“Dear John,”

Epistle comes from the Greek word meaning “letter” and translates as anything written that is sent by a messenger.

Epistles are similar to modern day letters. They have a traditional Hellenistic format that include:

1) An opening salutation containing the writer’s name, the recipient’s name, and a greeting
2) A prayer, blessing, or thanksgiving
3) The body of the letter containing what the sender wanted to say
4) Final greeting and farewell

Letters written to a group of people, which include most of the New Testament epistles, were not read individually but read aloud to the entire church.

(Material sourced from Dictionary.com and NewAdvent.org)

DID YOU KNOW?
A recent survey found that the average American home receives only one handwritten letter per month.

Brighten someone’s day and send a letter.

Sacred Scripture
1 Thess & 2 Thess
Matthew 25

Catechism of the Catholic Church
#1020-1022, 1038-1041 (If time allows 1020-1050)
STUDENTS’ READING REFLECTION & PRAYER

Sacred Scripture
Grades K-1  The Illustrated Acts of the Apostles  pp. n/a
Grades 2-4  Bible for Young Catholics  pp. 304
Grades 5-12  1 Thess and 2 Thess  1:1-12 and 3:1-18  
Matthew 25:1-46

Catechism
Grades K-2  First Communion Catechism  pp. n/a
Grades 3-6  Baltimore Catechism #1  pp. 68-70
Grades 7-12  Catechism of the Catholic Church  #1020-1022, 1038-1041 (If time allows 1020-1050)

TEACHING STRATEGY & OBJECTIVES

THEME:  PAUL CONTINUED TO NURTURE AND GUIDE THE CHURCH COMMUNITIES BY SENDING LETTERS OF INSTRUCTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

OBJECTIVES:  USING SELECTED READINGS FROM PAUL’S LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS PRESENT AND DISCUSS THESE IMPORTANT POINTS:
Paul remained in contact with the Church communities for ongoing evangelization, guidance, and correction.
Review the structure of the BIBLE; Old Testament, Gospels, Acts, Letters
The Letters are part of the Liturgy of the Word at Mass
Utilize Parables from Matthew 25 to emphasize these themes
Discuss Particular and General Judgment appropriate to grade level

OPENING PRAYER  THE GLORIA

REVIEW:

Lesson 15:
RESURRECTION
HOLY EUCHARIST

Lesson 16:
HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS
ANOINTING OF THE SICK
FAITH
CATECHISTS UNTIL NOW WE HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING THE CAREERS—THE “ACTS”—OF THE APOSTLES, PARTICULARLY PETER AND PAUL. NOW WE SHALL LOOK AT A NUMBER OF THEIR WRITINGS...THEIR EPISTLES.

WHY DID PAUL WRITE LETTERS?
After Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch [Acts 11:19], Paul plunged into the apostolate and set out to evangelize the world. In past weeks we have considered his apostolic labors in Asia Minor [modern day Turkey], Achaia and Macedonia [modern day Greece] and eventually Rome during his Three Missionary Journeys and his journey to the Capitol city of the Empire.

Towards the end of his Second Missionary Journey (probably following his failed attempt to impress the Athenians) Paul must have received word that people in the community he had founded in Thessalonica [Acts 17:1—9] were confused about certain teachings. Paul had been forced to leave them abruptly and had not finished his initial evangelization and catechesis. Confusion, problems, and false teachers began to spring up. Paul could not travel to Thessalonica at that particular time [he was most likely ministering in Corinth]... so he dictated and dispatched a letter to inform, encourage, correct, and guide them.

This pattern developed over time in many of the other churches Paul had founded... so he sent out a number of letters to help and to guide them as well. Many of these letters have survived and we have them until this day... preserved in the canon of Sacred Scripture.

WHY ARE PAUL’S LETTERS INCLUDED IN THE BIBLE?
Paul was chosen in a special way by Jesus Christ to bring the Gospel to the world; “HE IS A CHOSEN INSTRUMENT OF MINE TO CARRY MY NAME BEFORE THE GENTILES AND KINGS AND THE SONS OF ISRAEL; FOR I WILL SHOW HIM HOW MUCH HE MUST SUFFER FOR THE SAKE OF MY NAME” [Acts 9:15—16]. As Jesus’ Chosen Vessel, and filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul was given the understanding, the eloquence, the determination and the fortitude to fulfill his calling.

