

Level: Elementary School

Bible Verse: Matthew 14:28-33, *Christ Walking on Water*

Overview:

- Opening Prayer for Missions
- Icebreaker - Would You Rather
- Activity #1 - Read Matthew 14:28-33
- Activity #2 - Story from the Mission Field
- Activity #3 - Read and discuss the life of St. Photini
- Activity #4 - Assemble OCMC coin boxes and offer the prayer to St. Photini

Objective: This lesson seeks to help the youth understand that when we seek Christ and form a connection or relationship with Him, we connect with our neighbor.

Materials: Copies of the St. Photini coloring page, a piece of paper, crayons or colored pencils, multi-colored beads, and string or pipe cleaners.

Note to Teachers: This past year, we have faced many challenges and seen our world become divided. We've suffered the loss of friends, family, and felt disconnected from our communities. At times when we feel that we are alone, it is easy to lose sight of what is truly important. Yet, it is through our connection and love for Christ that we find healing, strength, and unity.

This is because we are ALL called to unite ourselves with Him. Christ is everything. He is the source of hope. The beacon of light. The reason for joy. He is simply love.

Have your students think about what it means to have a connection with Christ. To connect with someone, we open ourselves to them. We find time for them. We listen to what they have to teach us. And for Christ, we connect best when we find time to pray and go to church, when we fast, and when we offer ourselves to serve and love our neighbor - because we cannot love Christ if we cannot love our neighbor.

The Orthodox Christian Mission Center sends out living witnesses to help connect the world to Christ. These witnesses are OCMC missionaries and volunteers who offer their lives as examples for others to follow. They go out to different countries and connect with others to teach the Good News, to share Christ's love, and help lead them to salvation. Their stories are examples of how a fixed gaze towards Christ, draws us closer to one another.

Opening Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, we pray for all people from all nations, that they may come to know You. Help us to care for the spiritual and physical needs of others around us and around the world. Teach us how to show Your love and peace to others. Grant us the courage to answer Your call. Amen.*

Icebreaker: Would You Rather Game

The goal of the Icebreaker is to help the students feel connected to one another. Gather the students together (in-person or virtual) and ask each of the following questions. Let them hear each other's answers and see if they have any similarities with others in the group. They may find that someone answered differently, and that is OK because we are all united by our love for Christ.

Would you rather...

- Be able to fly or read minds?
- Be on your favorite T.V. show or travel to a new city or country?
- See a friend in person but not be able to talk to them or not be able to see a friend but be able to talk to them?
- Have dinner with your favorite celebrity or win \$1,000?
- Sing in the choir at church or serve in the altar?

Activity #1: Read Matthew 14:28-33

And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Discussion:

- Who did Jesus call? *He called to Peter.*
- What did Peter do? *He went to Christ by walking on the water.*
- What happened to Peter? Why did he begin to sink? *Peter was distracted by the winds and storm which made him afraid. He lost his focus on Jesus.*
- How are we like Peter? *Let them think about this. Help them brainstorm ways we are like Peter: we may lose focus of Jesus, there may be things in our life that make us afraid, we trust Jesus will be there for us, etc.*
- Where were the disciples? What were they thinking?
Let them think about it. The disciples were on the boat watching Peter walk on water. They witnessed the miracle of Jesus and Peter. They saw Jesus save Peter and knew him to be the Son of God.

Craft Activity: Have the students trace their foot on a piece of paper. Let them decorate their shoe print by drawing waves, fish, and a boat. Have them draw a family member, a friend, or loved one inside their footprint of someone they have a great connection with. After some time, allow the students to share their work.

Activity #2: Story From the Mission Field - Connecting Hearts in South Korea

Read about OCMC Missionary to South Korea, Fr. Chris Moore, to your group. Discuss how his connection with Christ brought him closer to someone he didn't know, and how he was able to bring them to Christ.

Discussion:

- Who was the story about? *Fr. Chris and his guest.*
- What happened? *A man came to his church seeking healing.*
- What did Fr. Chris do? *He sat with the man, listened to what was troubling him, and prayed for him many times.*
- When did the man start to feel better? *After he started going to Church more and speaking with Fr. Chris. A spark of love for Christ was in his heart.*
- How can we connect with other people? *Let them think about this. We don't know what the other person is going through. We can help them heal by being there for them because of our love for Christ.*

Activity #3: Read the life of St. Photini

Read aloud or allow the students to take turns reading portions of the life of St. Photini. Reflect on how her life is an example we can follow. Read the Gospel of John (4:5-42) for the story of the Samaritan woman.

Discussion:

- Who was St. Photini? *She was the Samaritan woman that Christ met at the well.*
- Where did St. Photini share the Good News? *She shared the Good News of Christ with throughout Samaria and North Africa.*
- What good works did St. Photini do to glorify God? *She shared the Gospel everywhere she went.*
- By connecting with Christ, who did St. Photini connect with? *Answers include: her family, the people in Samaria & Carthage, Emperor Nero's daughter & her slaves, and the prisoners.*
- What difficulties did St. Photini face? *She was tortured, in prison for three years, and thrown down a well.*
- Did she ever stop believing in Christ? *No, she sang and praised Him until she fell asleep in the Lord.*

Craft Activity: Prayer Bracelet for Lent - Beads and string/pipe cleaner.

