

“The Spirit of Peace”

Level: 9th Grade to Adult

Themes: “Acquire the spirit of peace, and a thousand souls around you shall be saved.”
– St. Seraphim of Sarov

“Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”
– James 3:18

Objectives:

- **Introduce** the idea to “acquire the spirit of peace, and a thousand souls around you shall be saved”
- **Establish** a connection between the “spirit of peace” and the ability to share Christ with those who do not know Him and to pique interest in those who do not know Him.
- **Understand** that when we have a spirit of peace, that helps to show others about the peacefulness and love that Christ is in us. It helps make others want to know more about us and our beliefs.
- **Challenge** students to realize that it is part of our faith to share Christ with others.
- **Identify** the ways that Orthodox Missionaries (such as Christina Semon) have a spirit of peace that assists them in their mission to spread the love of God.
- **Act** by collecting funds throughout Lent with the Mission Coin Boxes to support the work of the Mission Center so that many more are empowered to use their spirit of peace to bring others to the faith.

Overview:

The purpose of this lesson is to examine the concept of inner peace as understood in an Orthodox context, through the eyes of Missions. This will be done through the following:

- Participating in a fun activity to demonstrate the positive and negative effects of inner peace
- Sharing a story about one young woman’s experience with inner peace
- Engaging in a discussion about inner peace
- Identifying ways that inner peace can be shared with others.

Pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God

We pray for all people from all nations around the world

That they may come to know the peace that is only offered through a life lived with You.

Help me to open my own heart to your peace, and that I would be a good example of your love to others.

That I may be bold to welcome new believers into your Church

And that people will know that I am a Christian by my peace and my life.

Lesson:

Assemble the students at their desks and begin the lesson with a prayer, and consider using the prayer provided. Read the Bible verse, as well as the quote from St. Seraphim of Sarov. To encourage a deeper understanding of the verse and quote, ask the students to repeat the verse with you a second time, or ask a student to read the verse and quote.

Activity 1: “Steal vs. Share” Icebreaker (Directions)

- Begin the lesson with a prayer (consider using the prayer provided)
- Lead the participants in the “Steal vs. Share” icebreaker activity
- Introduce the discussion topic

Activity 2: Meet Christina, OCMC Missionary to Moldova (Directions)

- Read the short story about OCMC Missionary Christina Semon
- Guide the discussion using the discussion questions provided
- Reflect on the quote by St. Seraphim of Sarov

Activity 3: Assemble the OCMC Coin Boxes (Directions)

Discuss how these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center to spread Christ’s love around the world. Send the boxes home with the students and ask them to fill them and return the boxes at a time you decide upon. Remind the class of their role in spreading Christ’s love through having a spirit of peace within themselves.

Activity Sheet I: Who is a “peaceful” person?

This activity will serve as an icebreaker to prepare the group for a spiritual discussion about inner peace and its effect on others.

Materials: small candies (such as Skittles), cups/bowls to hold each person’s candies

- To begin, divide the group in half; one half will be designated the “sharers” and the other half will be the “stealers”. Distribute equal amounts of candy to each sharer.
- The participants will take turns asking each other “favorites” questions (favorite sport, favorite movie, favorite ice cream flavor, etc.).
- Each time a “sharer” asks a question, after the other person has answered, then the questioner will “share” a few pieces of candy with the other person.
- Each time a “stealer” asks a question, after the other person has answered, then the questioner will “steal” a few pieces of candy from the other person.

Variations:

- Randomly assign the roles to the participants by distributing small sheets of paper marked with either “sharer” or “stealer”, so that the others will not know his/her designation right away.
- Have the participants stand in two lines facing each other; each line should be a mixture of sharers and stealers. The two lines will trade off asking questions. Each turn, rotate one line to the left or right, so that the game ends when the first line comes back around to the same people with whom they started.

Note to leader: The candy in the game represents “peace”. The goal of the activity is to demonstrate the positive effect we can have on others when we possess inner peace, and the negative effect we can have on others when we lack inner peace.

