

Saints Work Together (May)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (May 7) d. 386

Sts. Helen (and Constantine) Equal to the Apostles (May 21)

Egeria the Pilgrim (wrote 381-384)

Today's lesson is unusual because it's about how the work of one set of saints (Helen and Constantine) made possible the works of another saint, St. Cyril of Jerusalem. We even have the writings of someone who heard the sermons of St. Cyril in the holy places uncovered and restored by St. Helen with the support of her son St. Constantine! Because he was a teaching saint, St. Cyril is not often taught about to children, but his method of teaching and preaching on the sites of the holy places, which he references in both his Catechetical Lectures and Mystagogical (On the Sacraments) Lectures, has formed a lot of the best practices of how the church has taught ever since. We re-enact some of the pilgrimage from Golgotha to the Tomb in our Holy Week services (as does the Catholic Church in a different way). When we all go outside and return, we are in a small way carrying out the pilgrimages that Egeria and other devout women and men undertook to follow the physical path to holy sites where the Bible stories unfolded.

Background:

You are probably familiar with the work of St. Helen to find the Holy Cross, as it is the center of one of our major feasts (Elevation of the Holy Cross). There were dozens of holy sites that St. Helen found, and on each she built a chapel for the faithful to celebrate the Holy Sacraments in those places. Some of those chapels still exist today, usually underneath or enclosed by larger Byzantine cathedrals or churches from the height of the later Roman Empire. St. Helen's work to build these churches heavily influenced how the bishops taught. Once they had churches in the places where Jesus met the woman at the well, where Abraham and Sarah met the three holy angels at Mamre, where Jesus was tried, crucified, buried and resurrected, ascended, and where the Holy Spirit descended, the bishops would teach and preach to the catechumens and faithful on those sites during Lent and Holy Week. We have references in St. Cyril of Jerusalem's lectures to the catechumens and to those newly baptized to the fact that he was preaching to them in the very places that they were studying. Near the end of St. Cyril's life, a devout woman called Egeria (or Etheria in some later manuscripts), most likely a nun or noblewoman from Spain wrote to her sister nuns and noblewomen about her pilgrimage to the holy sites in Egypt and

Palestine. You can pronounce her name *Egg-eria* or *Edge-eria*. Just pick one and stick to it; people do it both ways. Egeria was likely present at some of the sermons that St. Cyril preached or directed to have preached in the churches that St. Helen established.

Though St. Helen is commemorated later in the month than St. Cyril, her work greatly enriched the ministry of St. Cyril, whose sermons relied on tangible connections between places and events in the Old Testament and the life of Christ to help inquirers and the faithful understand and enter salvation.

St. Cyril's preaching style relies on "typology," or pattern-matching, what I have called "sensory anchors," to show that God continues to save and teach us throughout His creation. These patterns or anchors work by matching what happened in one part of salvation history with what happened/happens in another through the connections with actions or tangible objects/places that show up over and over again in order to teach us. For instance, St. Cyril connects the Creed to Jesus' parable of the mustard seed, because those who receive it do so as the beginning of growing in faith. The teachings of St. Cyril form the roots and branches of the faith as well as point towards the holy actions that Christians will undertake to grow and bear fruit of the faith. St. Cyril taught that Jesus cursed the fig tree as one of His last acts before going to His Passion, in order to remove the shame of the fig leaves under which Adam and Eve hid. Over and over again, St. Cyril will show how Christ fulfilled scripture, removed curses, and restored humans to salvation. Our lesson will include two little excerpts from one part of his sermons on the Crucifixion: the teaching that Christ wore the crown of thorns to remove the curse Adam received that the earth would bring forth thorns, and the teaching that Christ was pierced in the side to undo the sin and remove the curse from Eve, who was made from the side of Adam.

Note: For the little illustration with the clay/putty and Eve made from Adam's side, it might seem minor, but please include it. Next week's lesson will build on it with the clay used to make humans as well as to make new eyes for the man born blind.

