

Chapter 8:

Paul's Letters: Jesus the Universal Lord

Student Preparation

- Students were asked to read Chapter 8, pages 232-255.
- Students were also asked to complete the Chapter 7 Review Questions 5-13, 18 and 19 on pages 112-113.
- Some students were asked to bring in selections of music on CD which set a tone for prayer.
- Students were asked to bring in either an example of a letter or a researched story about modern-day martyrdom.

Warm-up (about 20 minutes)

- Have a few students play their music selections, prefacing the piece with a few comments about why they chose it. Select a piece of music to be used at closing prayer.
- Share and discuss the students' responses to the Chapter 7 Review Questions which they completed prior to this session. Answers may be found on pages 150-151 of the Teacher's Manual.
- Lead a discussion with students about the benefits of consistent prayer and quiet time: a greater sense of calm and peace, a consistent reminder of God's presence in their lives, etc. Ask students to talk about any difficulties they have encountered as they try to make prayer a more consistent part of their schedules. Encourage students to share solutions they have developed, such as finding the best time (evening is usually best for teens, but some are morning people), asking family members to be considerate of the time, turning off the cell phone, jotting down distracting thoughts to be dealt with later, and so on. Encourage students to continue this practice in the future.
- Read Romans 8:38-39 from page 232 as an opening prayer.

Part 1:

Lesson (about 30 minutes)

Text Reference: Zealous for Christ, The Life of St. Paul, Letters Written by St. Paul (pages 233-247)

- Have students take turns reading aloud the description of St. Paul found on page 233. Lead a discussion on qualities of a strong parish pastor. Ask students to consider why St. Paul was so influential, in spite of some of the characteristics listed in this reading.
- Paul's story, told on page 234-235, is one of dramatic conversion. Invite students to share any stories they may know of people who dramatically changed their lives in response to an encounter with Jesus. Give students some time to reflect on smaller incidents of conversion in their own lives. Invite them to share these stories, and to describe the people or events which prompted them to change.
- Review Paul's journeys shown on the map on page 236. Remind students that Paul made these journeys on foot, by boat, and perhaps on camel. The distance between Jerusalem and Corinth is about 850 miles as the crow flies. Divide students into groups and ask them to plot an equivalent travel route on a map of the United States, using their own city as Jerusalem or Corinth. Have students list all the challenges that Paul encountered in his travels, such as bad weather, the threat of bandits, hostile reception, etc.
- Have students share the examples of modern-day martyrs they discovered. Remind the group that the hardships Paul experienced are found in today's world as they were in the early Church.
- Have students answer the questions on page 159 of the Teacher's Manual.
- Review the four sections characteristically found in Paul's letters as described on page 238. Have students read the letter of Philemon silently and note the organization described.
- During the Korean war, a soldier was being held captive in a North Korean prisoner of war camp. A strong Christian, he remembered New Testament stories such as that referred to on page 241, where Peter, Paul, and others were miraculously freed from prison. Convinced that God would protect him in a similar way, this soldier simply walked out of his prison camp without attempting to hide his departure. He escaped to freedom, unnoticed by the prison guards. Ask students to discuss whether they agree with the soldier's decision, and how they account for his apparently miraculous escape.
- The issues Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians were divisions in the Church, problems in Christian morality and living, problems in Christian worship, and debate about the resurrection (pages 244-245). Brainstorm with students the ways in which these issues are debated within the Church today. Call for suggestions about how Paul's advice could be applied to today's Church.

Break/Writing Exercise (about 20 minutes)

- Join students for a break with refreshments.
- Give students paper and art supplies. Ask them to make a children's book depicting the story of Paul's life. Brainstorm with the group the events to be included in the book. If students enjoy the activity and do not have time to finish, the activity can be continued the following session. The finished products can be given to an elementary-age class.

Part 2:

Lesson (about 25 minutes)

Text Reference: Letters Written by St. Paul, Deuteropauline Letters (pages 247–254)

- Paul's letters frequently balance encouragement and compassion with exasperation and a challenge to communities to be accountable. Have students write a loving letter challenging current behavior. Assign some students to write a letter to the United States as a nation, another to their student body, others to their city or neighborhood, and others to their family. Have volunteers read their letters aloud.
- Catholics differ with many Protestants in the teaching about justification. Page 240 defines justification as bringing about a right relationship with God; in Catholic understanding, this relationship must include right behavior towards our neighbor. Some Protestant traditions teach, based on Romans 3:21-5:21, that humans are saved simply by developing a personal relationship with God and by declaring faith in Jesus. Have students present their explanation for the Church's teaching in light of this Scripture passage.
- Page 252 describes controversy in the early Church regarding the body. Ask students to evaluate the attitude toward the body and creation evidenced in the media and secular society today. Ask them to describe ways in which God's gift is celebrated, and other ways in which it is devalued.
- Break students into six groups. Assign each group one of the letters listed in the Teacher's Manual on pages 163-164. Read the themes listed in the manual, and have a secretary in each student group write down the theme pertaining to their assigned letter. Then give each group time to answer the questions listed in the manual. Have students report back to the larger group.

Prayer Experience (about 20 minutes)

- Set up prayer space.
- Invite students to think of a time during the previous week when, at least in retrospect, they are aware of God's presence in their lives. Invite them to tell about the experience, but do not require that everyone share.
- Play a piece of music brought in by a student to provide a transition into a time of quiet.
- Invite students to remember the love Jesus showed by coming to be with us and share our daily lives. Read Philippians 2:5-11 on page 243 as a focus for the class's prayer.
- Allow time for quiet reflection.
- Ask students to bring any intentions they may have for prayer.
- Close with a spontaneous prayer or:

Jesus, you know our lives because you came among us and shared our experiences. You know everything that happens to us, today and every day. Help us to trust our lives to you. Please bless all those in our midst and throughout the world who struggle, especially those we have mentioned today. Bless and protect us all through the coming week. Amen.

Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Have students complete Chapter 8 Review Questions 1-3 and 13-21 on pages 255-256.
- Have students read Chapter 9, pages 258-281.
- Ask students to commit themselves to setting aside ten to fifteen minutes four times per week for quiet time and prayer over the next two weeks. Ask them to quiet themselves, perhaps begin with a Scripture passage, open their hearts and minds to God. Ask them to journal briefly after each session.