

## GLG 2024

### Christ's Unconditional Love

by Fr. Robert Holet – [Leader Packet](#)

Originally created for the Great Lent Giveaway 2004

**Objective:** To engage youth to care about their lives, the lives of others, especially the poor and those served by FOCUS.

#### Needed Items:

- Icon of Christ
- White Board or a notebook for you to keep notes on discussion
- Plain white paper – enough for each participant
- Markers, color pencils, crayons
- Copies of Participant Worksheets
- Bibles

#### Introduction

Often when charitable opportunities present themselves to us we are conflicted because the circumstances of need that others experience may seem apparent to us, but do not engender a deeper reaction of caring within. This may be due, in part, to the power of our media today to routinely engage us emotionally through advertising and marketing, especially when certain emotionally engaging advertisements or messages appear. After a while we become desensitized to such presentations - and even worthwhile causes can be ignored. It is easy to become cynical where seemingly we are bombarded by such messages.<sup>i</sup>

Youth, in particular, are challenged today because they are often very passionate about issues that impact their lives and others. They have a strong desire for justice and equality. They deeply want to make a difference and impact on their world for the better. Simultaneously, they are challenged by many powerful desensitizing forces, especially violent video games.<sup>ii</sup> These electronic media, while powerful and engaging, can create an emotional distance between a person and real-life human dramas. In some cases confusion can take place between what is real and what is not. The pain of personal suffering (especially emotional or psychological suffering) can create personal distancing from one's own life. The use of drugs and alcohol can heighten this process of disengagement.

There are many other types of desensitization that can take place. The result of this can become an attitude of 'not caring'. Discouragement in school achievements can lead to an 'I don't care' attitude toward study and school work. Hurtful words or actions by peers can lead a young person to distance him or herself emotionally from friends and associates. A sense of inferiority or poor self-image can cause emotional withdrawal from this pain - and the widespread presence of depression in youth (especially girls). The Gospels always call us to engagement with one another, because God has engaged Himself with us. He has made us into a human family and His loving care for us is the hallmark of the Christian faith. God has come to heal us of our wounds which cause us to draw back. Our attitude is to be one of caring and sensitivity, leading us to love and action. **Christ's love is unconditional, total, without reserve or holding back!**

#### Beginning the Session

Pass out the participant worksheets and the plain pieces of paper. Have the markers, pencils, etc. preset on the tables. Begin the session in prayer. Have the participants read aloud or to themselves the first section, "Have a Heart".

### **Opening prayer** - Recite together

*O Lord Almighty, God of hosts and of all flesh, dwelling in the highest, you care for the humble. You search searching the will and the human heart, and clearly know the hidden things of us all - O God who is without beginning and ever-existing Light, we pray that You, O immortal King, accept our prayers which we offer to Thee at this present time in the course of this project, that our hearts might reflect your love and care for all humankind.*

### **Have a Heart!**

We say, 'Have a heart!' when we want to encourage someone to care and get involved. The word 'care' is actually a very rich word - based on an Old English word, which means to be 'grieved deeply'. When we care, we grieve, and grief (at the suffering of others or even our own) is one of the hardest emotions to allow ourselves to express, especially in public. But to have a heart, to be compassionate, is to focus on the pain of someone and truly care about their situation, suffering and try to alleviate it.

Christians are characterized by 'care-fullness' - an attitude of caring about others (and ourselves) and valuing them because of who they and we are in the sight of God. Hence St. Paul exhorts Titus, " *And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.* " Titus 3:8.

To be careful - is to be literally 'full of care'. Likewise we are encouraged not to 'lose heart', to give up or quit! St. Paul exhorts us, " *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* "

Likewise we are called to 'guard our heart'. What does this mean? Proverbs 4:23 reminds us to " *Above all, guard your heart.* " A care-ful person is aware that there are many forces at work that can distract us or move our hearts away from what's really important.

