Orthodox Jews believe that God gave Moses the Torah, and it contains 613 mitzvot (commandments) that are binding upon Jews. Judaism is a religion and a comprehensive way of life, filled with rules and practices that affect every aspect of life: what you do when you wake up in the morning, what you can and cannot eat, what you can and cannot wear, how to groom yourself, how to conduct business, who you can marry, how to observe the holidays and Shabbat, and most importantly, how to treat God. This set of rules and practices is known as "halakhah".

The word "halakhah" is usually translated as "Jewish Law," although a more literal translation might be "the path that one walks." The word is derived from the Hebrew root Hei-Lamed-Kaf, meaning to go, to walk or to travel.

PARENTS’ & CATECHISTS’ READING
REFLECTION & PRAYER

Sacred Scripture
Acts 15:1-35
Mark 7:1-23 & 2:23-28
John 16:5-14

Catechism of the Catholic Church
#80-87, 880-892    #1429, 553, 880-881
STUDENTS’ READING REFLECTION & PRAYER

Sacred Scripture

Grades K-1  The Illustrated Acts of the Apostles  pp. 34-35
pp. 222-223  Peter Receives the Primacy
Grades 2-4  Bible for Young Catholics  pp. 278-279
Grades 5-12  Acts 15:1-35
Mark 7:1-23 & 2:23-28
John 16:5-14
John 21:1-25

Catechism

Grades K-2  First Communion Catechism  pp. n/a

TEACHING STRATEGY & OBJECTIVES

THEME:

JESUS ENTRUSTED HIS CHURCH TO THE APOSTLES [AND THEIR SUCCESSORS]. GUIDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THEY WOULD PRESIDE, GUIDE, TEACH AND PROTECT HER.

OBJECTIVES:

Using the Readings from Acts 15:1-35:

Discuss that with any group disagreements and problems will arise.

Discuss in general terms (not dwelling on circumcision) the problem that arose between the Jews and Gentile converts.

Discuss how the issue was settled to include:

Peter’s authority as head of the Church
Where this authority comes from
How is this authority revealed

OPENING PRAYER

PRACTICE THE GLORIA

REVIEW:

From Lesson 8:  From Lesson 9:
RESURRECTION  FIRST COMMANDMENT
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS  FAITH
THE TWO GREATEST COMMANDMENTS  ORIGINAL SIN
CONCUPISCENCE
WHERE DOES THIS STORY BEGIN?
At the end of their First Missionary Journey Paul and Barnabas returned to their “home base” at Antioch. It is about 50 AD.

WHAT PROBLEM IS FACING THE EARLY CHURCH AT THIS TIME?
As the Early Church wins more Gentile Converts, the Jews who have become Christians feel that the Gentiles must accept the entire Jewish Law [all 613 of the Commandments]…to live as Jews before they can be Baptized and accepted into the Church. We discussed this problem before in Lesson 8.

WHAT DO PAUL AND BARNABAS DO TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM?
They go “up” to Jerusalem. Remember from our earlier studies, since Jerusalem was atop a high ridge of mountains running north-to-south along the Jordan rift, people tended to say they were going “up” to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem Barnabas and Paul meet with the “apostles and elders”… the “bishops and priests” to discuss the important matter of how the Church is to embrace and receive new members. The apostles are *episcopi* “overseers” or “bishops” of the church. *Presbyter* is from the Greek word “*presbyteros*” which means “elder”.

WHAT IS THIS GREAT GATHERING OF LEADERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH CALLED?
This gathering is referred to as the *First Ecumenical Council*… or the *Council of Jerusalem*. Luke places this account in the “heart” of his Acts of the Apostles—the “centerpiece” of his historical account of the Early Church.

WHAT IS AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL?
The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that an Ecumenical Council is…

> A GATHERING OF ALL THE BISHOPS OF THE WORLD, IN EXERCISE OF THEIR COLLEGIAL AUTHORITY OVER THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH.

> AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL IS USUALLY CALLED BY THE SUCCESSOR OF ST. PETER, THE POPE, OR AT LEAST CONFIRMED OR ACCEPTED BY HIM [CCC GLOSSARY].

The idea is that men whom God has entrusted to oversee our Church, gather to decide important matters and to teach with authority.

WHO TAKES COMMAND OF THIS GATHERING?
Luke tells us that there was much debate. Then, Peter stands up and takes command of the meeting.

