite Bible verse.
4. Your favorite subject in school.
5. Your favorite activities.
6. Something that symbolises your future profession.