Paul’s letters [also called "epistles"] were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Recall that SACRED SCRIPTURE THE BIBLE is THE WORD OF GOD INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WRITTEN BY MEN IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT. In fact, the Bible is not just one “book”... but is a collection of many books and "literary forms" [conventions and styles of writing]. For example, the Bible is made up of poetry [like the Psalms] and historical narratives [like the Exodus and the Acts of the Apostles]... and most importantly, the Gospels. Included among these literary forms are a number of Letters [also called Epistles]. If a particular book or psalm or letter is recognized as being inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is said to be “canonical” and is included in the books that comprise our Bible.

WHY DO WE READ PAUL’S LETTERS AT MASS?
The HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS is offered when JESUS CHRIST’S DEATH AND RESURRECTION ARE MADE PRESENT FOR THOSE WHO ARE GATHERED AND WE RECEIVE HIM IN THE HOLY EUCHARIST. Every Mass consists of the Liturgy of the Word [in which the written Word of God is proclaimed] and the Liturgy of the Eucharist when the Word of God, Jesus Christ, is received in the HOLY EUCHARIST.

HOLY EUCHARIST: THE SACRAMENT GIVEN TO US BY JESUS AT THE LAST SUPPER AND AT MASS IN HOLY COMMUNION—THE BREAD OF LIFE IS REALLY AND TRULY JESUS’ BODY, BLOOD, SOUL, AND DIVINITY.

Paul’s letters are a part of the rich treasure of our Catholic Tradition, and as part of the Bible, they are often proclaimed at Mass as a part of the Liturgy of the Word. They are filled with instruction, insight, and wisdom, and prepare us to approach the Altar of the Lord to receive Jesus Christ, the Word of God, in Holy Communion.

DID ANY OTHER APOSTLES WRITE LETTERS THAT ARE IN THE BIBLE?
We have two Letters from St. Peter, a Letter from St. James, a Letter from St. Jude, and three Letters from St. John. Like Paul’s letters, these letters too have been read and studied for two thousand years, and are proclaimed at Mass in the Liturgy of the Word.
TO WHOM WERE PAUL’S LETTERS WRITTEN...AND WHAT ARE THEIR APPROXIMATE DATES OF COMPOSITION?

We have 13 Letters from St. Paul which are inspired and canonical... and many opinions about when and where he wrote them. Rather than engaging in controversy and debate, we’ll follow the good and traditional opinions of the more reliable and orthodox scholars.

First, keep in mind the order in which Paul’s letters appear in the Bible is not the order in which they were written. When the Bible was organized in its final form, the Letters of St. Paul were ordered according to their length—from longest to shortest. So the letter to the Romans is presented first, followed by 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, and so on. The most likely order is as follows:

**THE FIERY YOUNG PREACHER IN HIS PRIME**
- 1 & 2 Thessalonians 51 AD [while in Corinth]
- Galatians 54 [while in Ephesus]

**THE GREAT PONDERINGS OF THE MATURE THEOLOGIAN**
- 1 Corinthians 57 [while in Ephesus]
- 2 Corinthians 57 [while in Macedonia]
- Romans 58 [while in Corinth]

**THE CAPTIVITY EPISTLES—WRITTEN WHILE PAUL WAS IN PRISON**
- Philippians 61—64 [on the way to Rome?]
- Philemon 61—64 [in Rome]
- Colossians 61—64 [in Rome]
- Ephesians 61—64 [in Rome]

**THE PASTORAL EPISTLES—PAUL IS A WISER AND GENTLER OLD MAN WHO IS ENCOURAGING AND TEACHING WITH PATIENCE**
- 1 Timothy 65 [while in Macedonia]
- Titus 65 [while in Macedonia]
- 2 Timothy 67 [while in Rome]

WHEN AND WHERE DID PAUL WRITE HIS LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS?

As noted above, Paul most likely wrote his Epistles to the Thessalonians in 51 AD while he was in Corinth during his Second Missionary Journey, not long after his mis-adventures in Athens.

WHY WAS PAUL WRITING TO THE THESSALONIANS?