Prayer is a beautiful gift given to us by God. Just like how prayer helped keep St. Photini connected to Christ, it can help us too. We grow our relationships with Christ by talking to him and asking for help to strengthen and heal our bonds with others. Throughout Great Lent, ask the students to take time every day to pray for those in your life that are important to you.

Have the students choose different colored beads to create their bracelet. Share with them that each color represents someone special in their life that they can pray for. Allow them to put their craft together and share their bracelets with the class.

- Blue – Jesus and the Saints
- Yellow – Family (parents, siblings, cousins, etc.)
- Red – Friends
- Purple - Parish Priest
- Green - Any you know who is sick.
- Orange - Someone you look up to
- Pink/White/Black - Someone who hurt you.

Modification: Since the assortment of beads varies depending on the brand or colors available, use the listing above as an example. Change colors around or combine groups together. The goal of this activity is to help the students learn on to pray by praying for others.

Activity #4: Assemble the OCMC Coin Boxes & Prayer to St. Photini

Discuss how these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center to send people who have answered God's call to help connect the world to Christ. Send the boxes home with the students and ask them to fill them and return the boxes at a time you decide upon. Encourage the class to pray for OCMC missionaries and mission priests regularly.

A Prayer to St. Photini

Illuminated by the Holy Spirit, All-Glorious One,
from Christ the Savior you drank the water of salvation.
With open hand you give it to those who thirst.
Great-Martyr Photini, Equal-to-the-Apostles,
pray to Christ for the salvation of our souls.

*Connecting Hearts in South Korea*Story From the Mission Field

Since January 2019, OCMC missionary Fr. Christopher Moore and his family have served the Orthodox Church in Ulsan, South Korea. At his parish of St. Dionysios of Zakynthos Orthodox Church, Fr. Chris sometimes encounters people who are not connected to the Orthodox Christian faith. Sometimes, they come seeking help in a holy place where one can receive encouragement, spiritual guidance, and friendly hospitality.

One afternoon a man stopped by the church. His head was hung low, his face was sunken, and he was soft-spoken. Fr. Chris believed Christ brought them together and blessed them with patience for one another. Since they could not speak each other's language well, they used an auto-translator to communicate.

The man, with a heavy heart, came to the Church for help. In the past he had a strong connection to Christianity, but, over time, he had grown cold towards Christ and his faith. On this day however, he came seeking repentance and found a new start when he stepped into an Orthodox church for the first time.

Fr. Chris and the man talked through some of his issues and prayed many times together. After four or five visits, through the grace of God, his heart became lighter, and a smile grew on his face. The man seemed to be finding a spark of love for Christ in his heart again. When it came time for their last meeting, the man told Fr. Chris he was moving to a different city. So, they prayed once more and thanked God for bringing them together.

Sometimes we are unsure if we can connect with other people. They might look different, talk different, or be experiencing a struggle we cannot see. We often wonder if they are going to be honest and true with us. But if we can soften our hearts, trust in the Holy Spirit's presence in our life, and see Christ in the other person, we can form a bond that is beautiful and help bring a healing presence through the love of Christ.

*The Life of St. Photini, Equal to the Apostles***Commemorated: February 26, March 20, & the fifth Sunday after Pascha**

St. Photini lived during the 1st century first in Palestine, and later North Africa in what is modern-day Tunisia. According to Church tradition, she was the Samaritan woman that Jesus Christ met at Jacob's well, as recorded in the Gospel of John (4:5-42).

Shortly after Pentecost, the Samaritan woman was among the first to be baptized by the Holy Apostles. She was given the Christian name Photini meaning "the enlightened one." Along with her five sisters and two sons, St. Photini traveled across Samaria preaching the Good News of Christ and settled in Carthage (modern-day Tunisia). Their missionary journey took place when Nero, Emperor of Rome, began persecuting Christians. He made it a crime to preach about Jesus. So, when this and future events were revealed to St. Photini in a dream, she along with her followers sailed for Rome.

Upon her arrival, curiosity grew throughout the capital city. Everyone wondered, "Who is this woman?" "She came here with a crowd of followers and she preaches Christ with great boldness." Soldiers brought her and her companions before Emperor Nero who demanded that they stop believing in Jesus. Unafraid of the maddened ruler, Photini tried to convert even him to the Christian faith. Nero ordered them to be tortured, but they felt no pain. He even tried to use his own daughter to get them to deny Jesus. St. Photini, after connecting with Nero's daughter, converted and saw her baptized along with her slaves.

For three years, St. Photini and her followers were held in a Roman prison where she preached and converted many. After many efforts to force her to worship idols, the emperor had her thrown into a deep, dry well and then into prison again. One night, Jesus appeared to her and made the sign of the cross over her three times. Filled with joy from this vision, she sang and praised the Lord for many days. In the year 66 A.D., St. Photini fell asleep in the Lord.

She was a living example of how our connection with Christ can connect us to each other. She holds a place of honor with the title "Equal to the Apostles" for her great work in sharing the Good News and building up the Church through missionary work.

O, Holy Saint Photini, Equal to the Apostles, pray unto God for us!

