

ACTIVITY 1: JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE

The purpose of this activity is to use John Chapter 6 to help teach children the real presence in the Eucharist and that what we see does not always reflect what is truly present. The following includes the complete Bible text and instructions on how to talk to the children and make this activity come to life. This is the most popular activity that kids really enjoy!

Materials needed: Bible, water beads, and strainer

Note: Extraordinary Mission will provide water beads & strainer, while the Bible verses are given in this manual.

Instructions for “Bread of Life” Discussion and “Water Beads” Demonstration

1. If necessary, give background about the Bible, about Moses and the Manna and The Multiplication of Loaves and Fish. The amount of background necessary will depend on what has already been discussed in class and how much time you have for an in-depth discussion.
2. Read the Bread of Life discourse from John chapter 6. It is best if you can mark the verses ahead of time and read directly from the Bible. Again, you can shorten or lengthen the amount you read depending on the amount of time you have. Consider having a place of honor set up for the Bible to highlight its importance. Perhaps a small table with a tablecloth, a bible stand, and an electric candle. Invite the children to be still and ready to listen closely to God’s Word and light the candle before you begin reading.
3. Discuss what was just read. Start with the literal facts about what happened in the story and move to the deeper meaning. You want to guide the children to discover on their own that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist.
4. Use the water beads to demonstrate that Jesus is hidden under the appearance of Bread and Wine in the Eucharist.

Step 1: Give Background. You might say something like...

We are going to read a story from the Bible. *(Hold up the Bible so that all the kids can see it).* Do you know what the Bible is? Yes, we believe the Bible is the Word of God because the people who wrote the Bible were all inspired by God the Holy Spirit to write just what God wanted them to write. There are two parts of the Bible. Do you know what they are called? Yes, the Old and New Testaments. The story of Jesus is found in the ___? Yes, New Testament, especially in the four Gospels: ___? Yes: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Old Testament tells the story of God and His chosen people, the Israelites. The Old Testament also foreshadows Jesus, meaning it is a little bit like a mystery story that gives clues so that the people who were waiting for Jesus to come would be able to recognize him when he finally came. We need to know the stories from the Old Testament so that we will know the clues to better understand the mystery of Jesus, too! One of the most important people in the Old Testament was named Moses. What do you know about Moses? Yes, Moses was the one who God spoke to in the Burning bush. God told Moses to go to the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, and tell him to let his people go.

God's people had been slaves to the Egyptians for many years and God wanted Moses to lead them to freedom. God helped Moses to part the Red Sea so that God's people could escape the Egyptians, and Moses is also the one who went up on the Mountain and got the Ten Commandments from God. (You can show pictures of Moses)

After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they were supposed to follow God's directions and go to the Promised Land. But they weren't always very good at listening to God's directions, and they ended up wandering in the desert for 40 years! Do you think the desert is a good place for a big group of people to stay? No! Why not? Right, there isn't very much food or water in the desert. But do you think God took care of his people? Yes, God made water come from a rock so that they had something to drink, and God sent down a special bread from Heaven that was called Manna. It was like dewfall on the ground each morning and it tasted like wafers of honey. Every day for 40 years God sent the Manna down from heaven so that the people would have bread to eat!

Fast forward to the New Testament. Jesus was with a big crowd of people in a deserted place (sort of like a desert?) They were listening to Jesus teach them all day and they were far away from the nearest town. They didn't have any food with them and everyone started to get hungry. There was a young boy who has 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. So, Jesus performed a miracle and changed the bread and fish into enough food to feed all 5000 people who were there-with 12 baskets of leftovers! (can show pictures) Does this remind you of the story where God fed Moses and God's chosen people with the Manna? The people remembered the story about Moses and the Manna and they were looking for the clues to see if Jesus might be the special person they were waiting for. So the day after Jesus did this miracle the crowd was looking for Jesus and this is what happened...

Step 2: Read the Gospel of John Chapter 6 (New American Bible Revised Edition)

If you didn't have time for much background, you might want to omit the text in brackets for a shorter/simplified version. Start at verse 35 and skip over verses 49&50.

26 [Jesus said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled.

27 Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

28 So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent."

30 So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do?"

31 Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

32 So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

34 So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."]

35 Jesus said [to them], "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

41 The Jews murmured about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven,"

42 and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven?'"

43 Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves.

47 Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

48 I am the bread of life.

49 [Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died;

50 this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die.]

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

52 The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?"

53 Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.

54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.

55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

60 Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?"

66 As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.

67 Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?"

68 Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

69 We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

Step 3: Discuss what was read. You might say something like...

Now let's talk about the story we just heard from the Bible and see if it can help us learn something about your First Communion! I hope you were listening for clues!

Verse 26-27: Why were the people looking for Jesus? Right, they wanted more food. But Jesus says, "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life." What food do you think Jesus is talking about that "endures for eternal life"? Maybe holy communion? Who did Jesus say will give us this bread? He said "the son of man will give (it) to you." Who could the "son of man" be? Do you think it is Jesus?