Likewise, a caring person is not 'half-hearted'. When a person does something half-heartedly, he or she is doing it just to go through the motions, to pass some minimal test or satisfy someone's requirement, but doesn't really put themselves wholly into it. To try to do something in charity, half-heartedly, is a real insult because it says the person we are supposedly trying to help is not worth our full hearted effort! So what do we make of all of this? Caring is all about our heart - what we can do whole-heartedly, with compassion, and sensitivity. If we don't 'feel like it', our heart is disengaged, we are disinterested, and our minds are 'somewhere else'. **At this point, ask the participants what they think concerning "caring" and what is written. Allow time for discussion. No one's thoughts are "wrong" – permit them the opportunity to convey their thoughts.**



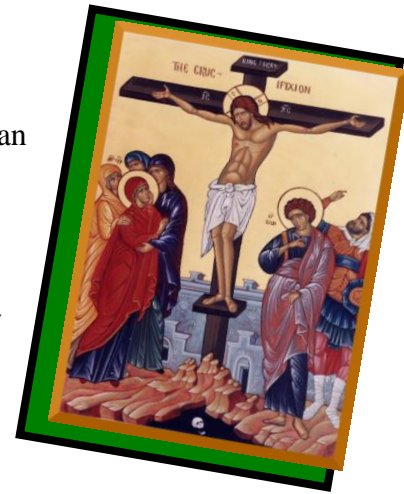
### **The Gospel**

Christianity is based upon the simple truth, that God *cares* for us, and that He loves us. He cared enough to send His Only Begotten Son into the world, to help us find our way to the Father and Eternal life. One of

the signs that the flame of the gospel is alive in us is whether or not we *care*. Christian conversion often means moving from "I don't care!" to "Yes, I do care!"

The remembrance of the Death of Jesus on the Cross in Holy Week is a reminder that He cared so much for us, that He would die for us. This is a sign that His love was without reserve, or conditions. He loves us as we are. He rose from the dead at Holy Pascha to show us that He cared so much for us that He would not allow us to be dead - in sin, and lying in the grave after our death, but He died and rose so that we could be raised up by Him in His divine love and care into Paradise.

### **A Story - Some Things Count**



*One young man confided in me this poignant story, in tears. He was, by all counts, successful in high school and at graduation received many honors and awards. He was proud of his accomplishments and thought he was ready to move on to conquer new worlds. But at graduation, he became increasingly uneasy about himself. What would happen now, in a whole new place with new people? Even worse, as he looked at his classmates on graduation day, they were all radiant and enjoying the day. They embraced each other and joyfully looked forward to their new endeavors, and staying*

*in touch.*

*But the young man was uneasy. He felt isolated from the joy of his friends. Finally he realized that his whole senior year had been about what he wanted to do and be about. He had checked out of school long ago and his focus was on himself. He realized that his fellow students who graduated with him that day were fine, bright, kind and had been generous toward him. But, he had never really cared much about them, or who they were, or what their life was about or where they were going. He had spent years with them - but knew very little about any of them personally even though he had 'hung out' with them so as to remain 'cool' in their circle. It had not mattered much at all, really, that he had been a part of their life, because he had not really cared about them. He had said as much - he was focused on His Future. Yes he had been 'successful' in his quest for good grades and achievements, but had not shared his heart with anyone. He didn't know them -nor did they know him.*

*The young man went on from that day saddened, but resolved that next year would be different. He would begin to try to care more about his classmates, not just himself or his interests or future. And later when he shared his story with me about his first year in college he was a changed, and much, much happier young man. He had found real friends because he had really learned how to care about them. And his faith had come alive too - because he had begun to discover that "I can care - and that some things count in life - especially other people."*

### **FOCUS - Caring for Others**

When we care, we do all sorts of things that we wouldn't otherwise. We exercise care toward others by simply meeting them, talking to them, looking at them, and opening our hearts. Sometimes we're able to show caring in practical ways, like extending ourselves to raise funds for people in need. We will never serve others until we care about them.

By your Great Lent Giveaway efforts, you can show other young people that, unlike the young man in the story above, you do care! And we realize too that those we try to help or serve often have bigger hearts than we do - and they can teach us a lot about the kind of caring that is good for the soul - by having a heart for others.

Ask the participants to take the *Have a Heart Quiz* and take a few moments for them to fill it out. Indicate to them that this is not an activity that needs to be shared but is for their own personal reflection. Then ask each to total the answers. Get the average by dividing by 3. Pass out the Have a Heart-O-Meter and 'fill it' with the level of caring that is represented by the number.

## Where Am I?

### 1-3 points

You have a... Lost heart!

Time to go find it!

### 4-6 points

You have a... Half-heart!

Your heart has the capacity, but is not doing all that it is capable of!

### 7-10 points

You have a... Care-full Heart!

Your heart needs to be poured out in loving others!

### *Discussion Starters*

Once the Have-a-Heart Quiz is completed and the heart is filled in. Lead the group in a discussion using the following questions. Some of the questions might be posed as more for personal reflection than for discussion.