Supplies: 6 speech output buttons, recorded with the phrases below (optional: Have someone read the statements for the people and only have 2 buttons recorded with the excerpts from St. Cyril's lecture on the Cross.); print outs of St. Helen's churches to represent The Church of the Resurrection (and tomb), the Church of the Ascension, and the Church of the Crucifixion; play silks for St. Helen (purple or red), St. Cyril (white or a rich color), and Egeria (black); a halo for St. Cyril (optional); a crown or halo for St. Helen; a cross for St. Helen to hold up (optional); optional

masking tape to tape the churches around the room; Model magic or Playdoh to make a little “human” who you will split in half from top to bottom to show Eve made from Adam’s side; printouts of the icon of Extreme Humility (Bridegroom) where Christ wears the crown of thorn and The Crucifixion where Christ has a pierced and bleeding side (you can also use icons you have on hand if you already have them).

Set Up: Have the little churches printed out and ready for St. Helen to put around the room. Have your putty/clay at hand as well as the different speech output buttons for each saint/historical person. If you have a place where you plan to say the Church of the Resurrection was, have St. Cyril or Egeria press the speech output buttons with his sermon excerpts there. If you’re using silks and a crown to dress up, have them at the ready. You’ll need three volunteers to act out the story. If the students are up to it, have them move between the three spots following St. Helen as she sets up the churches; if not, they can watch and join up by the “Resurrection/Anastasis” Church.

Speech Output Buttons for the Saints & Sermon:

St. Helen Button: “Hi! I’m Saint Helen Equal to the Apostles. I found a lot of the holy places from Jesus’ life and built churches on them.”

St. Cyril Button: “Hi! I’m Saint Cyril of Jerusalem. I taught in the churches Saint Helen established.”

Egeria the Pilgrim Nun: “I’m Egeria the Pilgrim Nun. I went to the churches that Saint Helen built and heard the sermons that Saint Cyril preached!”

For All: “Saints work together!”

Sermon Illustration 1: “Christ wore the crown of thorns to break the curse of thorns.”

Sermon Illustration 2: “Christ was pierced in the side to undo the sin of Eve, who was made from Adam’s side.”

TELL & ACT OUT THE STORY

“Today we will see how God helps saints work together over time so that the whole church is strengthened and built up. The saints we are going to talk about lived over 1600 years ago, but we still imitate them and learn from them today!”

“We need three volunteers today to help us learn about St. Helen, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, and the Pilgrim Egeria. Who would like to be Helen? Cyril? Egeria?”

Hand out the props to the volunteers as they volunteer. Walk alongside Helen holding the “churches” so you can hand them to her as she goes.

“In May, we remember both St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Helen, though not at the same time. We commemorate St. Cyril on May 7th and St. Helen with her son St. Constantine, the Equals to the Apostles, on May 21st.”

“St. Helen came first. She was the mother of St. Constantine the Emperor, who made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire.” *Gesture towards St. Helen. If the student playing Helen is able and/or has the personality for it, you can ask her to raise her hand or curtsey.*

“St. Helen found the Holy Life-giving Cross, and she also recovered the whereabouts of many other holy places. When she found an important place like Mt. Sinai or Jacob’s Well or the home of Martha and her siblings Mary and Lazarus or Golgotha where the Crucifixion happened, she would make a chapel on that site so that Christians could come to learn and celebrate the holy Sacraments there. St. Helen found lots of places, and some of them still have the churches where people can visit today. Three of the churches especially became places where the bishops taught the faithful during Lent: the churches of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. Let’s place these churches with St. Helen.”

Walk around the room, placing the three churches at least a few steps apart. You can have St. Helen tape them to the backs of chairs/walls with masking/Command poster tape or set them on surfaces.

“The year that St. Constantine made Christianity legal was the same year that St. Cyril of Jerusalem was born.”

