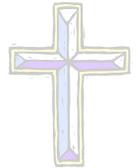

Studying what the Lord teaches us about sexuality



Introduction

General aim of the lesson

This lesson seeks to help students understand what friendship is and why it is so precious a gift. Friendship makes life much happier and enables us to be better persons. The lesson seeks to explore the truest kind of friendship, and to see why it lasts longer and is more rewarding than less perfect kinds of friendships. In a special way it treats romantic friendships, and what characterizes true and lasting friendships to serve life well.

Specific objectives

1. To understand the reasons why friendship is both so attractive and so important for our lives.
2. To be able to tell the difference between “true friendships” and less solid kinds of friendship.
3. To reflect on how Scripture praises true friendship, and why Christ wants to be a friend to each of us.
4. To think about a special kind of friendship, romantic friendships, and to understand why and how God wanted friendships like these to be.
5. To understand how important it is that we have truthful, generous, and pure hearts in all our friendships.

These are the things we will talk about . . .

Outline of the lesson

Opening Prayer

1. Friendship is a gift precious to each of us.
2. There are many kinds of friendships and love.
3. True romantic love involves appropriate times and pure hearts.

Path through the lesson

Opening prayer

The opening prayer could have the two following short readings from Scripture, and then a prayer that God will give to each of us good friends.

1. Reading from Sirach, 6:14-16:

A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he that has found one has found a treasure. There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend, and no scales can measure his excellence.



II. Reading from the Gospel of John 15:13-17:

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends.... I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.... This I command you, to love one another.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You for choosing us to be Your disciples and Your friends, and to walk in Your light. Teach us to be faithful friends to You, to keep Your commandments, and to be good friends to one another. Remain always a friend to us, and kindly give us good friends on earth, who will stand by us faithfully all our lives. We ask this in Your name, O Lord. Amen.

Perhaps you could then invite your students to pray the "Our Father" together.

1. Why friendship is precious to us

- While definitions come later in the lesson, the catechist can begin by suggesting briefly what friendships are and reminding the students how much they like to have good friends. "Friendship is a wonderful thing. Friends are people whom we really care about, and who really care about us too. Friendships make everything in life better."
- Point out how much Christ wanted His disciples to be His *friends*. It is useful to look over all that his lesson says about Christ's desire for us to be His friends, by keeping His commandments.
- Have one of the students read the paragraphs on how much friendship blesses us.

DISCUSSION: Who are our friends?

Go over the first five questions, helping the class see the many different kinds of friends. The catechist could have the students briefly answer questions six and seven in pairs and report back to the whole class. This leads them to see that friendship means different things, though there is a shared meaning: Friends are those whom we love, and who love us, and friends recognize that their friends do care about them.

Then begin exploring the questions about how friends should treat each other. Be able to explain the Golden Rule. This section should not take too long; the lesson returns to some of this later. The catechist may also choose to have the students answer the remaining two questions in pairs, again reporting back to the whole class as a conclusion to this section.



2. The many kinds of friendship and love

Begin with recalling what is common to all kinds of friendships: Friends love each other, and know they are loved by the other.

But some friendships are comparatively shallow friendships, and may not last too long. Make clear the extent of *fun* and *useful* friendships. Let the students know these are not bad friendships. Fun and useful friendships are also not so deep, because the aim is to get something out of the relationship instead of caring deeply about the friend.

But *true friendships* are the kind everyone most wants to have. Read through the paragraph on this, and make sure the students get the idea.

DISCUSSIONS: Real friendship and handling problems of peer relationships

If you used the Sirach scripture reading in the opening prayer, you could go at once to questions two to four on the student's sheet. These are probing questions; the students should have a chance to think through them. The catechist may want to use these questions as a whole-class discussion.

Then explain the idea of "peers." Students can see easily that peers are ordinarily people we like, but they are not always exactly friends. Why? The discussion questions in this section can be very helpful for the students. The catechist may want to have the students develop some strategies to handle the suggested peer pressures. The class may want to use these topics as the subject of prayer in the days ahead.

3. Romantic love: Good times and pure hearts

Several things are treated in these paragraphs. A) It is a good thing to have true friends among the boys and girls with whom we grow up. B) There is something magic about romantic friendships. Why did God create romantic friendships? Try to make it very clear: God is the author of romantic friendship too, when they are truthful and strong. The section "Why God created romance" is very useful.

The next section about romantic love and marriage is a bit more difficult, but very important. Prepare this section carefully in advance of the class, and be able to speak of it with ease and confidence.

It is important for the students to realize there may be something magic and wonderful about romantic love now, but there is something about it that God made for later years. It is great already, but will be much greater when we have learned the generous kind of love that God wants us to be able to have.

Things that spoil love

Certainly we want it to be clear to the students that love is a great and good thing. (One could read the classical passage in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.)

Precisely because love is so good and so important, it should not be spoiled. Explain how people and things get hurt when we use them foolishly. When a small child uses the good china to throw around like a ball, trouble

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comes! When one is beginning to have a serious friendship, and feeling the mysterious ways sexuality touches the friendship, it is good to learn from the Lord how to handle these emotions. He is the one who created sexuality. He knows how love and sexuality are to be treated, if people are not to be hurt.

Important concepts are taught here. At all ages of our life, love is important. Our being boys and girls, persons who have sexuality, is a source of joy all the time. Sexual activity is not a toy; it is made to go with important realities — with having children, having the kind of love and honest promises of married love that make homes strong, and make it safe to bring children into the world.

The Lord teaches us clearly that sexual activity is made for mature love in marriage. It is not something casual. Unless it is surrounded by the mature and honest love that marriage promises, it goes very wrong.

We see how very wrong it goes when people engage in sexual activity outside marriage. Some of the greatest troubles of our time come from that! AIDS — abortions — diseases of many kinds — broken lives when people do not learn how love must be handled so that it can last a marriage a whole life long.

Much of the world, especially those who have not learned the truest meaning of love from Christ, have many troubles. The world often encourages young people to fill their minds with wrong thoughts and dreams about sexuality — to act in ways that offend love's true meaning. True friendship involves people who honestly love and do not harm each other because of their friendship with Christ. Those are the kinds of friendships that are faithful and strong.

We always need to end on a positive note! There are lots of people who have learned love rightly from Christ, and their lives work well. Christ is our great teacher. If we learn and listen to him, we need not worry. Important things like love and sexuality can go well in our lives if we learn from Christ and remain faithful friends of his.

Tying things together

At the end of this lesson, it could be very useful to bring together the various parts of the lesson, as listed on the student's sheet.

For further reference and background the catechist should consult the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 456-463; 478; 519-521; 604-605.