

# HOLY WEDNESDAY AND HOLY THURSDAY

Magazine pages 9–11

**Christ heals us, makes us whole, and unites us to each other and to Him, through the sacraments of Holy Unction and Holy Communion.**

## MATERIALS

- *Journey through Holy Week* zine for each student
- Chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers

## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- **Work together** to experience the importance of unity and mutual dependence.
- **Personalize** their role as a member of the body of Christ.
- **Connect** the image of mutual dependence on the spiritual unity of the body of Christ.
- **Focus** understanding of unity in the direction of service to others.

## INTRODUCTION

This lesson includes the service of Holy Unction on Holy Wednesday, the Last Supper and Eucharist on Holy Thursday morning, and Christ's betrayal on Holy Thursday evening. It begins by showing that all people should be in unity as the Body of Christ. At the Last Supper, by washing the feet of the disciples, Christ shows that humble service goes along with His unifying presence and sacrifice. This illustrates how we also are called to serve each other, and to be in unity with each other and with Christ. The next level of Christ's unity with us is in the physical pain He feels in the Garden of Gethsemane on Holy Thursday evening.

Note: In some parishes, the sacrament of Holy Unction is celebrated on Holy Wednesday during the day and the Orthros for Holy Thursday (a Bridegroom Service) is chanted that evening.

## Opening Prayer

Lord our God, the source of all wisdom and truth, send down upon us the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of discernment. Enlighten the eyes of our souls with the light of Your knowledge, that we may learn from Your wisdom and grow in virtue, to the glory of Your name. Amen.

## PROCEDURES

### 1. Focusing Activity: Sentence Relay

The purpose of this activity is to show the importance of working together, depending on one another to accomplish something, and having unity. It is a “chalkboard relay,” with each team contributing a word on the board. The first team to create a complete a sensible sentence on the board is the winning team. Rules: The sentence must contain as many words as there are students on that team. The sentence doesn’t have to be true, but it must really be a sentence: it must be grammatically correct and make sense.

Divide the class into two teams.

Set a timer or watch for 1–5 minutes, depending on how many students you have. The smaller your group and teams, the less time they will need.

Once the timer starts, each team sends one student at a time to the board to write a word until every student has contributed a word. (Keep an eye on the activity to note which team creates a complete sentence first.)

If both teams finish at about the same time and both have written sentences, don’t worry about declaring a winner. Remember that the point is that each team relies on every member in order to create the sentence; if both teams have succeeded in this, show support for both.

**Note:** If you have a small class or don’t prefer to divide your class into two teams, this activity will also work with one group; the main idea—needing each other and working together—still comes across with one “team.”

After the teams finish, lead a discussion of the activity, with the following questions:

- If you were the first person to write a word, what helped you decide what to write?

*Students may or may not say that they had to*

*think about what might be a good start to a sentence, and how their teammates would follow their word.*

- If you had to follow someone else’s word, what did you have to think about before you decided what to write?

*Students may respond that they had to think about what the person before them had written, and what might make sense for the person after them might write.*

Have students again read their sentences. Point out or guide students to notice the most important part of this activity: **every person needed to participate and contribute in order to write the sentence. Every word is necessary for the sentence to have been written.**

### 2. Name present praxis

Guide students to the conclusion that our faith teaches us that we **are all united in one body, the Body of Christ**, and all parts of this Body are necessary for full and healthy functioning. (Just like all members of the team were necessary to write the sentence.)

### 3. Reflect on present praxis

Ask students:

- If we are all members of this unified Body of Christ, what part of this body do you feel that you are? Are you the hands, feet, eyes, ears, voice, etc.?

Be sure to ask them why they feel that way. If need be, allow this question to “hang,” and you may get some insightful answers, such as:

*“The eyes, because I see possibilities before me; the feet, because I want to actively help people; the ears, because I help people by listening to them, and/or am trying to listen to God’s guidance; the voice, because I have a gift for sharing ideas with people; the hands,*

**HOLY WEDNESDAY**  
**HOLY UNCTION**



If you have ever had a cold or the flu, you probably know that when you're sick, you are just not yourself! In fact, if you become very ill, it can be very hard to even imagine or remember what it feels like to be your normal, healthy self. Have you ever broken a bone, sprained an ankle, or injured yourself? If so, maybe you couldn't do some of the simple things that you would have normally taken for granted. You needed help. You wanted to be whole again. You needed healing.

Not being ourselves and needing help from others are two problems that we bring with us to church on Holy Wednesday evening, when we receive the Sacrament of Holy Unction. This tradition of anointing with blessed oils is recorded in the Epistle of James. We believe that when we are anointed, Jesus Christ restores our wholeness both physically and spiritually.

We need this sacrament of healing in two ways: as individual Christians and as a community of Christians, the Body of Christ.

