

Level: High School/Adult

Bible Verse: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." -Matthew 25:40

Overview: The purpose of this lesson is to examine the concept of sharing the love of Christ. This will be done through the following:

- **Introduce** the theme of caring for others for the sake of Christ
- **Challenge** students to consider how we can care for people spiritually by sharing the love of Christ with them
- **Explore** some of the OCMC's mission efforts to care for the growing Orthodox Church in northwestern Guatemala
- **Identify** ways that Orthodox missions can serve Christ by serving other people
- **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

Note to Teacher: As Orthodox Christians, we are each called to participate in Christ's Great Commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Through this lesson, you will encourage your students to consider missions in the context of Christ's teachings about caring for one another in the Parable of the Judgment, Matthew 25:31-46. This parable calls us to see Christ in other people and to serve them as if we were serving Christ himself. You and your students will reflect on how serving others can be a means to spread the gospel and bring them to Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, We pray for all people from all nations around the world that they may come to know who You are because they see You alive in me. Help me to care for the spiritual and physical needs of others around me and around the world. Help me to be a good example of your love to others. That I may be bold to welcome new believers into your Church. Let my life be an example of Christian love and action.

Lesson: Assemble the group and begin the lesson with a prayer; consider using the prayer provided. Read out loud the Parable of the Judgment, Matthew 25:31-46. Discuss the concept that we will be judged based on our actions towards other people.

Activity 1: Group Share

- Lead the participants in the Group Share activity
- Transition the discussion by using the discussion questions provided

Activity 2: The Orthodox Church in Guatemala

- Read the reflections about Orthodox missions efforts in Guatemala
- Guide the discussion using the discussion questions provided
- Reflect on the theme to "Share the Love of Christ"

Activity 3: OCMC Coin Boxes

- Assemble the OCMC coin boxes
- Discuss how these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center to spread Christ's love in Guatemala and around the world. Send the boxes home with the students and ask them to fill them and return the boxes at a time you determine. Remind the class of their role in showing their love for Christ by bringing Christ to other people.

Read:***Matthew 25:31-46 (RSV)***

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Discussion**Question:**

1. What does this parable mean to you?
2. What criteria will God use to judge us?
3. What does it mean to care for "one of the least of these my brethren"? What kind of needs do other people have that we can fulfill?

Activity #1: *Group Share*

After the group has discussed Matthew 25:31-46 and the need to care for one another's needs, this activity will serve to move the discussion towards how we can apply this concept beyond a superficial understanding of only physical needs.

Taking turns, ask the participants to share the most encouraging thing that someone said to him/her this week.

**Discussion
Questions:**

1. How did it feel to receive encouragement from someone?
2. Do you think encouraging one another can have a positive effect on a person's soul? Why or why not?
3. The parable does not speak only of physical needs- being hungry or thirsty. What other needs are included? (welcoming strangers, visiting prisoners)

Explain: this kind of act shows the person that they are valued and lets them know that someone else cares about them.

Activity #2: *The Orthodox Church in Guatemala*

Thousands of people in the greater region of northwestern Guatemala have embraced Orthodoxy over the past 3 years, and their numbers continue to multiply. These communities are served by just a handful of Orthodox priests under His Eminence Archbishop Athenagoras of Mexico. Over the past few years, the OCMC has sent two missionary families to serve this Guatemalan Church, with a third family preparing for service. In 2013, the OCMC sent its first short-term mission team to this region of Guatemala. The OCMC Mission Team assisted with construction of a local seminary in order to train more men to become priests.

While this team was in Guatemala, they visited a village called Aguacate and shared in their celebration of the Divine Liturgy. OCMC Mission Specialist Fr. John Chakos describes this unique experience:

The OCMC team members had never seen such spirited worship. The church was filled to overflowing. In this village, every Sunday seems like Pascha because almost every member attends and fully participates in the Liturgy. When Fr. Evangelos, the parish priest, and I began to give Holy Communion, the people kept coming and coming, so much so that our chalices were nearly empty. Then, when the Liturgy was over, our team sang a lively Latino worship hymn to the delight of the congregation. They reciprocated by singing music in their own Mayan language. Finally, as all the fellowship came to an end, we began passing out paper icons of "Christ the Sower" as a memento of our visit. While many had approached for Holy Communion, even more, especially the children, came forward eager-

ly. Hundreds upon hundreds of them, holding each other's hands, or carried on the backs or in the arms of a parent, kept streaming in. Overwhelmed by the sheer number of children, I felt a profound sense of responsibility for them. This was the present and future of Orthodoxy and they were waiting for us to respond.

One of the short-term team members, Nick Hogan, offers his own reflection:

One of the most shocking elements of our mission was to see how friendly, how warm and accepting the Guatemalan people are. Every stranger I was introduced to, although separated by language and culture, embraced me with a hug as though I were family. Our real purpose in Guatemala was to show the [people] in Guatemala that they are loved and cared for, and to show them that the Orthodox world at large is here for them.

Discussion

1. What part of the reading made the biggest impact on you? Why?
2. How did the mission team's visit affect the people of Aguacate?

Read: Nick states that their mission team's purpose "was to show the Orthodox Christians in Guatemala that they are loved and cared for, and to show them that the Orthodox world at large is here for them."

3. How does showing the people in Guatemala that "they are loved and cared for" fulfill Jesus Christ's teaching to serve others as if we were serving Him?
4. How can showing people the love of Christ help to spread the gospel?
5. What can you do in your life to accomplish this?

Activity #3:***OCMC Coin Boxes***

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 caring for others.