


GOD THE GOOD SHEPHERD

UNIT TWO: God's Messengers

Lesson 4: Three Men in a Fire

CONTENT:

1. After the time of Elijah, Jerusalem was conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar. He took many Jews as prisoners to Babylon. Among them were three Jews who were renamed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
2. Once the king made a golden statue and ordered everyone to worship it. The three men trusted God and refused to obey. The king was furious and ordered them to be thrown into a fiery furnace. God sent an angel and did not allow them to be burnt.
3. When Mother Mary appeared to the three children at Fatima, she asked them if they wished to suffer for God to make up for those who hurt him, and to help save sinners. They were ready and they did show great courage in suffering for God. He in turn helped and comforted them.
4.  *A martyr is someone who suffers a lot or even dies for the sake of God. All Christians must speak and live for God, even if we have to suffer for it. Jesus has asked us to be brave because he has defeated the enemy for us. [CCC1808; 2472-2474]*

ASSIGNMENT: Read handout at home. Find out and write the names of 3 other martyrs.

REFERENCES: Daniel 1:1-4; Ch3. John16:33. 'Our Lady of Fatima' by W. T. Walsh.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Handouts.

I. STARTER:

- Today we'll talk about friends. Think of one person whom you are a good friend to. If you are someone's friend, how do you behave towards him/her? [*I talk to him, play with him, help him etc.*]
- Suppose one day your friend is not present and other children tell you to do something bad to him. Suppose they say, "Tell the teacher that he cheated. If you don't, you'll get into trouble!" Would you do it?... If you are truly his friend, you would stand up for him. You wouldn't mind getting hurt for it. Today we'll hear about some brave men who were true friends of God.

II. DEVELOPMENT:

After the time of Elijah a powerful king called Nebuchadnezzar came from Babylon to Jerusalem with his big army. [*Write the name NEBUCHADNEZZAR on the blackboard and let the students say it a few times*] King Nebuchadnezzar defeated the king there and took away whatever he wanted: gold and animals and precious things from the temple. He also took many Jewish people as prisoners. Among them were three handsome, clever young men. The king wanted them to serve him in his kingdom. They were given the names Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. [*The students repeat the names.*] The king gave them important jobs in his kingdom.

Once King Nebuchadnezzar had an idea. He made a huge golden statue, as big as a three-storey building. When it was ready he ordered everyone to come and worship the statue as if it was God. All the officers as well as all the common people came and bowed down to the statue. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not go anywhere near the statue. They loved the Lord and knew that they should be faithful to him. They refused to bow down to any other god.

Now there were certain officers who were jealous of the three young men and decided to make trouble for them. They went to the king and said, "O King, you ordered that everyone who hears the band playing should bow down and worship the golden statue. Well, these three Jews refuse to do it! What are you going to do to them?"

The king got into a terrible rage. "Bring those Jews here!" he shouted. He asked them, "Is it true O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not worship my golden statue? Now when the band

plays, fall down and worship it, otherwise you will be thrown into a furnace of fire, and what god can save you then? (A furnace is like a very big oven.)

The three men answered boldly, "O King, if our God wants to save us from the fire, let him do it. If not, it's all right. But we will not worship your statue."

This answer made the king even angrier. His face twisted with rage and he screamed. "Make the fire seven times hotter! Tie them up and throw them in."

The strongest guards came and tied up the three brave men. The fire was made seven times hotter. As the guards threw them into the furnace, they themselves got burnt and died. And what do you think happened to the Jewish men? As they fell down into the fire, a cool wet wind whistled through the fire and went round and round them. They didn't even feel hot. They looked up and saw that there was another person standing in the fire. It was an angel from God!

The ropes fell off as the three young men jumped up. They began to sing praise to God as they marched around in the fire:

"Blessed are you, O Lord God of our fathers!
You should be praised and exalted forever!
For you have rescued us from the fire and saved us from death!"

From far off King Nebuchadnezzar heard them singing and shouting. He asked his servants, "Didn't we throw three men into the fire? And weren't they tied up?"

"Yes, O king!"

"But I can see four men walking about, and the fourth one looks like a god!"

He shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! Servants of the Most High God, come out! Now I know that your God can save his people!"

[Teach the song, 'Three Brave Men' sung to the tune of 'Three Blind Mice']

Three brave men, [2] Friends of God, [2]
Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
Into the fire they had to go
But God delivered them out you know..Three brave men!

