



St Thérèse

Artist unknown

This month's lesson is on the Liturgical Year, a difficult concept to convey in anything other than a calendar, but there are many, many individual pieces that make up our list of annual celebrations. One of them is the feast of St. Thérèse on October 1.

She's the patron of lots of things, but it's her devotion to a child-like faith that may make her a great patron for the children you know. She liked to think of each of her little good deeds and sacrifices as a flower she was offering to Jesus and it was her goal to make a beautiful garden full of them.

Roses were her favorite flower and are still a signature of her intercession. "It is her way of whispering to those who need a sign that she has heard and God is responding."

The Liturgical Year

The Church, "in the course of the year, . . . unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from his Incarnation and Nativity through his Ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord".

By keeping the memorials of the saints - first of all the holy Mother of God, then the apostles, the martyrs, and other saints - on fixed days of the liturgical year, the Church on earth shows that she is united with the liturgy of heaven. She gives glory to Christ for having accomplished his salvation in his glorified members; their example encourages her on her way to the Father.

(CCC 1194-1195)



The Communion of Saints

Artist unknown

There are some obvious lessons in a beautiful setting. It's a picture of heaven with Jesus enthroned in the center with the Holy Spirit and God the Father above Him. St. Joseph (with lilies) is just to his left and Mary is to His right. Other than that, the most striking things may be the color, the activity, and the variety. If you're ever tempted to think heaven will be boring, spend some time with this image!

And look at how densely packed it all is! It looks full, but heaven is never too full for more and there is a place for every person who ever has or ever will live. (You too!) That's a lot of people, and we get a sense of that here. A few of them are looking out at us, inviting us into the scene, but mostly they are rightly focused on Jesus, giving Him eternal praise.

The Communion of the Church of Heaven and Earth

The intercession of the saints. "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness. . . . They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus . . . So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped.

Communion with the saints. Exactly as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom as from its fountain and head issues all grace, and the life of the People of God itself".

In the one family of God. "For if we continue to love one another and to join in praising the Most Holy Trinity - all of us who are sons of God and form one family in Christ - we will be faithful to the deepest vocation of the Church."

CCC 956, 957, 959



Adoration of the Child

Gerrit van Honthorst, c 1620

As a teaching piece, start with the characters which even your youngest students are likely to know. A serene Mary and Joseph are on the right and there are two shepherds on the left who are not much older than your students. It would be impossible to not notice their expressions! They're so joyful and their response to what they're seeing is reflected in their gestures of piety. (Don't we also fold our hands in the Presence of Christ as we go up to receive holy Communion?)

The central character, though, is Jesus and the first thing you may have noticed about this painting is the use of light. It's not shining onto Jesus from some outside source, but He is the source shining up onto the faces of His onlookers.

The Christmas Mystery

Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty heaven's glory was made manifest. The Church never tires of singing the glory of this night:

The Virgin today brings into the world the Eternal And the earth offers a cave to the Inaccessible. The angels and shepherds praise him And the magi advance with the star, For you are born for us, Little Child, God eternal!

To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom. For this, we must humble ourselves and become little. Even more: to become "children of God" we must be "born from above" or "born of God". Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us. Christmas is the mystery of this "marvelous exchange":

O marvelous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity.

CCC 525-526



St. Norbert

Marten Pepijn, c 1637

This is Saint Norbert worshipping Our Lord, truly present in this ornate monstrance. Norbert was a worldly man who had a very dramatic conversion story and went on to found a religious order that continues to this day. One of the other things Saint Norbert is known for is defending the Eucharist against heresy and disbelief, and one of his attributes is to be pictured with a monstrance.

I'd like to recommend this piece for January classrooms in preparation for our time of family adoration during the large group sessions. Catechists, help your students get more out of the experience by pointing out some elements in this work of art:

- ♦ Norbert's obvious devotion. His posture, focus, position of his hands – all are expressions of love for He who is before him.
- ♦ The beauty of this particular monstrance. We offer our best to God, and some craftsman and the artist, certainly did that, also as a sign of their devotion to God.

Blessing and Adoration

Adoration is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us⁹⁹ and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the "King of Glory,"¹⁰⁰ respectful silence in the presence of the "ever greater" God.¹⁰¹ Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications.

CCC 2628



Light of the World

William Holman Hunt

First painted in the mid-1800's, this subject became popular for Victorian era religious devotions. It's based on Revelation 3:20 and is filled with great symbolism for you to decode!

The door, the lantern, Christ knocking instead of just letting himself in, the brush and weeds growing near the door - all have something to teach about the nature of Jesus and His gentle persistence in pursuing us.