WHAT DOES PETER SAY?
Peter tells the assembly that he was especially chosen to be the first to bring the Good News to the Gentiles. He points out that God the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentile converts…and that he cleansed their hearts by Faith. FAITH: THE VIRTUE WHICH GIVES US THE ABILITY TO BELIEVE IN GOD AND IN THE MYSTERIES WHICH HE HAS REVEALED opens the minds and hearts of those who believe to a sacramental relationship with Christ and His Church.

Peter goes on to say, “Why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”
WHAT DO THESE LAST WORDS MEAN?
Peter is talking about circumcision and the Law of 613 Commandments which were a part of the Old Covenant… the Old Testament. Peter calls it a “yoke”… which is a heavy bridle put over the shoulders of beasts to direct them and make them work… because the Jews found so many laws and customs burdensome…and were never really able to be faithful to them all.

Peter, speaking as the Head of the Church… “the Rock” on which the Church is built… is saying that Gentile converts should not be bound by all the laws of the Old Covenant.

WHAT GIVES PETER THE RIGHT TO PRESIDE OVER THE COUNCIL?
In order to answer this question, we must look back to the Gospels… MATTHEW 16. In the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked the question, WHO DO MEN SAY THAT I AM? The Apostles provide a number of answers…then Jesus asks them, WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? Peter stands forth and boldly declares his faith in Jesus… “You are the Messiah… the Son of the Living God!” And Jesus responds…

I TELL YOU; YOU ARE PETER, AND ON THIS ROCK
I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH…

Jesus changes Simon’s name to “ROCK.” When God changes someone’s name, it often means that they have a new role and mission. Peter is to be a “massive rock”… a foundation for Jesus’ Church. Many people believe that they do not need a church or “organized religion,” but this is obviously not Jesus’ thought—He establishes a Church…

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH BAPTIZED FOLLOWERS OF JESUS BELIEVE, WORSHIP, AND ARE SANCTIFIED IN HIS MYSTICAL BODY WHICH IS ONE, HOLY, UNIVERSAL, AND APOSTOLIC.

Jesus continues with His Commission to Peter…

AND THE GATES OF HADES SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT.

The “gates of hades” is another way of referring to the powers of hell. The devil and his dark angels may tempt us and work to destroy our Church and the human race, but the Catholic Church, like a lighthouse on a stormy night, will always shed the light that dispels the darkness…by teaching the Truth and bringing Grace into the world through prayer and the Sacraments.

I WILL GIVE TO YOU THE KEYS OF HEAVEN

Keys open doors [or gates] and are a symbol of authority and power. To Jews in Jesus’ time the man with the keys was seen as the “right hand” of the King. In Isaiah 22:22 we see the keys taken away from the King’s right hand man [or steward] and his authority and power given to another man. Peter is here named as the Head of the Church which will be Jesus Christ’s “Mystical Body”… or Kingdom after the Son ascends to the Right Hand of His Father in Heaven.
These words refer to a power which is conferred on Peter and his successors—those who follow him in office—who we call Popes, to speak and teach and act for God Himself. It is an awesome power that we describe as...

**INFALLIBILITY**

The Pope, guided by the Holy Spirit, cannot make a mistake when he teaches on matters of faith or morality.

Some people are confused about Infallibility. It does not mean that the Pope is “practically perfect in every way.” In the past we have had a few popes who were bad men and terrible leaders. But God protected His Church from men like these... and always will. Infallibility means that when the Pope addresses the Universal Church “ex cathedra” [which means “from the chair”] the Holy Spirit guides Him to the Truth and protects him from teaching what is not True. (See John 16:5-14). This verse is also used to help us understand the power and authority of the Church exercised in and through Canon Law and the Sacraments.

**CATECHISTS... THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO CONSIDER SEVERAL OTHER TERMS AND DEFINITIONS...**

**REVELATION**

God communicates His saving truth to mankind.

**SACRED SCRIPTURE**

The Bible...the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by men in the Old and New Testament.

**SACRED TRADITION**

God’s saving truth revealed to mankind and handed down by word or in writing.

**MAGISTERIUM**

The teaching authority of the Spirit-guided Church throughout history.

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF IN AND THROUGH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH RECEIVES AND PROCLAIMS THE WORD OF GOD... SACRED SCRIPTURE

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONTINUES TO LEAD THE WORLD TO THE “COMPLETE TRUTH”... A TRUTH WHICH IS NOT CONTAINED IN OR RESTRICTED TO THE BIBLE... SACRED TRADITION.