[The students could enact the story if time permits, actors taking the parts of the 3 Jews, the king, tale-bearers, guards and the angel.]

NEXT CLASS:

- Last time we heard about three Jewish men who were faithful to God. What were their names? *[Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.]*
- Why did the king order them to be thrown into the furnace? *[Because they refused to worship the golden statue.]* What happened to them in the fire? *[God sent an angel and a cool, wet wind and they didn't get burned.]*
- There are many people like the three young men who were ready to suffer for God. Some were even ready to die for God because they loved him so much. Such people are called martyrs. *[Write MARTYRS on the board.]*

Let me tell you a true story about young children like you, who were ready to suffer for God. The children lived in a place called Fatima, and they were given the job of taking the sheep out to graze in the hillsides nearby. (Just like David the shepherd-boy) There was Lucia, who was 10 years old, and her cousins Francisco who was 9, and Jacinta who was 7 years old.

The children loved to play and also to pray. They would chase butterflies, play cards or the two girls would dance while Francisco would play tunes on his flute. They would sing songs and hymns to God and Mother Mary. They would stand and shout from a certain hill and hear their echoes come back. After their lunch they would kneel and pray the Rosary.

One day the children were busy making a play house for themselves among the bushes when they saw a very bright flash of light. They dropped the stones they were carrying and ran to take shelter under a tree.

Then there was another flash near them. The children began to run again when they saw something that made them stand still. Just in front of them, above a small tree, there was a ball of light and in the centre of it stood a very beautiful Lady. She was shining white. Her hands were joined together and there was a rosary hanging from them.

“Don’t be afraid. I won’t hurt you.” She said to the children.

The children felt their hearts fill up with joy as they looked at her and heard her voice.

“Where does your Excellency come from?” Lucia had the courage to ask. “I am from heaven!” (Can you guess who the Lady was? The children didn’t know then, but it was Mother Mary.)

“Will I go to heaven too?” Lucia asked. “Yes you will!”

“And Jacinta?” “Yes.”

“And Francisco?” “Yes. But he will have to say many Rosaries.”

Then the Lady asked them, “Do you wish to offer yourselves to God, and to go through all the suffering he sends you, to make up for all those who make him sad, and to help save sinners?”

The children replied, “Yes! We do!”

“Then you will have much to suffer. But God will help you and comfort you.” The Lady said.

As she spoke two streams of light came out of her hands and surrounded them and filled their hearts. They fell down on their knees and prayed. “My God, I love you!”

The Lady then said, “Pray the Rosary every day for peace in the world.” She also told them a secret that they were not to tell others yet. Then she slowly rose and moved away into the sky till they could see her no more.

The children returned home so full of joy they felt almost as if they could fly like birds.

Jacinta kept saying, “Oh, such a pretty Lady!”

And Francisco said, “O my Lady, I will say all the Rosaries that you want!”

The children did have to suffer a lot, because many people thought that they were telling lies.

Lucia’s mother punished her and would not talk to her. One officer caught the children and put them into prison with all the other prisoners, robbers and murderers. Jacinta thought she would never see her mother again and burst into tears, but her brother said, “Don’t cry Jacinta. Let’s offer this to Jesus for the poor sinners, as the Lady told us to do!”

After some time the officer took the children to his office and asked them to tell him the secret. But the children were silent.

“Very well, I tried to save you. But since you won’t tell, you will be boiled in a pot of hot oil.” He shouted and a cruel-looking guard appeared.

“Is the oil nice and hot?” “Yes sir”

“Boiling?” “Yes sir!”

“Then take this one and throw her in!” He pointed to Jacinta. The guard picked her up and carried her away. Francisco said, “What do we care if they kill us? We’ll go straight to heaven.”

The door opened and the guard came in. “She’s fried. Now for the next one.” He took Francisco away. Again the officer tried to get the secret out of Lucia, but God made her strong. She refused.

The guard took her and led her to another room and there she found, Jacinta and Francisco alive and well! The brave children hugged each other. They knew Our Lady was happy with them for being ready to suffer for God.

[Give out the handouts and read the written matter filling in the missing words:

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, STATUE, FURNACE, ANGEL, PRAISING, FATIMA, SUFFER, SINNERS, YES.]

III. REFLECTION & PRAYER:

- Do you love God as much as the 3 young men and the three children? Do you think you would be ready to suffer for God? Let’s ask God to help us to be brave and stand up for him, even if we have to suffer for him. [Lead the students in a prayer.]

Home assignment: x Read handout at home.
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