- What questions did I rate highest -that I care the most about?*
- Do you generally care about most things, or not so much?*
- Were you surprised or disappointed by anything in the Exercise questions?*
- What kinds of scenes on TV or stories touch you, move you or make you cry?*
- Does your engagement with social media, video games or electronic devices help you to be more 'care-full' or less? Do you ever act based upon a need that you may sense from one of your friends who posts something?*
- Have you ever been hurt - and in order to 'keep it together' had to decide that you would 'not care any more'.*
- Do you believe that God cares about you -where you are right now?*

### Have a Heart Quiz

Honestly assess how much *you* care about the following. Note- this is not an exercise to make you feel bad - rather just to see what is important to you right now.

Scale - 3 = Care-full            2 = Half- hearted            1 Heart Lost

1. I care deeply about my friends. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I love my family (parents, siblings, other family members) \_\_\_\_\_
3. My school is important to me. \_\_\_\_\_
4. My school *work* is important to me. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I value my home - where I live. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Our Church services are a key part of my weekly. \_\_\_\_\_
7. When I am confronted with the suffering of others, like the homeless - I feel their pain. \_\_\_\_\_
8. When I see a TV ad about suffering animals, it makes me want to cry or help the creature. \_\_\_\_\_
9. My special hobbies and activities are important to me. \_\_\_\_\_

10. I don't care whether I care or not! \_\_\_\_\_

Sometimes we pretend to care, when we really don't. This is 'faking it' - going along making it look like we're interested but not really thinking it's important.

- Have you ever done that?
- Do you do it a lot?
- If so, why?

Once the activity and discussion is complete, close the session in prayer and perhaps share in a Lenten meal.

Additional Activities May Include:

- Baking Heart Shaped Cookies – As a group bake heart shaped cookies following the session. The cookies could be sold to raise funds for the GLG or they could be handed out to parishioners as a thank you. The cookies could also be taken to a local elderly facility, Boys and Girls Club or soup kitchen.

Heart Shaped Cards – The participants could make heart-shaped cards with inscriptions such as, *“God loves you and so do I!”* *“...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”* John 3:15-17

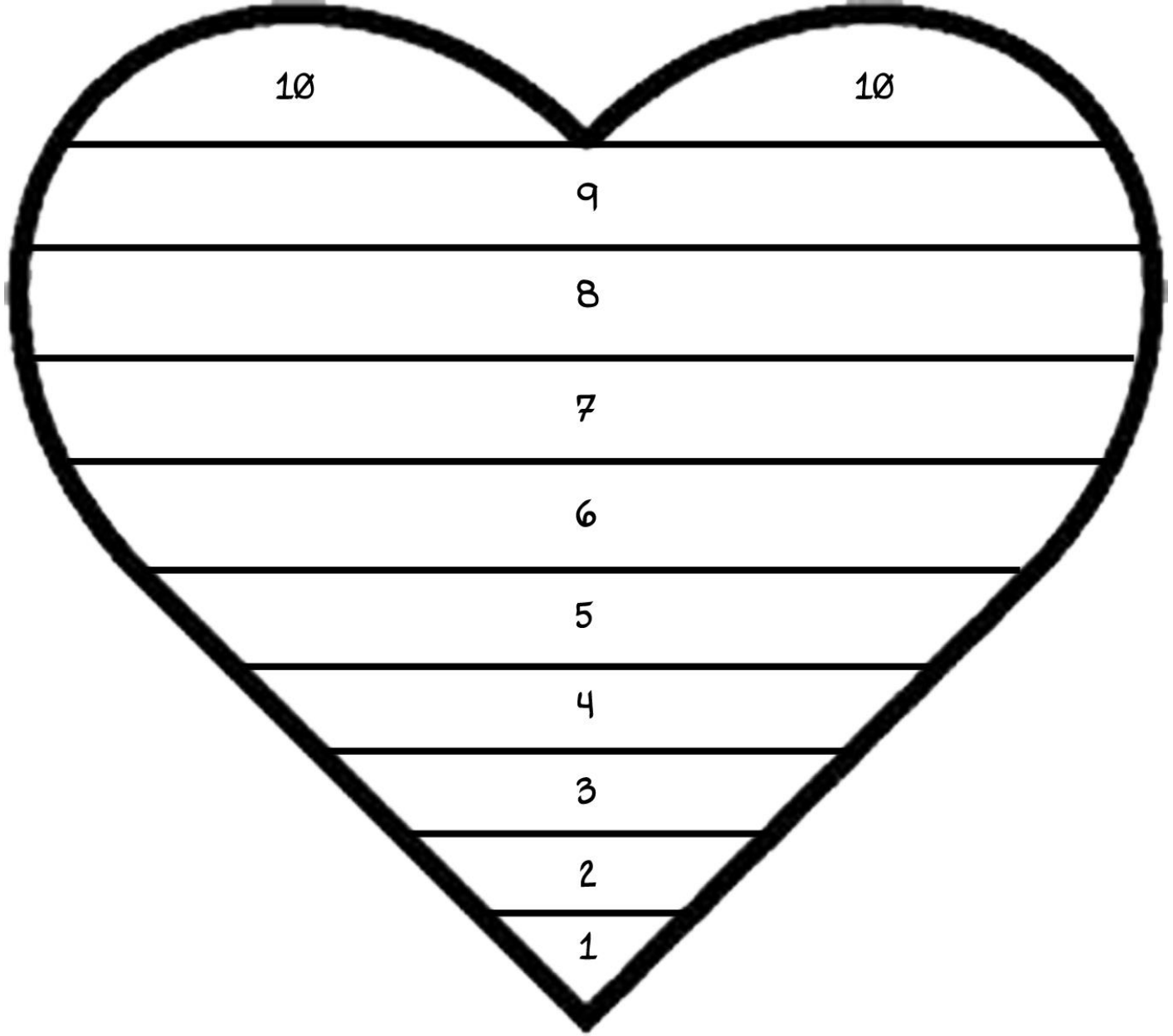
- To be given to family, friends, shut-ins, or those in difficult times to boost their spirits.
- To give as Pascha cards to parish shut-ins.

