

High Feasts & Holy Days

Lesson 3: Saint Valentine's Day

2.5.2017

Objectives: Explore the trajectory of Valentine's Day from its religious origins into the secular and into the commercial.

Materials: flipchart, blindfold, lesson attachment, laptop/projector/screen.

Time allotments suggested and meant to be adapted for **75 minute class.**

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ What is your most romantic movie ever?
 - ▶ What was the best Valentine’s Day gift you ever received or gave?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: “Guess Who Loves You” (5 minutes max)

Put a chair in the middle of the room. Have everyone stand in a circle around the chair. Get a volunteer to be “IT,” who sits in the chair with blindfold over eyes. Shuffle the circle around. Teacher points silently to one of the youth, who then DISGUISES voice and says “Guess who loves you” and “IT” tries to guess the correct identity. Give anywhere between one and three guesses, depending on the size of the class. If “IT” guesses incorrectly, “IT” has to take one more turn.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from Charles Schulz, cartoonist best known for comic strip Peanuts)

“All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn’t hurt.”

4. Joys and Sorrows (10 minutes): Listening is a precious gift that we offer one another at church. Using the balance scale and the blue (sorrows) and yellow (joys) stones, invite youth to share a joy and/or a sorrow from the past week, as a way of meeting one another with our lives and sharing in community. You will want to set limits (e.g. two stones max per person) so that no one monopolizes sharing time.

Each Sunday, a copy of the congregation's Embracing Meditation will be made available to your class, so that stones can be put in for those whose names are being spoken in the Sanctuary.

5. Learning Activity: The history of a religious holiday gone commercial (30 minutes)

Paper copies or PowerPoint presentation will be available (see lesson attachment). Teachers take time to review and facilitate discussion, covering this brief history of Valentine's Day. **Please help youth note familiar elements that are carried through over time to the holiday we know today.**

- Have youths take turns volunteering to read aloud historical information on slides/pages, with teachers facilitating discussion.
- Learning slides/pages culminate with final page's question:
 - What other religious or sacred holy days have become secular and commercial? What other sacred holidays have become about "stuff"? List four:
(E.g. Christmas, Halloween, Easter, Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day, Fourth of July as "sacred" American holiday)

6. Team Presentations: (15 minutes)

Divide youth into four teams for each of the four holidays identified, with each team tasked to reflect on how their specific holiday has become commercialized. Teams should take **5 minutes** to complete attached handout as preparation, then share their reflections in a presentation to the larger group for the last **10 minutes**.

7. Questions for Class Discussion (15 minutes)

It's not difficult to see how retailers discovered, for their own purposes, that holidays and festivals were superb commercial opportunities. But...

- What may happen, if anything, when a holy day becomes commercialized? When you place it in the hands of retailers (with no disrespect to retail industry)?
(Consider: If markets try to cater to as broad a consumer base – not just those who identify religiously with a holiday – what fades into background and what aspects come forward as consumable goods with broader appeal?)

(Consider: Does a Christmas gift exchange connect to the original Christmas story or to general sentiment of giving and benevolence? Does it matter?)

- Do religious observances – worship, rituals, holy day gatherings – **compete** or **benefit** or are **unaffected** by market events and schedules?
- Put differently... Do the "church" and "market" compete for public attention around holidays?

- Does the more ancient “religious calendar” drive the course of the year or does Macy’s window display?
- Rather than having a religious holiday forced on non- and other- religious persons, might commercializing a holiday open it up and make it more inclusive/accessible for others to enjoy? (*Hint: Not “Christmas Carols” but “Winter Holiday Music” for non-Christians? Or not Resurrection Sunday but Easter Bunny who delivers springtime joy for all?*)
- What’s your overall feeling about the commercialization of holidays?

8. Say goodbye until next time: Extinguish the chalice, saying:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

9. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- return blue/yellow stones to containers
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets