

Leader Session Eleven- Confession: A New Start

Main Ideas: The Resurrection opened the Gates of Paradise to us, but we still need to show God that we want to enter to be with Him in eternity. We will make mistakes, but God has also given us a way to repair those mistakes so that we can enter Paradise.

Supplies needed: Bibles, Participant Workbooks for each youth

(10 minutes) Have students begin reading about confession.

We've been talking a lot about the happiness that comes with Jesus's resurrection. Most importantly, we are joyful because we no longer have to worry that when our body dies, our soul will go to Hades and be trapped there. Through His resurrection, Jesus "trampled down death, by death" and opened the gates of Heaven. Jesus's friends were also filled with joy after His resurrection. They had witnessed His crucifixion and burial, and were so happy when He joined them again. The songs we sing in church celebrate all of these and more, and when we say Christ Is Risen! we know that He is and always will be.

One thing that we need to remember is that even though Jesus opened the gates of Paradise, we still have to show God that we want to enter with Him. In our first Session, we learned about the Gospel reading of the Last Judgement when Jesus separated the sheep and the goats. As the shepherd, only His sheep will go where He is going. He told the people that if they chose to help someone who needed food or clothing or love, they were also helping Jesus because we are all made in His image. People who chose to keep walking or who weren't even paying attention to what other people needed had ignored Jesus too.

Any time we choose to ignore God or the rules that He has given to us, we are committing a sin. Sometimes, we might realize we are doing something wrong and choose to do it anyway (have you ever taken something from a sibling or heard your parents calling you and chose to ignore them or take your time getting there?). Pause and ask youth to answer the question Other times, we realize later that we should have done something differently. Maybe we said something to a friend that we meant as a joke but they didn't take it that way, or we broke or lost something that we didn't realize was valuable to someone else. (There are many guides with questions that will help you to think about ways you may have sinned. There is one in our camping program prayer book.) Just like a brick wall is made up of many smaller bricks, each time we sin we build a bigger wall between us and God. Taking time to think about the ways you might be building a wall is very important. Fill in the blocks below with a way in which

someone might separate themselves from God. It could be something that you have done in the past, but it doesn't have to be.

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| Told a rumor I heard about someone | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | Yelled at my sibling | |
| Laughed at someone who made a mistake | | | |

(10 minutes) Students may want to work with a partner or alone. You may want to have the prayer books available for this activity so that students can look at the questions for preparing for confession, although the goal is not for them to put their confession on this paper. Decide if it would be a help or a distraction.

(10 minutes) Have students read the next section and the story about Longinus)

God gave us the gift of free will. He wants us to want to be with Him. The good news is that we can't build a wall that God can't break down-if we show that we are really sorry and want to join Him again. Through the sacrament of Holy Confession, we tell our sins so that God knows that we understand what we have done wrong AND repent which means to tell Him that we are sorry. A Confession isn't complete without both parts. (Think about how it would feel if you confronted someone who shared a rumor about you and they said, "yeah I did that" but didn't apologize). Then we ask God to forgive us-to break down the wall that we built. The priest is present at our confession because even though it's God that we are talking to, the priest can help us by giving us suggestions for fixing our mistakes. They can help us think of ways to avoid committing the same sin in the future.

Learning about the saints can help us as we try to live our lives according to God's will. There are many saints who lived a life that was not pleasing to God, but repented, saying that they were sorry and were

forgiven! You learned about once such saint, St. Mary of Egypt, in an earlier Session. Today we are going to read about a saint whose life was changed by Christ's resurrection.

Longinus the Centurion

Department of
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
ORTHODOX CHURCH in AMERICA

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On Friday of this week we remember the martyred saint Longinus the Centurion, who stood at the foot of the cross and pierced the side of Our Lord with a spear. He was moved, as he stood there, to make a powerful confession of faith. He declared, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

If we think for a moment about what took place during the hours before Longinus uttered his memorable words, we'll have to dwell on some ugly scenes. Soldiers like Longinus were responsible for many of the terrible things done to Our Lord during those hours. Jesus was mocked, scourged, ridiculed and crowned by having sharp thorns put roughly on his head. The soldiers were more than willing to cast lots for His clothing, and to hear without anything but agreement the mocking of passersby as He endured agony on the cross.

Longinus belonged to the Roman Empire's fighting elite. He was trained to value power, and to believe in ruthless suppression of any who were perceived to be Rome's enemies. He would have been unlikely to have compassion for, or interest in, an itinerant preacher who had stirred up the populace in an alarming way. He could watch without emotion as that preacher was put to death in the slow, incredibly painful way reserved for criminals who were not citizens of Rome.