Verses 28-29: Then the people ask Jesus what the work of God is. Do you remember what Jesus said? Yes, the work of God is to "believe in the one He sent." Who did God send? Yes, Jesus. Do you think we should do the work of God and Believe in Jesus? Yes! Why? Jesus is God! Jesus loves us and died on the cross for us. Would Jesus ever lie? No, that's right. He was God, he always told the truth!

Verses 30-31: But the people weren't ready to believe in Jesus yet. They wanted Him to do "a sign"(another miracle) before they would believe in Him. Had Jesus just done a miracle? Yes multiplying the 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish for the 5000 people. But they were remembering the story of Moses and how God gave the people Manna every day for 40 years! They wanted Jesus to keep making bread to feed them, but is that what Jesus does? No, that's right.

Verses 32-33: So what does Jesus say? He says, "it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven." What do you think is the "true bread from heaven" that Jesus is talking about? Something that "comes down from heaven" to "give life to the world?"

Verse 34: The crowd still doesn't know what bread Jesus could be talking about but they say, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Verse 35: [Then] Jesus says that He is "the bread of life!" How do you think the people felt when Jesus said that? They were probably surprised and maybe confused. Maybe they even thought Jesus was kind of crazy!

Verses 41-43: Do you remember what the people do? Yes, they start murmuring about Jesus. They think, "we know Jesus' Mom and Dad, how can he be from heaven?" And who are Jesus' Mom and Dad? Yes, Joseph and Mary! But is Jesus actually from heaven? Yes!

Verses 47-51: The people aren't believing what Jesus said, So Jesus tells them again that he is the bread from heaven. And now he also says that if you eat this bread you will live forever, but then he says the bread you have to eat is his flesh!

Verse 52: What do you think the people are thinking now? They say, "how can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They are really confused, maybe they think Jesus is really crazy! But what is Jesus talking about? That's right, he's talking about eating holy communion. Thank goodness he made a way for us to eat his flesh under the appearance of bread (without it looking like flesh or blood!)

Verses 53-56: Does Jesus tell the people that he is just talking figuratively, does he say that he doesn't really mean that they have to eat his flesh? NO, That is not what Jesus does. He must really and truly mean that people have to eat his flesh to have eternal life, because that is what he tells them again! He says it over and over again in these last few verses! (you can reread verses 54-56 from the Bible.)

Verses 60,66: So does everyone finally believe Jesus? No, it says in the Bible that many people thought that it was too hard to believe and so they walked away from Jesus.

Verses 67-69: What does Jesus do when the people walk away? He turns to the twelve and asks if they want to leave too. Do you know who the twelve are? Yes, The twelve apostles, Jesus' closest friends. Do they leave? NO. Do they believe Jesus? Yes, even though they don't completely understand what Jesus is saying Peter answers for the group and says that they believe Jesus is the "Holy one of God." Do you know who Peter was? Yes, He was the leader of the apostles, and he became the first Pope.

Summary: So what do you think this means for you as you prepare to receive Holy Communion? Do you think the bread and the wine are something more, something you can't see with your eyes? Yes, it is really Jesus' flesh and blood! How do we know that? Right, because Jesus told us it was and we can read about it in the Bible! So Jesus asks each of you if you want to leave him or if you will believe what he says about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It is hard to understand, but you have to decide if you really believe Jesus or not. Are you going to walk away? Or are you going to stay with Jesus? I hope you will all decide to believe in Jesus! To help you understand a little better I have a fun demonstration...

Step 4: Water Bead Demonstration

Get out the bowl full of water with water beads hidden inside. You might say something like...

Are there some things we can't see with our eyes? What are some things we can't see? Can we see the air? Wind? Germs? Love? God?

(Hold up the bowl so that everyone can see it. You can walk around to give each child a good view.) What do your eyes see when they look at this bowl? Yes, a normal bowl of water.

But there is special treasure hidden in this bowl of water that you can't see. Just like we can't see Jesus in Holy Communion, but he is a very special treasure hidden under the appearance of normal bread and wine.

I am going to walk around and let each of you put your hand in the bowl of water to see if you can feel anything. If you feel something, do not grab it and do not pull it out of the water. You don't want to ruin it for your neighbor. *(Walk around and let each child feel into the bowl. It is a pretty strange feeling to feel something you can't see! You might want to have the kids use hand sanitizer before this activity to minimize the spread of germs.)*

(After everyone has had a chance to touch the water beads return to the front of the room.) You might say something like... Did you feel something in the water? Do you think you know what it is? (Holding the bowl so that everyone can see pour the bowl so that the water beads fall into the strainer, have an empty bowl underneath the strainer to catch the water.)

(Hold up the strainer full of water beads.) Can you believe that all these were hidden in the water? Our eyes couldn't see them, but they were really there. Just like we can't see Jesus in Holy Communion, but he is truly present!

NOTE: *You can walk around and let the kids feel the water beads again. Kids really like feeling the water beads and really enjoy this activity, however there is a WARNING: Tell kids, "do not squish and do not squeeze the beads because they will break into a bunch of mushy, messy pieces." Some kids will squish and squeeze even after the warning so have a few paper towels on hand to clean up messes.*