Because of the usual pattern of opposition and riots that hampered his attempts to evangelize, Paul had to leave Thessalonica suddenly [Acts 17:10]. He was writing to encourage them to live moral lives and to help them to understand the Second Coming of Jesus at the General Judgment.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS LETTER?

First Thessalonians is a relatively short letter [only 1,472 words] and deals with only a few issues. Paul is only beginning to express himself effectively in print [aided, of course, by the Holy Spirit].

WHAT IS AN IMPORTANT THEME IN THE FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS?

Paul encourages the Thessalonians to remain faithful to what they have been taught and to be prepared for the coming of the Lord.

CATECHISTS...WE WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ A PORTION OF THIS LETTER [IF AGE APPROPRIATE]... PREFERABLY 4:14—5:11 [OR A SEGMENT FROM THIS PASSAGE].
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS LETTER?
There is a great and wise observation close to the end of the letter that serves as a good guide for all of us who seek to know Jesus Christ… “Test everything; hold fast to what is good” [1 Thess 5:22]. What an incredibly wise way to go about this business of coming to know and love Jesus… consider all that is presented and taught to us… evaluate it critically and carefully… and hold on firmly to the Truth when we come to know it.

WHAT IS AN IMPORTANT THEME IN PAUL’S SECOND LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS?
The same themes are present here as in Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians; Faithfulness and Readiness. We must add a third theme for this Second Letter: Diligence. After reading Paul’s First Letter, a number of the Thessalonians figured that the end of the world was about to take place… so they stopped working and presumed that others should take care of them [a misunderstanding of Christian Charity!] Unfortunately in almost every age, including our own, there are people who are lazy, who have no desire to work, and who expect to be subsidized by those who do. True Christian Charity can be defined…

CHARITY THE VIRTUE WHICH GIVES US THE ABILITY TO LOVE WITH GOD’S LOVE

Paul condemns the shiftless and lazy behavior of the Thessalonians, and in his own characteristic way offers a directive; “If anyone will not work, let him not eat” [2 Thess 3:10].

CATECHISTS, WE WOULD RECOMMEND PASSING OVER THE CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGES OF THE “MAN OF LAWLESSNESS” AND THE “ANTICHRIST” [in Chapter 2]. IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO MAKE THE POINTS WE COVER HERE THEN MOVE ON TO JESUS CHRIST’S ACCOUNT OF THE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

BUT FOR YOUR INFORMATION— IN CASE YOU ARE WONDERING YOURSELVES OR IF THE TOPIC IS BROUGHT UP THE BY THE STUDENTS, THIS IDEA OF “THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS” … SOMETIMES CALLED “THE ANTI-CHRIST,” HAS GREATLY INTERESTED PEOPLE OVER THE PAST 2,000 YEARS. MANY PEOPLE HAVE A LURID FASCINATION WITH THE IDEA, AND IT HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF MANY A BOOK [AND MOTION PICTURE].

THE CHURCH HAS NOT SPOKEN DEFINITIVELY ON THIS SUBJECT. THERE IS A CERTAIN AMBIGUITY IN THE CONCEPT. IT MAY REFER TO A SPECIFIC PERSON [LIKE ROMAN EMPERORS NERO OR DIOCLETIAN]… OR IT MAY REFER TO VARIOUS EVIL LEADERS WHO HAVE APPEARED OVER THE PAST 2,000 YEARS [LIKE HITLER OR STALIN]. IT MAY COLLECTIVELY REFER TO ALL SUCH PERSONS… OR EVEN TO A GENERAL ATTITUDE AMONG NATIONS AND CULTURES.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PAUL’S LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS?
We might well summarize the themes and ideas of these letters in the old saying, “Live every day as if it is your last; and one day you’ll be right!” We are not supposed to live in fear of the end of the world; that would be foolish. But we should always live with the knowledge that one day our lives in this world will be over.

Think of how patient, forgiving, and charitable we would be if we expected the world to end at sundown today; if this was to be our last day we would probably seek to become as holy as we could before passing from this life into Eternal Life. If we all thought this way, we might well find ourselves living in a world populated by saints!
“DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME”
MOMENTS FROM THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST
JESUS’ ACCOUNT OF THE GENERAL JUDGEMENT MATTHEW 25

CATECHISTS... WE WOULD RECOMMEND THAT YOU READ THROUGH THE TWO PARABLES IN THIS CHAPTER WITH YOUR CLASS. ASK THEM AFTERWARDS WHAT THEY THINK THE PARABLES MEAN...