Have St. Cyril step forward.

“When St. Cyril grew up in sanctity and became the bishop of Jerusalem, he preached in the churches that St. Helen had built! St. Cyril’s teaching brought together all of salvation history, from creation through the Old Testament, to the life of Christ, which was the center of his teachings. Through the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, Cyril

showed how God redeemed the whole creation both in the past and also in the lives of those faithful he was teaching in his time. St. Cyril pointed out patterns that repeated throughout salvation history to show how God would correct and redeem sins of the past with similar actions in Christ's life."

Get out the little piece of clay and shape it into a round lump or into a sort of humanoid if you'd rather. Hold it up.

"One of the topics St. Cyril taught when he was at the church where the Crucifixion had taken place was the redemption of human nature, both male and female. Remember that in the beginning, God had made one human." *Show the clay.* "Then God did not want the human to be alone, so God took the side of Adam and formed Eve from his side." *Split the clay down the middle.* "So the one human became two humans, male and female, the woman, Eve, from the side of the man, Adam." *Hold up the two pieces of clay.* "Later both Adam and Eve sinned. So how did God redeem them both?"

"Well, when Adam had sinned, God cursed the ground to bring forth thorns so Adam would have to work hard for his food. But when Christ redeemed humanity, Christ wore a crown of thorns to undo the sin of Adam and undo the curse." *Hold up the Adam clay.*

"When Eve sinned, God cursed her along with Adam. But when when Christ redeemed humanity, Christ was pierced in His side to undo the sin of Eve and remove the curse from her." *Hold up the Eve clay.*

"Let's look at the icons." *Look at the icons of the Bridegroom and Crucifixion.*

"Yes! Look. Christ is wearing the crown of thorns. And here in this one, He has been pierced from His side. Some of you were at the Deposition service in Holy Week and saw this icon of the Lord up close, too."

"Back then, other people would come and hear the sermons and see the icons in Jerusalem. One of them was Egeria." *Ask Egeria to step forward.*

"Near the end of St. Cyril's life, a nun called Egeria made a trip to the holy places where Christ lived, to visit the churches St. Helen built, and she heard the sermons that St. Cyril preached! Egeria wrote letters to her sister nuns about the holy places, too. Let's listen to some of the sermon that she might have heard at the place where Christ hung on the Cross."

[St. Cyril Sermon Excerpts (paraphrased into modern English from *Catechesis 13*)]

Read each excerpt, then have the students push the relevant button after each:

“When Adam sinned, the earth was cursed with thorns. Christ wore the crown of thorns to break the curse and was buried in the earth so that the earth would receive a blessing instead of a curse.”

Speech output button:

“Christ wore the crown of thorns to break the curse of thorns.”

Read:

“Eve was made from the side of Adam, and she sinned. Christ was pierced in His side to undo the sin of Eve and to heal her from the curse.”

Speech Output Button:

“Christ was pierced in the side to undo the sin of Eve, who was made from Adam’s side.”

The students might want to push the buttons more than once. The connections are kind of complicated, so let them do so a few times before moving on. When they do, point to the icons and the clay.

“Let’s have St. Helen and St. Cyril and Pilgrim Egeria together. These saints worked together to bring others the story of Christ healing the whole world and all of humankind. We still follow in their footsteps when we act out parts of salvation together in church. We go outside and come back in during HolyWeek services. We process around on the Sunday of Orthodoxy to show the whole world that salvation has come! On Sundays, the priest and altar servers process around to show that the self-offering of Christ is on behalf of all and for all.”

“God helped the saints to work together.”

Button: “*Saints work together!*”

“We get to work together with these saints, too! We pray with them and are being made whole with them in Christ.”

Button: “*Saints work together!*”

“Let’s all make our cross so we can carry their lessons with us.” Make sign of the cross.

Button: “*Saints work together!*”

Ending Song: Christos Anesti/Christ is Risen!