Longinus, according to most sources, was the officer in command at the Lord's crucifixion. It was his job to make sure that those on the crosses were definitely dead. This is why it is surprising to find, in some modern books that claim to "demythologize" the Christian Gospel, the bald assertion that there were no eyewitnesses to the Crucifixion. These books then claim that without eyewitnesses we have no certainty that Jesus Christ actually died and rose again.

Yet the Gospel of John, in 19: 31-35 tells us in detail how the soldiers dealt with the crucified bodies that day, and in verses 26-27 it tells us how Jesus gave His Mother into John's care. So there were a number of witnesses, a fact which is one of the foundations of our faith.

Longinus was one witness who was overcome by what he experienced when Jesus died. He was awestruck at seeing the earth shake and the rocks split, and he knew that Jesus was the Son of God, as He had claimed to be. The rest of his life, after he accepted baptism, was spent as a follower of Christ who witnessed to others. He died a martyr at the hands of Pilate's soldiers, who pursued him and reluctantly followed their orders to kill him.

Troparion - Tone 1

Longinus, you beheld the King of Glory
who was nailed to the Cross,
yet shone on those in darkness.
You were enlightened by His rays
and became a martyr and save those who cry:
Glory to Him who gave you strength!
Glory to Him who granted you a crown!
Glory to Him who through you grants healing to all!

Just a bored centurion who had to make sure the Jewish troublemaker on the cross was really dead—those ordinary words describe Longinus. Yet he was changed, to become a great witness to the Resurrection. That is what God can do, and all the "demythologizing" books in the world can't undo it.

(15 minutes) Read through the next section and fill in the blanks. Depending on time, you could have one student read out loud or have students break into groups to read the Bible passage. When they finish they can color in the image of the Jesus prayer on the last page of this Session.

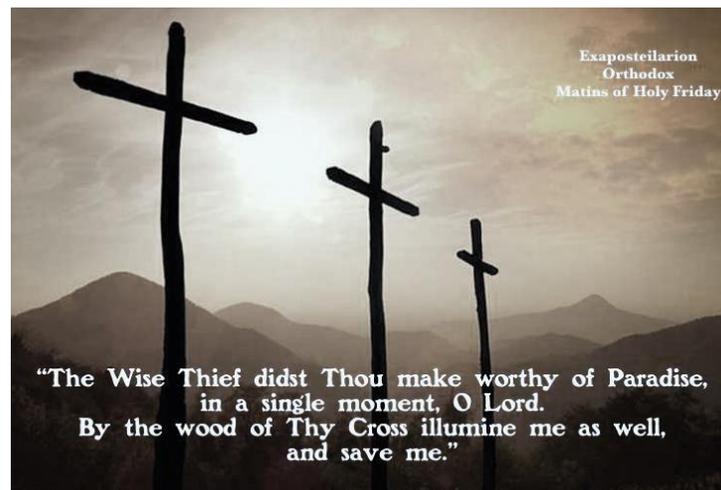
The Wise Thief

There's another moment from the events of Jesus's Resurrection that teaches us something about how important it is to repent. Two other men were crucified with Jesus. They were both thieves, one to the left of Jesus and one to the right. Read Luke 23: 39-43 to learn more about these men.

Fill in the blanks as you listen:

“Then one of the [criminals](#) who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed [justly](#), for we receive the due rewards of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, [remember me](#) when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to Him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in [paradise](#).’”

The thief who asked Jesus to remember Him, literally repented in the last few minutes of his life. By telling the thief that He would be with Him in paradise *today*, Jesus sends the message to us that repentance is necessary if we want to go through the gates that He opened. The words below come from the service of the Twelve Passion Gospels that is served in the evening on Holy Thursday.



The Jesus Prayer

In addition to repenting through the sacrament of Holy Confession, we can continually pray to God, asking for forgiveness and strength to avoid the temptation to sin. Although there are many prayers that can help us, we learned about one last week in the Session about preparing for Great Lent. Remember the Pharisee who went in to the temple to praise what he had done right, and the Publican who bowed down in church and repented for all of the things he had done wrong. Jesus told his disciples that the Publican is the one who had acted properly. The prayer known as the Jesus prayer is similar to the prayer of the Publican and it can be a helpful tool for us to focus on repentance. Practice saying it as often as you can and you will find that it helps in any situation- when you are sad, afraid, in need of help.



Jesus Prayer

*Lord
Jesus Christ,
Son of God,
Have Mercy
on Me
a Sinner.*