For younger youth ages 5-9:

Pre-fold pieces of paper in halves. They can be of any size. Outline half of a heart along the fold. For younger children, pre-cut the hearts and place an icon of Christ on the inside. For older children, you can allow them to cut out the hearts. Explain to the youth in your own words: *Have you ever felt sad, lonely, scared or angry? Have the older children write some of these words on the outside of the heart. When we feel these different ways, our hearts are just a little bit broken or hurt. Other people's hearts hurt for the same reasons and also because they may be hungry or do not have clothing, water or even someone to love them.*

*Do you know someone who can heal a broken or hurt heart?* Youth may say a doctor or parents. Allow time for their answers. *Jesus heals our hearts – He is the best doctor we can find! We should try to be as much like Jesus as we can! Let's open up our hearts.* Open up the paper hearts. Inside should be the icon of Christ. For older youth, give them the icon to glue inside. Continue, *When the heart is folded it is not whole, it is a little broken or hurt but when we open up our heart, like Jesus did for us, we have full hearts! We should always try to be like Jesus and have full hearts.*

*One way that we can be like Jesus is to care for others who have hearts that may be hurting: like being sad, lonely, scared or angry. We care for other people by giving love. We can do this in many different ways. Do you have any suggestions of how we can give love and care for others?* Allow time for answers. Give each of them a bandaid or several bandaids. They can write their answers on the bandaids and place them on the heart. Encourage answers such as love, care, help, be kind, smile, give to those who are poor, give hugs, etc. You can also pre-print some of these words on labels for younger children to stick on or print pictures of these actions to stick on.



*When we love others we have caring hearts. Let's always try to live like Jesus loving and caring for others!*

You could also read to the youth the following books and discuss how these saints showed love through caring for others:

*The Life of St. Brigid: Abbess of Kildare by Jane G. Meyer (Available on Amazon)*

*St. Herman of Alaska by S.A. Smith (Available at Light and Life Publishing)*

## Have A Heart!

Where am I?

<p><b>1-3 points</b></p> <p>You have a... Lost heart!</p>	<p><b>4-6 points</b></p> <p>You have a... Half-heart!</p>	<p><b>7-10 points</b></p> <p>You have a... Care-full Heart!</p>
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Time to go find it!	Your heart has the capacity, but is not doing all that it is capable of!	Your heart needs to be poured out in loving others!
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<sup>i</sup> The youth of today are exposed to unprecedented experiences by way of digital media of suffering, persecution, war, and every imaginable hardship in countless ways, daily. Their world is global and the appeals to the heart are continuous and even relentless.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.studymode.com/essays/The-Desensitized-Youth-1096880.html> - there are many such studies available.