

Exploring the Catholic Virtue of Charity

Overview: Students will explore the Catholic virtue of charity in the novel *To Hope and Back*, focusing on themes of selflessness, generosity, service, and humility. Students will read passages from the book, engage in discussions, and participate in activities that encourage them to live out this virtue in their own lives. Students will engage in citizenship education and create an action plan that explores the virtue of charity from multiple perspectives. They will research and learn about local or national nonprofit organizations, gaining a deeper appreciation for community mobilization and the impact of charitable work.

1. Introduction to the Catholic Virtue of Charity: Activate the learning by engaging students in reflective conversations, Catholic mindfulness and a deeper understanding of the virtue.

Discussion Prompts: What does "charity" mean to you? How does charity differ from simply being nice? Can you think of a time when someone showed charity toward you, or when you showed charity to someone else? Why is charity important in building strong relationships and communities?

Scripture Reference: Read Mark 4:18 and discuss how this passage reflects the nature of charity—acting with love, kindness, and selflessness toward others.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free."

Define Charity: Charity is the virtue of loving others selflessly, being generous and compassionate toward those in need, and acting with kindness and care. It is an essential part of Christian living, demonstrating God's love through our actions.

2. Exploring Charity in *To Hope and Back*: Explore the passage below reflecting on the Catholic virtue of charity. Use the discussion questions to spark conversation.

"Following Lawrence Berenson's failed efforts to find a haven for the passengers of the St. Louis, the person now in charge of negotiations on behalf of those on board was Morris Troper, the European Director of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). As the ship was streaming its way towards Europe, Troper stepped up the pressure on European countries and

began round-the-clock discussions with those countries that had relief agencies supported by the JDC. His first contact was with King Leopold III and Prime Minister Pierlot of Belgium, who ultimately agreed to take a number of the refugees. Next, Troper contacted Queen Wilhelmina of Holland who also agreed to accept a number of passengers. With these two countries on his side, Troper now believed that he could put pressure on several more countries.” (p. 167-168)

“One Christmas Eve, several months after arriving in Agde, Sol and his mother managed to escape when the French soldiers guarding them became drunk, and abandoned their posts. But since Sol's father was in another section of the camp, Sol and his mother were forced to leave without him. They made their way to the small town where they had been living before their arrest. A kind and generous teacher who remembered them agreed to take them in. Several days later, Sol's father escaped and joined them. It was in this small town that Sol was reunited with Leon Silver, the boy who had befriended him on board the St. Louis. Leon and his parents had also escaped from Agde.” (p.190)

“Once the St. Louis had been emptied of its passengers in Antwerp, the captain received orders to restock the ship and steer it to New York to begin summer cruises to the Caribbean. The ship was at sea when war broke out on September 3, 1939, and Captain Schroeder did not manage to get the ship back to Hamburg until January 1940. It was the last voyage for the captain. After the war ended, Captain Schroeder tried to make a living as a writer, but he struggled financially. Many of the former passengers of the St. Louis sent him food and clothing to help him in his later years.” (p. 194)

Discussion Questions:

- How does Sol's life, and the lives of his family members, change after arriving in Agde and encountering the teacher? How does this demonstrate the virtue of charity?
- Can charity be shown through actions, words, and attitudes? Give personal/book examples.
- In what ways can charity go beyond just giving money or material things?
- How do the characters in the book sustain the virtue of charity when faced with difficult situations? How do they demonstrate kindness and care towards others?

3. Engaging with Charity: Students engage in a reflective activity that explores the virtue of charity.

In this activity, students will reflect on how charity can be expressed in their community through a class action project.

Instructions:

Identify a Need in Your Community: Students will work in small groups to identify a local need in their school or community. This could include organizing a food drive, creating care packages for a local shelter, visiting a nursing home, or helping to clean up a park.

Create a Plan for Action: Once a need is identified, each group will create a plan for how they will address it. Students will discuss what steps need to be taken, what resources they will need, and how they can engage others to help.

Acting with Charity: After the planning phase, students will carry out their community service projects. This can be done as a class, with each group presenting their project and involving others in their initiative.

Reflect on the Experience: After completing the project, students will reflect on how they demonstrated charity through their actions. They will discuss the importance of giving to others and the impact of their efforts on those they served.

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

- How did you feel when you were helping others?
 - What was the most rewarding part of practicing charity?
 - How did your actions demonstrate selfless love and care for others?
 - How can you continue to practice charity in your daily life?
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4. Connecting Charity to Real-World Action: Students apply their knowledge of the virtue of charity and make connections to themselves, others and the world.

Students will learn about a local or national non-profit organization to examine their charity efforts and impact on communities. Students will develop an understanding of how charity organizations contribute to society and how they can support these efforts through their own actions. Through their research, students will learn about the organization's mission, programs, and how it supports those in need. They will also reflect on how these charity efforts align with the Catholic virtue of Charity and consider ways they can contribute to the cause.

Instructions:

Choose a Non-Profit Organization: Students will choose a local or national non-profit organization to research. It can be related to a cause they care about, such as hunger, homelessness, animal welfare, education, or environmental conservation.

Research the Organization: Students will gather information about the organization, including:

- **Mission and Values:** What is the organization's mission? What are their core values and goals?
- **Programs and Services:** What kind of charity work do they do? What programs or services do they offer to the community?
- **Impact:** How does the organization measure its success? What positive changes have they made in the community or for specific groups of people?
- **How They Operate:** Where does the organization get its funding? How do they organize their charitable efforts? Who are their partners or supporters?

Students can use the organization's website, news articles, videos, or interviews to gather their research.

Create a Presentation: After completing the research, students will create a **presentation** (this can be a poster, PowerPoint, or written report) summarizing what they learned. The presentation should include:

- The organization's name and a brief overview of its mission.
- A description of its charity efforts and programs.
- Examples of how the organization has impacted the community.
- A reflection on how the organization embodies the Catholic virtue of Charity through its actions.

Presentation to the Class: Students will present their findings to the class. Encourage them to explain why they chose the organization, how it has made a difference in the community, and how it relates to the virtue of Charity.

5. Consolidating and Celebrating our Learning: Students are invited to consolidate their learning and celebrate their new knowledge.

Invite students to reflect on the virtue of charity and share one thing they will do to practice charity in the coming week. Encourage them to think of simple actions that demonstrate care for others, whether at home, at school, or in their neighborhood.

6. Closing Prayer: Rejoice in the virtue of charity by coming together in prayer.

Dear God,

Thank You for showing us Your love through acts of charity. Help us to be kind and generous to

those in need, and to always act with love and care toward others. May we reflect Your love in all that we do, sharing our blessings and offering a helping hand. Grant us the strength to continue serving others with hearts full of charity.

Amen.