

9—Feast Days: Recalling God’s Blessings

Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to ...

- understand that Feast Days give us a glimpse of our goal and inspire us to continue our journey to God.
- realize that on Feast Days we symbolically relive the great events of our salvation.
- state that the greatest feast day is the Resurrection of Our Lord together with Sundays commemorating Christ's Resurrection.
- list the Twelve Great Feasts.

For the Catechists

Celebrating Holy Days is our way of honoring the people and events that are part of our salvation history. Scripture tells us of these events that lead to our eternal life with God. When we attend services on Feast Days, we hear Scripture tell the story, and we come together as Church family to commemorate the event. That is the reason we should want to go to church on Holy Days. Regretfully, the guideline of "obligation" or "solemn" or "simple" is the criteria used by many people.

This lesson asks the students to recognize our need to celebrate the many ways God has revealed His Presence to us. The Divine Liturgy is the greatest Christian festival, and our Eastern Christian Churches celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord every Sunday. Our Church cycle gives a guideline to follow to commemorate other major events. This lesson lists Twelve Major Feast Days that celebrate events in Christ's and the Theotokos's life. God sent His Son to gain for us eternal life, and these Feast Days celebrate God's gift. The student book asks the youth to compare these celebrations to our family celebrations for birthdays and anniversaries. Help the students realize that just as we celebrate family and friends the same time every year, we should be celebrating Christ and the events of His life by attending every year the Liturgies for the Feast Days.

In the God With Us series, Unit 7, "Our Church Year," is included in all grade levels for both the teacher manual and student book. For each grade level, these mini-lessons on twenty-one Feast Days focus on a different aspect of the Feast Day. The Book 8 mini-lessons include details about the icon for that Feast and the Kontakion that describes the event honored. Throughout the year present these mini-lessons before the Feast Day to encourage students to attend church services as celebrations on their journey.

Materials Needed

Opening Prayer: "The Lord's Prayer"

Icon: Christ Pantocrator (*Come Bless the Lord* icon packet #3).

Closing Prayer: "The Thanksgiving Hymn" on the last page of the lesson.

Pens, pencils, markers and white paper

1. Opening Prayer

- Chant or recite "The Lord's Prayer."

2. Introduction

Bring in holy water in a bottle and olive and/or palm branches. Ask them if any of these items make them think about a Holy Day that is celebrated in the Church.

(Theophany: holy water and Palm Sunday: olive and/or palm branches, pussy willows)

Encourage them to think about how our Eastern Christian Churches help us realize God's presence by blessing items and asking us to take them home.

3. Guided Reading

- Before the reading, review last week's objectives. Then summarize this week's objectives of the lesson on a wall pad or easel pad to use for review next week.
- Have students read text aloud and emphasize the importance of fasting in their lives.
- Read the paragraph in italics aloud together.
- Take time to read the Twelve Great Feasts aloud. Pascha is not part of this list because it supersedes all other Feasts.

4. Scriptural Reflection

- Help students find 1 Peter 1:3-5.
- Before reading aloud, have students make the sign of the cross. Remind them that reading Scripture is praying.
- Look at the icon and ask the students to see themselves praying with the Publican.
- Give the students 3 minutes to answer the questions and read the passage again.
- Ask the students to work in groups of 2 and share their answers aloud.
- Possible answers:
 - He is saying that the Resurrection of Christ gave us a new life and hope in eternal life with God.
 - Our inheritance is life everlasting with God.
 - Answers will vary—pray, be kind to people, be grateful.
- Make a list of the ways we can thank God every day.

Background Reading (Feast of Saints)

"The Church also celebrates the feasts of its heroes of faith, the saints, based on this understanding of God's glorification of humanity. Through their holiness and their heroism for the sake of the faith, they reveal the ongoing action of the Spirit in the life of the people of God, deifying them and exalting them by riches of faith and love. The saints do not replace Christ as the one mediator between God and humanity (ref 2 Tim 2:5-6). The rule of worship once again determines our faith. We ask the saints to pray and to intercede for us with God. Their ability to help us comes only from their union with God. Just as we ask others to pray for us, we can ask those who have already achieved unity with God to pray for us. We also pray for the saints, that their share in the divine life be continually deepened. Our veneration of the saints is actually a sign of our faith in the resurrection and of the solidarity of all faithful through God. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God of the living and not the dead (Lk 20:37-38). Our veneration of the saints is a mark of our trust in God, who always keeps His covenant with us, 'so that in [Christ] we might become the very holiness of God' (2 Cor 5:21)" (LLII 46-47).

5. From the Teaching of the Church Fathers

- Ask one student to read the words from St. Justin.
- Have the students answer the questions; then discuss their answers. Suggestions:
Encourage the students to be specific.
Allow time for discussion.

6. Liturgical Study

- Read the paragraphs aloud.
- Ask: "Why do you think many people do not go to church on Holy Days?"
- Brainstorm ideas on how to get people to think about church as not just a place you go to but a place you want to be in to celebrate God's gift to us—eternal life.

7. Closing Prayers

"The Thanksgiving Hymn" on the last page of the lesson.

Supplemental Activities:

Review—At the end of the lesson, ask the students what they remember by using one of the following suggestions:

1. Make a poster for a Feast Day. Include details and ways to celebrate.
 2. Volunteer to be a greeter in church on a Feast Day. Welcome people as they come into church and add a comment about the importance of this Feast Day.
 3. In your "Faith Book," create a page devoted to a Feast Day. Include pictures and comments about how the Church celebrates the Feast.
- (For details about the "Faith Book," go to the first lesson in this Teacher Manual. Instructions can be found under "Supplemental Activities.")

Background Reading (The Lord's Day)

"Because the saving mystery of Christ is the cornerstone of our salvation, the Church—as early as the first century—made Sunday, rather than the Sabbath, its weekly holy day. The Sabbath commemorates the first creation, keeping a day of rest on the seventh day to the week when, according to Genesis, God rested. For Christians, Sunday—on which Christ rose from the dead—is the first day of the New Creation, the 'king and master of all days' (Pascha Canon). This is why Christians began considering Sunday as the 'eighth day' of the week: The first of a completely new order, truly the Lord's Day. Our Byzantine Churches especially emphasize this paschal character of Sunday with the cycle of resurrection hymn which we sing in the services of the Lord's Day" (*Journey* TM 166).