

WE APPROACH THE LENTEN JOURNEY

A Lesson Plan for Youth

Presbytera Georget Photos

The manner in which we take a trip makes a big difference in how much we derive from our adventure and how much we enjoy ourselves. We would not go to the beach without sunblock; the outcome could be very painful. Just the same, we would not go skiing without the proper attire; we would freeze from the cold. The journey through Great Lent is the same in many ways. To experience everything the season has to offer, we must prepare for the journey. If you would like to take the challenge, this is your first step.

Let's consider the following scenario: How far would you go to see, hear and speak to Christ? Considering everything in your life at this moment, do you feel ready to face Christ? Before Great Lent begins, we have five weeks of preparation. In the first week, depending on the liturgical cycle, we will hear of Zacchaeus in the Gospel lesson. Zacchaeus was a tax collector—not a sterling character by any means. He lied and stole from his neighbors in the name of his occupation. His strong curiosity to see and hear Christ drove him up a sycamore tree. It was his genuine desire to hear the truth that saved him. Jesus immediately asked Zacchaeus to descend from the tree and went home with him. The tax collector was so moved by Christ that he repented and gave back all he had stolen from his neighbors, up to twice the amount!

Now let us put ourselves in Zacchaeus's place. No one is perfect. If we show a true desire before and during Great Lent, might we also benefit as much as Zacchaeus did? Three things had happened here. First, Zacchaeus had a desire; he was receptive to

Christ. Second, Zacchaeus was a sinner, but because of his drive to witness what Christ had to offer, he was given the blessing of salvation. Third, Christ was so moved by his genuine action that he showed mercy on Zacchaeus's house. Does this mean that if we make an honest effort, Christ will reward us also? If you have the curiosity, courage and, most of all, the desire, then try this project!

LENT JOURNEY BRACELET

- Pen and paper
 - 20 pony beads in a color you hate
 - 20 pony beads in a color you love
 - 2 plastic sandwich bags
 - 8 inches of plastic, hemp, thin jewelry wire or thin chain
 - Jewelry clasp and fittings (if wire or chain is used)
1. On the front side of the sheet of paper, list all of your spiritual weaknesses and deficiencies. This is a private matter, not to be shared with your friends or family. (You might complete this part of the activity with the guidance of your parish priest in the context of confession.) This is not a competition to see who has the most sins, nor should you wear the bracelet in pride of your sins: that defeats the purpose. When listing your weaknesses consider pride, swearing, stealing, gossip, malice, not praying, lying, hatred, envy, greed, cruelty, etc. List them all!

2. On the back of the sheet, list all of your spiritual strengths and virtues. Consider helping at home, praying, helping your family, love, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, work, school, church, etc.
3. Take the 8-inch cord or chain you have selected. Make sure it is sturdy, because you will be wearing it and slipping beads on and off for the entire period of the Triodion, Great Lent and Holy Week. Form a slipknot at one end. At the other end, place a clasp or another slipknot. Make sure that you can easily add and remove beads.

This is not a contest to see who has the cutest bracelet. Remember this during its construction. Add 10 of the beads you dislike to the bracelet first; these beads represent your sins and spiritual weaknesses and will make you aware of what you have to change. Place the remaining 10 beads in a plastic sandwich bag.

4. Now add your 10 of your favorite color beads. These beads represent your virtues. Put the remaining beads into the other bag.
5. Tie or fasten the bracelet and place it on your right wrist. Every time you make the sign of the cross during, the bracelet will remind you of what you are working toward.

Now that you have constructed the bracelet, what is your goal?

That is where the challenge lies.

6. On your iconostasis at home, place the sheet of paper, the chart on page 3 and the bags with the extra beads. If you do not already have an icon area somewhere at home, take an icon of Christ, the Virgin Mary holding Christ or your patron saint (e.g., St. Demetrios, St. George) and keep it close to your bed or an area in which you feel comfortable praying. Place a little electric light or candle there to illuminate your icon.

7. Recite St. Ephraim's Prayer:

Lord and Master of my life!

Take away from me the spirit of sloth, faintheartedness, lust of power and idle talk.

But grant rather the spirit of purity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen.

8. Every evening of the Lenten season before you retire and say your evening prayers, you have a job to do. Recite St. Ephraim's Prayer, and then review your list of strengths and weaknesses. For each of your "bad" points that you have corrected, release the clasp or knot, remove a negative bead and add a positive bead. For any "good" points you have slipped up on, remove a positive bead and add a negative bead.

- Frequent communion, church attendance, participating in the choir, assisting the priest in the altar or with special projects, and participating in Sunday school (as a student, assistant or teacher) earn you a "good" bead.
- When you skip a day or a week of entry, add a "bad" bead for each of the skipped days.
- If you add something "bad" to the list that you have not previously done, add a bead to the bracelet. Do likewise for the "good" points.

9. Now count the beads of each color on your bracelet. Record the number on the chart below. Use the shaded area for "bad" and the unshaded area for "good." Fold your chart and list and put them back under the icon.

10. Your goal is to come as close as possible to removing all of your negative (sin) beads and increasing your positive (virtue) beads. During this time, you will develop a stronger sense of prayer and motivation. When you reflect on your sheet for the last time, you will see your development.

Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Zacchaeus							
Publican & Pharisee							<i>First Saturday of the Souls</i>
Prodigal Son							<i>Second Saturday of the Souls</i>
Forgiveness Sunday							<i>Third Saturday of the Souls</i>
Sunday of Orthodoxy (1st Sunday of Lent)							
St. Gregory Palamas (2nd Sunday of Lent)							
Veneration of the Holy Cross (3rd Sunday of Lent)							
St. John Climacus (St. John of the Ladder) (4th Sunday of Lent)							
St. Mary of Egypt (5th Sunday of Lent)							<i>Saturday of Lazarus</i>
Palm Sunday (6th Sunday of Lent)	<i>Palm Sunday</i>	<i>Holy Monday</i>	<i>Holy Tuesday</i>	<i>Holy Wednesday</i>	<i>Holy Thursday</i>	<i>Holy Friday</i>	<i>Holy Saturday</i>
Holy Pascha	Take off your bracelet!						