Just like having the flu makes you feel less than yourself physically, being spiritually sick also makes you less than yourself. All of us are spiritually sick, but what does this mean? Our imperfections and sins, when we "miss the mark," are our ailments. If we were to be ourselves as God intended us to be, then we would glorify Him in everything we do. Most of us do not succeed in this. When we tend to be lazy, want more for ourselves than for others, or forget to be thankful, we are not being ourselves. Inside, our souls are divided and broken instead of whole, healthy, and complete. These are some of our sicknesses. Every one of us must visit the spiritual hospital that is the Church, to ask the Lord to heal us inside and help us become whole and healthy human beings. It is impossible to think about an individual's spiritual healing without remembering how tightly connected we all are to one another. No matter how spiritually sick or well we are, all of our actions affect everyone around us. No sin is the story of just one person. The good news is that all of an individual person's positive actions also affect the people around him or her. The point is that the sacrament of Holy Unction heals our sickness and brokenness both as individuals and as the whole body of Christian people.

Remember what it is like to have a broken or sprained bone: you need help from others with simple tasks like opening doors or even tying your shoes. As the Body of Christ, we all need one another. But the body is broken. In our broken state, we forget this. We put ourselves before others; we think we are better than others; we don't always treat each other with respect; we may hurt other people without meaning to. All of these things happen because we need to be healed of our spiritual sicknesses.

The Sacrament of Holy Unction restores the whole Body of Christ to fullness, reconnecting people to one another. We can treat each other with the respect that all people, who are all created in the image and likeness of God, deserve. When this happens, we can actually see each other in a new light. We may actually look different to each other if we are striving for our brokenness to be healed. Holy Unction can restore the Body of Christ to fullness and togetherness.

**Jesus restores our wholeness**



because I help people by making or doing things for them."

The above answers were taken from Greek Orthodox young people when this question was asked during a summer camp discussion group. Don't be afraid to ask this unconventional question!

#### 4. Access the Christian story and vision

Read pages 9–10.

Alternatively, you could have the students read page 9 and then discuss Holy Unction. Then have students read page 10 and discuss the Last Supper.

Explain that the sacraments of our Church help to nurture this unity, and we commemorate the celebration of two of these sacraments on Holy Wednesday and Holy Thursday: Unction and Communion.

To discuss Holy Unction (p. 9), emphasize the following points:

- Just as when we are sick or injured, we rely on each other more, we also need each other for spiritual help, too. For example, a troubled person might need a friend who is the

"ears" of Christ, to listen, or a confused person might need a friend who is the "voice" of Christ, to help explain something.

- Just like in the opening activity, each person's actions affect the whole group.
- The sacrament of Holy Unction heals each individual and unifies the whole group—the whole Body of Christ.

When you discuss Holy Communion (Holy Thursday morning, p. 10), emphasize the following points:

- Just as Holy Unction is life-giving, Christ's sacrifice at His Mystical Supper gives life to us as His Body.
- The bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit and are life-giving to each person who partakes of Holy Communion.
- When we partake of Holy Communion, we unite with Him and we unite with each other because we share in a common meal, with shared food, even a shared cup and plate.
- Christ chose to wash His disciples' feet at the Mystical Supper for a reason, and this choice teaches us something: **uniting with us and bringing us life go hand-in-hand with doing humble service for others.**
- Just as receiving Holy Communion is life-giving, so is service to others.

#### 5. Appropriate the story and vision

Explain to students:

- Christ's choice to wash His disciples' feet answers the question, "What do I do to show that I care for or love someone?" It is an example of an action that young people can imitate in a practical way, through service. It shows that true leadership exists in service.
- Also, it **connects the Orthodox Church's**

## HOLY THURSDAY MORNING

**O**n the morning of Holy Thursday, Christ shares salvation with us, uniting us to Him and to each other in one sacramental moment. We join Him in the upper room, where He offers the first Eucharist. Imagine sitting at the table with your beloved teacher and friend, Jesus. It is the Pasover meal, a sacred tradition that you have observed year after year, a time to thank God for freeing His people from slavery in Egypt. But this time is different because Jesus says, "Take, eat, this is my body of the new covenant.... Drink from it, all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

We hear this at every Divine Liturgy, but what does it mean? What did it mean the first time, at the Pasover meal?

It means life. We say "food is life" because it keeps our bodies going. In the Eucharist, the gifts of food—bread and wine—are sanctified and consecrated. They become a gift of everlasting life, the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The change is not physical, but mystical. The "qualities" of the materials they were created to be, but through blood of our Lord. When we receive Him into ourselves bodily and spiritually, we allow Him to live inside us; we make it more possible to live our lives in Him. We also call the Eucharist "communion" because we partake together. To keep Christ in and to live a life in Him is to live in loving communion with others.

