



EASTER TO PENTECOST

Parent Guide

HOW TO USE **MY SUNDAY SHEPHERD**

Sometimes we forget: children have a special relationship with God. Remember what Jesus said, “Amen I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (*Mark 10:15*).

Jesus recognized that the spiritual life of children is close to God. For Jesus, it is the child—not the adult—who is the model of spirituality. Jesus told us adults that we have something to learn from children.

The purpose of MY SUNDAY SHEPHERD is to assist parents both to nurture and to be enriched by the spiritual life of our children. We do this by praying in a way that enables our children to pray with us.

The Story Picture on the Front Cover



MY SUNDAY SHEPHERD features

a carefully illustrated cover picture that tells the story of the Sunday readings and, on the back, a prayer guide with few words. The words are few because young children cannot read. What’s more, we want to encourage you to tell God’s story in your own words. The cover picture is your visual aid; it tells God’s story in visual language children can understand. So, when you tell God’s story in your words, let your children tell you, too, what they see in the picture. Their insights can provide nourishment for your own spiritual life.

After you have talked with your child about the story, your child might want to create an original

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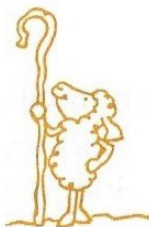
Mary Vidmar

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picture on a separate paper. Such an activity might help express your child's reflection or response to God's word, having heard the word *first through you*.

You might then display your child's original drawing with MY SUNDAY SHEPHERD on your refrigerator or in your child's room. As the liturgical season unfolds, you will have a display of pictures that illustrate the life of Jesus which we celebrate through the Church Year.

The Scripture/ Prayer Guide on the Back Cover



1. GOD SPEAKS TO US is a carefully worded summary of the Sunday scripture texts. You may use this *after* you and your child have reflected on God's story. This summary focuses on the Good News in a way that relates God's word to your child's experience.

When we tell our children scripture stories, it is enough if we convey to them in simple words *what God says*. We need *not* be in a hurry to tell them what we think they should hear. Rather, we need to listen to what our children have heard God say to them...and enjoy the surprise of God's presence in their lives. Of course, we can share with them what we heard God say to us, but not in such a way as to devalue their response. Respect for our child reflects our respect for the creative power of God's word and of God's Spirit alive in our child.

2. WE RESPOND is a short prayerful reply to God who has spoken to us in the scriptures. When someone speaks to us, we reply. The same is so with God.

3. MORNING PRAYER and EVENING PRAYER sustain our conversation with God through the week. We based the content of these prayers on God's word for that week.

In the MORNING PRAYER we praise God for the gift of a new day and incorporate the sign of the cross with the prayer. Taking time to pray may seem impossible, given our hurried, harried lives. However, even a very brief, time set aside each morning to pray—at breakfast or after dressing—nurtures an attitude of praise and gratitude.

The EVENING PRAYER is more reflective as we ask God to accept what we have made of our day and, as we sleep, to protect us, our family and those we remember who are in need of God's care.

4. The PARENT/CHILD REFLECTION is a vital part of our children's—and our own—spiritual life. This reflection may happen at any time of day or evening—when our child may crawl under the covers with us, or in the car on the way to somewhere. Those are privileged times. We can see the world through the eyes of our child and listen to God speak to our child—and to us—through our child's experience and sense of wonder. "A little child shall lead us. . . ." (*Isaiah 11:9*).

FAMILY RITUALS AND THE SEASON OF EASTER



Easter follows the season of Lent—traditionally the time of penance and self-denial when we focus on sharing in the cross of Jesus. Now, during Easter, we do not abandon the cross. We embrace it as the cross of victory over suffering and death. With this cross we bless ourselves in the morning and at night, when we enter and leave church, when we begin or end a prayer, or when we begin or end a meal.

The cross of Jesus gives life everlasting. This is the foundation of our faith. Jesus died, rose to new life, ascended to heaven, and sent the Spirit to be with us always. So we continue during Easter time to express that grand mystery of love through the sign of the cross.

The meaning of the cross that we want to share with our children embraces both the suffering of Jesus and the glory of life without pain and death. The Spirit of Jesus fills us with joy because the Lord is risen as he said, and we know that we will never be alone again.

The ritual blessing with the sign of the cross is a special gift we parents can give to our children. The EVENING PRAYER features this parental blessing through the season of Easter with the hope that your child might also bless you through this holy season and throughout the year.

Sunday after Sunday during

Easter, the story of Jesus' glory unfolds. Each week, the picture on MY SUNDAY SHEPHERD adds another episode to the story full of surprises.

- The gospel for the Second Sunday proclaims a message of great joy. Jesus is alive! He shows his followers his wounds. "Peace be with you," he greets them. "Receive the Holy Spirit." Again, Jesus shows his concern for the needs of his followers—and for our needs, too.

- On the Third Sunday, we hear the beautiful story of Emmaus. No surprise that the followers of Jesus did not recognize the risen Lord until the ritual blessing of the bread. The question is: do we? The story and ritual of Emmaus is our story, too. What a wonderful story and ritual to celebrate with our children in our homes. We praise you, Lord Jesus, in the food we share and in everyone we meet.

- The scriptures for the Fourth Sunday describe a familiar image that reveals the tender feelings of Jesus for his followers. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who calls us by name. Those who follow Jesus recognize his voice in their hearts. In you, Lord Jesus, we place our trust. Guide us. Protect us . . . especially our children.

- The scriptures for the Fifth Sunday describe still another image of our close relationship with Jesus. The work of Jesus includes preparing a special place for each of us in God's house. The image need

not be taken literally. But the message is clear: when we follow Jesus, we will find our place with God. We need not worry. No one will be left out. The work of Jesus in preparing God's house is also our work—making of this world a place where people can find a home with God. Lord Jesus, we enter the house of our God with joy!

- On the Sixth Sunday, Jesus makes a wonderful promise. While he must return to his Father, he will not leave us alone. He will send the Spirit of God to be with us. When we try to live in the Spirit of Jesus, we can rest assured, Jesus is with us.

- Then, on Ascension, we celebrate the return of Jesus to his place in glory with God. Seeing Jesus leave must have been a bitter-sweet event for the followers of Jesus. Nevertheless, they trusted in him. They returned to Jerusalem to pray, awaiting the gift of the Spirit, when Jesus promised to be with them in a new way. Little did they know the impact that the Spirit would have on their lives.

- The scriptures for the Seventh Sunday send another clear message. There is power in prayer—not earthly power but the strength that comes from the movement of God's Spirit. So, when we pray, we listen more than we speak. We acknowledge God's presence in our lives, remembering always that it is the Spirit who moves us to pray.

So, when we pray, like the followers of Jesus, we are alert to the movement of the Spirit.

- Pentecost—the celebration of God with us in even greater abundance. Gathered in prayer, the followers of Jesus were filled with the fire of the Spirit. Pentecost marks the beginning of the mission of God's people to continue the work of Jesus: to proclaim God's unfailing love and mercy, and to be, like Jesus, merciful and caring.

Throughout the Easter Season, we see the vivid expressions of Jesus' love for his followers. Having risen from the dead, he returns to reassure them of his victory over death. Knowing they feel troubled, he says, "Peace be with you." Again and again, he reassures his followers of life and love everlasting. He leads them to recognize God's hidden presence in our lives—through the breaking of the bread at Emmaus. Jesus enlightens us with knowledge of the Spirit, that when we live as Jesus lived and continue his work, we find our place in God's house both now and forever. Surely this day—and each and every day—is a day our God has made. Let us be glad and give thanks. Alleluia!