PETER, GUIDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, MAKES GOD’S PLAN CLEARLY KNOWN TO THE “COLLEGE OF BISHOPS”... AND TO THE CHURCH!
WHO SPEAKS AFTER PETER?
James the Bishop of Jerusalem is the major figure who speaks after Peter. This is not John’s Brother James [nick-named “Boanerges”]… this is James the son of Alpheus… also known as “James the Lesser.” James the son of Alpheus is most likely the Apostle described as the brother [a cousin] of Jesus Himself. He was famous for his piety and devotion… a good and holy man of prayer. The “conservatives” who demanded that all men entering the Church embrace the Law in its entirety respected James [as did many of the Pharisees of that time].

WHAT DOES JAMES SAY?
James, exercising his office of Bishop together with Peter, convinces those present that they should follow Peter’s counsel. He recommends that they require only that gentile converts leave behind worship of idols [false gods]… that they properly respect human love [and marriage], and avoid eating blood [which the pagans frequently did].

WHY ARE JAMES’ WORDS SO IMPORTANT?
We are reminded that some elements of the Old Law do remain in effect—like the 10 Commandments and the Great Commandment… but many of the old dietary, tribal, and Sabbath laws were no longer binding.

HOW DOES THE COUNCIL END?
The Fathers of the Council draft a letter with their decision and send it out with Paul, Barnabas, and other representatives from the gathering.
WHERE AND WHEN DOES THIS STORY TAKE PLACE?
Jesus rose from the dead most likely on April 9, 30 AD. In his Gospel John tells us that Jesus appeared to the gathered Apostles later that evening. One week later [April 16?] John tells us that Jesus appears to the Apostles in the upper room again—and this time Thomas is with them. Sometime after that second appearance, but before Jesus Ascends into Heaven [40 days after His Resurrection] Jesus appears this third time…not in Jerusalem or Judea, but in Galilee…by the Sea of Galilee [Tiberias].

WHY DOES THIS STORY SOUND FAMILIAR?
People often confuse this story with the Miraculous catch of fish as Luke reports it in Chapter 5 of his Gospel. But they are two different stories [go back and read it!]. It is worth noting that in the Gospels the Apostles don’t catch a single fish without Jesus’ help!

WHO IS THE FIRST APOSTLE TO RECOGNIZE JESUS?
“The Disciple Whom Jesus loved.” This is John’s way of referring to himself in his Gospel—so John is the one who first recognized Jesus.

IS THE NUMBER OF 153 FISH SIGNIFICANT?
YES! It is symbolic. At that time it was thought that there were 153 different species of fish in the world. Some lists also reckoned that there were 153 nations in the world at that time. The number 153 symbolizes universality and completeness…These Fishers of Men are meant to go out and evangelize the whole world!

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHARCOAL FIRE?
We see a charcoal fire only twice in the Gospels. The first time is in the courtyard of Caiaphas’ Palace where Peter is warming himself just before he denies Jesus three times. The second time is here on the shore of the sea just before Jesus asks and Peter answers Jesus three times that he loves Him.

WHY DOES JESUS ASK SIMON THREE TIMES IF HE LOVES HIM?
Peter’s three declarations of love for Christ are meant to “cancel out” his three fold denial of Jesus. Also, a “threefold” affirmation before witnesses is a sign of the conferral of authority…Peter’s authority to govern and guide the Apostles and the Church.

WHAT DO JESUS’ THREE COMMANDS TO PETER MEAN?
We must look at what all three symbolize. Jesus says...

1. “FEED MY LAMBS.”
   This means that Peter is to take good care of the little children; to teach them about Jesus in catechesis and most importantly to feed them with the Holy Eucharist…the Bread of Life.

2. “TEND MY SHEEP.”
   This means that Peter is to be in charge of the whole Church…to “tend” it. He is in charge of administrating the entire Mystical Body of Christ.

3. “FEED MY SHEEP.”
   This means that Peter is also in charge of teaching and instructing adults…nourishing them with the Holy Eucharist and sound doctrine [the Truth!]

WHAT IS JESUS’ LAST COMMAND TO PETER IN THIS STORY?
Peter seems to be a bit afraid when Jesus says that he is going to be killed [he will be crucified upside down]. Peter wonders if John too is going to be martyred…but Jesus says that is none of Peter’s business. He tells Peter…“FOLLOW ME.” Following Jesus is Peter’s business…and ours too!