In the upper room, Jesus does something else that surprises His disciples: He washes their feet. To wash someone's feet is an act of great humility. Coming from their beloved teacher, guide, and Lord, the disciples do not know how to receive this action. Why does He do it? Christ washes their feet for the same reason that He is crucified: He offers Himself as a humble servant who, as God Himself, also is supremely strong. When He washes His disciples' feet, He shows that He loves each of them intensely and personally, as He loves each of us.

**Christ Washing the Apostles' Feet**

- In the Gospel of John, there is no story of the Last Supper as we usually think about it. Instead, at a supper before Jesus's betrayal, Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. The icon shows Jesus washing Peter's feet. Read John 13:6-9 to see how Peter reacts.
- Washing the feet of another person was one of the most extreme forms of humility at the time of Jesus, something that usually a servant or a slave would do for a guest in a house. What do you think Jesus wanted to say about Himself by washing the feet of His disciples?

**We allow Him to live inside us**

- Read John 15:5-8. In the icon, find each person the passage describes. Who is the person closest to Jesus, and what is he doing?

**The Mystical (Last) Supper**

- Many icons have a red cloth hanging in the background to remind us that the event is taking place indoors.

## HOLY THURSDAY EVENING

**W**e enter into Christ's darkest hour, when in His final earthly days, He is betrayed and gives Himself up to be crucified. We spend a lot of time listening to twelve Gospel accounts of these events.

We go with Jesus to the garden of Gethsemane, where His prayer shows us that He is completely human and completely obedient to His Father. He knows that He is going to die, which brings Him intense pain. He first asks His Father to take the pain away, but then says, "not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). Because He is really human, it really hurts that He must be unjustly crucified. Because He is a perfect human, He obeys out of love for His Father and for the rest of us, whom He saves by His crucifixion and resurrection. All of us can relate to the prayer to "make it go away" when we have to deal with something painful. It's okay to pray this, but Christ shows us the next step—accepting and trusting God's will.

The hymns we hear focus on a great contrast. Christ, who is our God, is treated as a lowly criminal. Each phrase of the hymn compares ideas of Christ's glory with details of His suffering.

Today is hung upon the tree, He who suspended the land in the midst of the waters.

A crown of thorns crowns Him, who is the king of angels. He is wrapped about with the purple of mockery, who wrapped the heavens with clouds.

He received buffetings, who freed Adam in the Jordan. He was transfused with nails, the Bridegroom of the Church. He was pierced with a spear, the Son of the Virgin. We worship your passion, O Christ. Show us also your glorious resurrection.

This can be a long service, with lots of standing still, lots of trying to pay attention to the readings. Try to focus on the stories, listening or reading along, because the whole story is about each and every one of us. It's okay to feel a little sorry or tired. It's okay if your feet hurt. Let those hurting feet stand with Christ in His physical and emotional pain on this day. Remember that He endured our every human pain and discomfort, walking obediently through it during these last days of His earthly life.

**Crucifixion**

- The plaque at the top of the cross has Greek letters that abbreviate "The King of Glory." Read Psalm 24:7-10 and John 18:33-37. How do these two passages relate to one another and to the cross?
- There is a small skull in the earth below the cross, as the very bottom of the icon. It reminds us that Jesus was crucified at "the place of the skull," Golgotha. A tradition teaches that this is the skull of Adam, the first human.
- Read Matthew 27:54 to see what the centurion (Roman army officer) is saying. According to Orthodox tradition, his name is Longinos. He is a saint of the Church, and his feast day is October 18.

**His prayer shows us that He is completely human and obedient**

**sacramental life and the call to serve.** As Orthodox Christians, we start in our church, in communion with each other and with Christ, and then take Christ's love out into the world, in our actions.

- **We are called to partake of Holy Communion, but that when we do, we are also called to follow His example of humble service.**
- One way we can serve God is to plan to attend certain Holy Week services as a group and sit together. One of the reasons we call them "services" is that our attendance and participation in them is an act of "service to God."

## 6. Decision for lived response

**Review the main ideas of this lesson:**

- We are one Body, and all of us need each other.
- We are healed and unified to each other and to Christ in the sacraments of Holy Unction and Holy Communion.
- We are called to sustain this unity by serv-

ing one another as Christ served others, in humility.

Ask students:

- How can your faith in these ideas change the way you live?

Encourage students to share specific ways that they can carry forward these messages in their lives and how it may change their perspective or choices.

## Closing Prayer Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, deliver me from the spirit of laziness, meddling, vain ambition, and idle talk.

Grant to me, Your servant, the spirit of prudence, humility, patience, and love.

Yes, Lord and King; grant me that I may see my own faults, and to not judge my brothers and sisters, for You are blessed to the ages of ages. Amen.