

Read One Gospel from Beginning to End

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How many of our young people, after 12 years of faith formation, have read at least one of the Gospels from beginning to end? Of course, the lectionary is designed so that we read nearly all of Matthew in Year A, Mark in Year B, and Luke in Year C. But that's not quite the same as beginning with the first chapter of a Gospel and reading straight through to the last.

In our schools, teachers introduce students to the classics of literature, to world history, and to the stories of peoples and nations. They teach our young people to understand and appreciate our development as a free and democratic people through the study of the landmark documents that proclaim and define our national vision. Yet catechists seldom teach the whole of any of the four documents that are the foundation of our Christianity. The Gospels define who we are and what we believe about God and Jesus, the world, and ourselves. If we want to know who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going, we need to be grounded in the Gospels.

While it is true that our textbooks do an excellent job of rooting every lesson in Scripture, isolated stories do not give the same picture as an entire Gospel. The reading of at least one Gospel, from beginning to end, ought to be a goal of the junior high or high school years. It might be a summer project. (Aren't we always looking for ways to remind our youth – and adults – that growth in faith is a continual process, not just something that happens from September through June?)

Perhaps reading a complete Gospel could be a Confirmation activity for a candidate and sponsor. What could provide a better focus for sharing their faith?

A Gospel study club might be another way to encourage young people to read a complete Gospel and share what they have learned.

Whatever form your project takes, it would seem best to let youth choose which evangelist they wish to read. (Mark is the shortest.) They will need some basis, however, for making their choice. A short explanation about each Gospel writer, his audience, and purpose will help them.

To assist young people in reflecting on Jesus' meaning for their lives, you might provide them with questions to accompany their reading:

1. What did Jesus believe about the meaning of life? How were his beliefs reflected in the way he lived?
2. What things do you think Jesus values most?
3. Besides Jesus, who is your favorite person in this Gospel? Why?

4. What kind of person does Jesus want for a follower? Do you qualify?
5. Is there anyone in this Gospel who reminds you of yourself? How?
6. Pick one incident in this Gospel and rewrite it as you think it might happen in your own neighborhood today. Put yourself and the people you know in the story.
7. Find a story in this Gospel that helps you understand some problem you have right now.
8. Considering the things that Jesus does in this Gospel, do you see something in today's Church that Jesus would be excited and happy about? Something that Jesus might be troubled about?
9. Considering the things that Jesus says and does in this Gospel, do you see something in our world that Jesus would be glad about? Something that doesn't coincide with Jesus' ideas or values?
10. Choose some words from this Gospel that might become your personal motto for living. Why did you choose them? How do you think they might enrich your life?
11. Did reading this Gospel from beginning to end help you to know Jesus better? What do you now know that you didn't know before?

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