THE PARABLE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH BRIDESMAIDS [verses 1—13]

WHAT IS THIS PARABLE ABOUT?
Jesus says quite clearly, it is about the Kingdom of Heaven [verse 1]. More specifically, it is about the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of time.

WHAT DO THE FOLLOWING SYMBOLIZE:
- Bridesmaids: People in the world… us!
- Marriage Feast: Heaven
- Lamps: Perhaps our good deeds which are visible to others
- Oil: Perhaps GRACE: THE LIFE AND LOVE OF GOD WITHIN US.
- Midnight: The End of the World…
- Bridegroom: Jesus Christ at the Second Coming

SHOULDN’T THE 5 WISE BRIDESMAIDS HAVE SHARED THEIR OIL WITH THE FOOLISH ONES?
Not really. There are Parables about the importance of sharing [the Rich Man and the Beggar; the Man With the Bins of Grain, the Widow and her Two Coins]. The focus of this Parable is not sharing; it is about being ready at all times for the Coming of Christ.

If the Oil does symbolize Grace, then the Wise Bridesmaids would not have been able to give it away even if they wanted to. Just as we cannot [directly] give Life, or Time, we cannot directly give Grace. Although we can pray for God to give Grace to others, we cannot give our Grace to them directly ourselves—only God gives Grace.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM JESUS’ PARABLE?
We’d better live good and holy lives and be ready for Jesus to visit us at all times…or we might miss out on Heaven!

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS [verses 14—30]

WHAT IS THIS PARABLE ABOUT?
It is about how God gives each of us Talents and Abilities that we are supposed to use to build up His Kingdom. Although “talent” in Jesus’ time referred to a significant amount of money, because of this parable, it began to refer to “gifts and abilities” that God has given to each of us. Some receive more “talents” than others; God expects more from such persons as these. But God expects all of us, even those who think that they are not very gifted, to do their best for Him, and to show some “return” on His “investment.”

Like the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids, this Parable has a disturbing ending… “CAST THE WORTHLESS SERVANT INTO THE OUTER DARKNESS WHERE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH!” We see that if we do not follow Jesus faithfully in this life, that we may be lost and punished forever—a theme which Jesus states even more powerfully in the following account…
THE GENERAL JUDGMENT [verses 31—46]

CATECHISTS…A GOOD READ-THROUGH OF THIS STORY FOR THE CLASS SHOULD SERVE QUITE WELL. IT IS SELF-EXPLANATORY. THIS [OBVIOUSLY] IS JESUS CHRIST’S ACCOUNT OF THE GENERAL JUDGMENT. SEVERAL POINTS WORTH PONDERING…

THEME: IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO AVOID DOING EVIL… ONE MUST ALSO DO GOOD IN ORDER TO ATTAIN ETERNAL LIFE.

WHEN WE LOVE AND SERVE OTHERS, WE LOVE AND SERVE JESUS IN AND THROUGH THEM!

WHAT IS PARTICULAR JUDGMENT?
When we die we suddenly stand before Jesus Christ…and all the good and evil we have done in this life will suddenly be seen and known by us. This is the moment of PARTICULAR JUDGMENT: We are judged individually and our eternal destiny is determined. Our souls are sent to one of three “places”…

HELL: A STATE OF ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD.
WE REJECT AND HATE HIM FOREVER

PURGATORY: A STATE OF EXISTENCE IN WHICH WE ARE “PURGED” OR PURIFIED FROM THE DAMAGE WE HAVE DONE TO OUR SOULS BY OUR SINS

HEAVEN: EVERLASTING LIFE IN GOD’S PRESENCE

WHAT IS THE GENERAL JUDGMENT?
Towards the end of the Nicene Creed, we say,

“I LOOK FORWARD TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME”

This refers to the end of the world. At that time our bodies rise from the grave to be reunited with our souls. In this GENERAL JUDGMENT [which Jesus describes in MT 25 and Paul describes in 1 THES 4:14—17 and 2 THES 1:5—10], all the human race is judged together—those who are evil are consigned to hell forever; and those who have followed Jesus find their bodies and souls united in a glorified state…and are taken into Heaven where we shall be with God forever. AMEN!