Discussion & Questions:

1. Which did you prefer, having candy stolen from you or having candy shared with you? Why?
2. *Explain: In this game, the candy represented inner peace.
Read the quote from James 3:18: "Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."*
3. How would you describe inner peace?
4. How does one acquire inner peace?
5. Inner peace is illusive. What do we do when we lose it? How do we gain it back?
6. What role does God play in our inner peace (or lack thereof)?
7. How do you understand what the Apostle James is saying?
[i.e. the seeds (peace) grow into the fruits (righteousness)]

Activity 2: Meet Christina, OCMC Missionary to Moldova

I was baptized as an Orthodox Christian by my parents and they raised me Orthodox by participating in Sunday School, youth activities, and the Divine Liturgy every Sunday. Along with my church activities and school, I was involved with softball and swimming. At the end of high school, I was recruited by the softball coaches at Binghamton University (in New York) to play Division I softball on a scholarship. It was a dream come true! With a big smile on my face I started out my college life, however, a storm of challenges began to appear in the distance.

I was an hour away from home, independent, and ready to start this new phase of my life on my own. My life was changed by the college scene. I was in control of my life, but looking back, I realize now that I abused this freedom. The peace and balance that I had growing up was gone. But God allowed this darkness and would open doors for me that would show me the way back to His peace and love.

The key door that God opened for me was an opportunity to spend part of my college study abroad in Russia. My heart knew that this was a special opportunity, so special that I chose to give up my softball scholarship in order to go! During my time in Russia, I enjoyed living in an Orthodox country and I found myself surrounded by saints' relics, icons, and church communities. This time allowed me to reflect on my life and all of those things that helped shape me growing up – being surrounded by the Church and all of my friends and family in the Body of Christ. The peace I found as a result of this experience made me much stronger as a Christian and encouraged me to seek out a life where I could serve and work for the Church.

Once I graduated from college, I had to do what each of us has to do – work. Unsure of what God had for me next, I worked at Starbucks as well as in a factory. In the meantime, I couldn't ignore the call in my heart to serve the Church and to help people. I searched for international volunteer opportunities, because God had always put a love for travel and a curiosity for new cultures in my heart. I knew about the Peace Corps, but I expanded my search and, through God's help, was led to the Orthodox Christian Mission Center. I went to my spiritual father and shared with him what I thought God was speaking to my heart. Once I had his blessing, I shared my calling with my parents. I prayed that my parents would not worry too much, knowing that I was in God's hands.

I am blessed to be here in Moldova now, where I am able offer the joy of a life lived in Jesus Christ with young people who are just beginning to understand how deep Christ's love really reaches. In addition to organizing youth gatherings at the local church, I have become involved in several outreach programs to help young people. Whether we are assisting young mothers to care for their babies or teaching teenage girls valuable skills like cooking and sewing, through these social ministries we first and foremost show them that Christ loves them and cares about them; the love that we show to them is an imitation of Christ's love. Glory to God for all things!

Discussion & Questions:

1. What part of Christina's story stands out the most for you? Why?
2. How would you describe her journey towards inner peace?
3. In what ways does she share her peace with others?
4. *Read: When we have inner peace, it emanates from us, and others can see it in us. By the same token, when we lack inner peace, we can cause others to lose it.*
5. Have you ever felt like you lost your own peace, like Christina describes losing hers?
6. Have you ever met someone whom you would describe as truly peaceful? What effect did being around him/her have on you?
7. How can we gain peace ourselves, especially when we are surrounded by so many distractions from our daily life?
8. In what ways can we share our peace with others?
9. *Read: St. Seraphim of Sarov was a monastic father who lived in Russia in the 18th-19th centuries. He famously said, "Acquire the spirit of peace, and a thousand souls around you shall be saved."*
10. How do you think "a thousand souls...shall be saved" by someone who has acquired a spirit of peace?
11. What can you do in your life to accomplish this?

Activity 4: Assemble the OCMC Coin Boxes