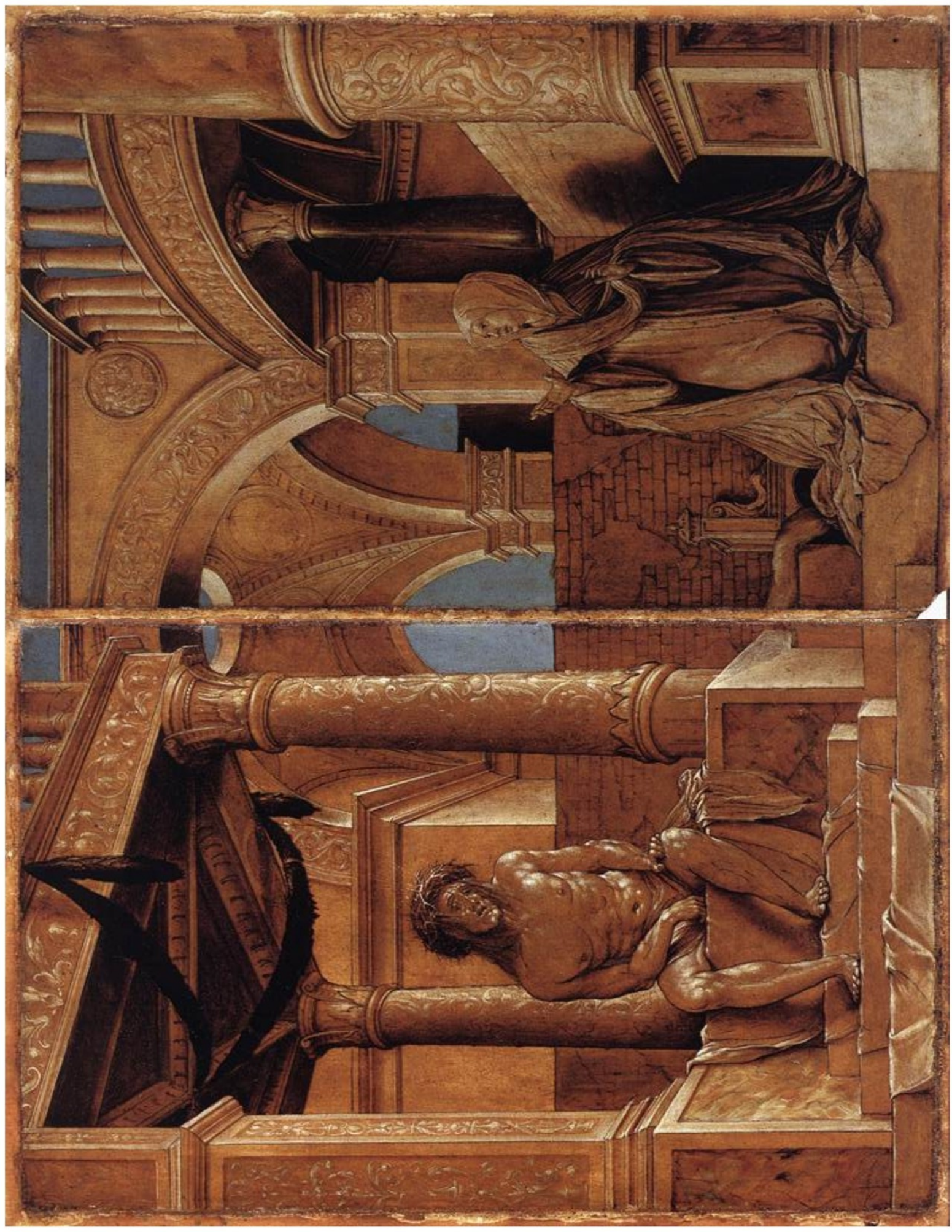
We can never fall so far away from Christ that He is no longer there. No matter what, He is always close by waiting for our response to His knock.

Another less obvious feature of this piece is that there is no doorknob on the outside. Jesus will not let Himself in; the knob is on my side of the door and only I can open it to answer His invitation to me, and it's the same for each of you as well.

God's Mercy

Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." He invites them to that conversion without which one cannot enter the kingdom, but shows them in word and deed his Father's boundless mercy for them and the vast "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents." The supreme proof of his love will be the sacrifice of his own life "for the forgiveness of sins."

CCC 545



Christ and the Mater Dolorosa

Hans Holbein the Younger

The subjects here are Jesus and his mother, and the setting is Pilate's palace. Jesus has been whipped (although not graphically here) and crowned with the painful thorns, but has not yet started the terrible walk to His crucifixion.

Imagine all the hate and mockery and suffering that is still to come this day. Now can you imagine what it would be like to know all of that is still ahead of you? No wonder Jesus looks so very exhausted and sad!

Now imagine you are Mary. She also has a good idea of what is ahead for her beloved Son and she cannot do anything to stop it. In fact, the arrangement of this piece, with her on a completely different panel, just highlights her separation from Jesus on this day. "Mater Dolorosa" means Mother of Sorrows; a perfect description of a mother who is helpless to stop the unfair death of her beloved child.

Christ Offered Himself to His Father for our Sins

The desire to embrace his Father's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' whole life, for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation. And so he asked, "And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour." And again, "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?" From the cross, just before "It is finished", he said, "I thirst."

IN BRIEF

- ◆ "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3).
- ◆ Our salvation flows from God's initiative of love for us, because "he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10).
- ◆ "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19).
- ◆ Jesus freely offered himself for our salvation. Beforehand, during the Last Supper, he both symbolized this offering and made it really present: "This is my body which is given for you" (Lk 22:19).
- ◆ The redemption won by Christ consists in this, that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28), that is, he "loved [his own] to the end" (Jn 13:1), so that they might be "ransomed from [their] fathers" (1 Pt 1:18).
- ◆ By his loving obedience to the Father, "unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), Jesus fulfills the atoning mission (cf. Is 53:10) of the suffering Servant, who will "make many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (Is 53:11; cf. Rom 5:19).

CCC 607, 619-623



God the Father

Pierre Mignard, c 1664

No one really knows what God looks like, but artists have a wonderful way of making something intangible into something visible. In religious art, an *attribute* helps us identify the subject of the work. It's most commonly something that is held but can also be something worn, something in the background, a particular color used, or a number of other meaningful hints.

In the case of God the Father, what do we know about Him? He's all-powerful, all-knowing, and can do anything and be everywhere. He's creator, king, and judge. Jesus reveals Him to be a loving father "who art in heaven."

Here, God is shown as an old man as a way to describe that He is ancient/timeless and wise, dressed in a regal color to show his sovereignty, and strong to show His unlimited power. He's holding the Earth in His hand to highlight His role as creator, and the angels are rightly worshipping Him.

The Father revealed by the Son

Many religions invoke God as "Father". The deity is often considered the "father of gods and of men". In Israel, God is called "Father" inasmuch as he is Creator of the world. Even more, God is Father because of the covenant and the gift of the law to Israel, "his first-born son". God is also called the Father of the king of Israel. Most especially he is "the Father of the poor", of the orphaned and the widowed, who are under his loving protection.

By calling God "Father", the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children. God's parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood, which emphasizes God's immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature. The language of faith thus draws on the human experience of parents, who are in a way the first representatives of God for man. But this experience also tells us that human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood. We ought therefore to recall that God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: he is God. He also transcends human fatherhood and motherhood, although he is their origin and standard: no one is father as God is Father.

Jesus revealed that God is Father in an unheard-of sense: he is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father in relation to his only Son, who is eternally Son only in relation to his Father: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." CCC 238-240



Pentecost

Joseph Mildorfer, c 1750

One thing that sets this work apart from other pieces of Pentecost art is that unlike so many works that picture all those in the upper room neatly sitting in a row, this one depicts a level of drama that matches the event.

- ♦ Look at these people – they are completely enraptured by what's happening. They're not even looking at each other, but each seems to be totally consumed with their newfound relationship with the Holy Spirit.
- ♦ Look at the tongues of fire – they are just now being sent down and have not yet come "to rest on each one of them." They seem to be alive and are being sent from the Dove at the center of the heaven's section at the top.
- ♦ Look at the other center of this work, the Blessed Virgin Mary. See how she recognizes her beloved Friend and is welcoming His arrival?

This painting was originally at the altar of a church in Hungary dedicated to the Holy Spirit. Wouldn't it be amazing to look up each time you were at Mass to be reminded of this beautiful relationship the Spirit offers to each of us?

The Holy Spirit—God's Gift

"God is Love" and love is his first gift, containing all others. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Because we are dead or at least wounded through sin, the first effect of the gift of love is the forgiveness of our sins. The communion of the Holy Spirit in the Church restores to the baptized the divine likeness lost through sin.

He, then, gives us the "pledge" or "first fruits" of our inheritance: the very life of the Holy Trinity, which is to love as "God [has] loved us." This love (the "charity" of 1 Cor 13) is the source of the new life in Christ, made possible because we have received "power" from the Holy Spirit.

By this power of the Spirit, God's children can bear much fruit. He who has grafted us onto the true vine will make us bear "the fruit of the Spirit: . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." "We live by the Spirit"; the more we renounce ourselves, the more we "walk by the Spirit."

Through the Holy Spirit we are restored to paradise, led back to the Kingdom of heaven, and adopted as children, given confidence to call God "Father" and to share in Christ's grace, called children of light and given a share in eternal glory.

CCC 733-736