

**2020 Creative Festivals Lesson Plan:
Middle School/High School**

Theme:

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” (John 3:17)

Goal:

To help the students understand the theme well enough to express it in art, photography, poetry, and creative writing.

Lesson Objectives:

The students will be able to:

- Discuss the concept of condemnation.
- Describe the three stages of being saved.
- Explain the difference between judging ourselves and judging others.

Time: 40 Minutes

Materials:

- Icon of Christ the Savior (*If an actual icon of Christ the Savior is not available, use the one that is attached.*)
- Fr. Rick’s Sermon, “Don’t Condemn Nor Criticize,” by Fr. Richard Demetrius Andrews, St. George Orthodox Church, St. Paul, Minnesota (*Attached. Print several copies, including one for the teacher.*)
<http://www.stgeorgegoc.org/pastors-corner/fr-ricks-sermons/dont-condemn-nor-criticize>
- Paper and Pencils

Opening Prayer:

(Face the icon of Christ the Savior.) *“Thank you, Father, for sending Your Son Jesus not to judge and condemn us but to save us and make us Your children, partakers of your very nature. Amen.”*

Introduction:

Read the theme aloud to the students. Then ask, *“What does the word condemn mean?”* Answers might include some of the following: to strongly disapprove, to declare someone guilty, to inflict a penalty upon someone, etc. *“What do you think the word condemn means according to our Orthodox Christian faith?”* (To be separated from God forever.) *“Jesus came into the world so that we could be rescued from condemnation. The name ‘Jesus’ literally means ‘God saves.’ He came to show us how we could be reunited with God. So if God is not condemning us, how does someone*

*become condemned?" (Obtain answers. Then read the following excerpt from the Orthodox Study Bible notes on page 1427.) "While Christ comes to save and not to condemn, man has free will. Thus he can reject this gift and he becomes condemned by his own rejection." Read the following excerpts from Fr. Anthony Coniaris's book, *The Great I Came's of Jesus*, page 111.*

"Before Jesus came, we were a fallen race. We needed not a judge to condemn us but a Savior to raise us from our fall...Jesus said, 'Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.' We needed someone to lift us, heal us, not someone to judge and condemn us."

Discussion:

Ask the students what it means to be saved. (Obtain responses.) Read the following quote from Fr. Anthony Coniaris's book, *The Great I Came's of Jesus*, on page 112.

"I have been saved, I am being saved; and I shall yet be saved." (Ask the students what they think he means by this statement. After they have given their answers, read the following excerpt, on pages 112-113.) "...salvation is comprehensive. It has to do with our past- we have been saved from sin and death. This we call justification. It has to do with the present- we are being saved. This has to do with our daily walk and growth in the life of Christ and the Spirit. This we call sanctification. And salvation has to do also with our final glory in Christ...We were saved at baptism but we must continue to 'work out' our salvation for the rest of our life by daily serving, loving, obeying, and following Jesus."

Activity:

Break up the class into groups of three or four. Give them paper and pencils. Assign part of Fr. Rick's sermon, "Don't Condemn or Criticize," to each group. Have the groups discuss their portion of the sermon, write down their comments, and report back to the class. Discuss the difference between judging ourselves and judging others.

Conclusion:

"In Orthodox theology 'being saved' is a process that takes place in our lives every day. The more we grow in knowledge of Christ, the more we recognize our sinfulness and are humbled before God. We come to realize that we are being saved daily through repentance and yielding our hearts and minds to Christ. Christ did not come to judge us but to save us."

Closing Prayer:

"Come, Lord, Jesus, into the manger of my soul. It is not worthy of your presence. It is unclean, dirty, sinful, but You want so much to come. And it is by your coming that it can be cleansed. Come, free me to love You and bear the fruit of Your salvation in the world. Amen."



Fr. Rick's Sermon

Don't Condemn Nor Criticize

From Fr. Anthony Coniaris "Jesus Came to Save World not Condemn It" (Meet Jesus in the Sunday Gospels, vol.2 p.43)

Jesus says to the woman caught in adultery, "*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more*" (John 8:1-11)

"God sent His only-begotten Son into the world; not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17).

God is the only One who has the authority to criticize and to condemn. He will come as Judge at the end of the world but now He comes as Savior.

"Judge not and you will not be judged" (Matt.7:1). Jesus addresses these words to persons who, though their lives were far from perfect, were busy criticizing others.

¹"Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:1-4)

Jesus is not demanding a complete halt to judging and criticizing. What He is demanding is that we clean up our own lives first before we speak to the evil in the lives of others. Most of us overlook our own faults while we magnify the faults of others.

One of the hardest things to take is one of the easiest things to give—criticism. "*It takes a good man to build a barn, but any fool can kick or burn it down.*" (Sam Rayburn)

Jesus has not called us to change anyone. He has called us to love them. Changing people is His business. Loving them is our business.

If we wish to help someone grow, we need to remember that encouragement and promise are the bricks we build on. Critics and cynics belong to the demolition company. Those who praise and encourage are in the construction business.

Jesus emphasized that the key to constructive criticism is to know how to judge oneself first. *“Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye (Matthew 7:5). St. Nilus said, “The beginning of salvation is to condemn yourself.”*

The closer one draws to God, the more one is able to see his/her own sins. And when one truly sees his own sins, he has no time to judge others. The reason we judge others is because we do not know ourselves. We are blind to ourselves.

The devil asked a saint one day, *“Who are the goats and who are the sheep?”* The saint replied, *“I am one of the goats but as for the sheep, God alone knows who they are.”* The saint judged the person he was supposed to judge—himself. The others he left to God’s judgment.

E.S. Jones said, *“Inoculate yourself with a mild dose of self-criticism so that you’ll be immune against the criticism of others. When criticism comes, you can say, ‘That isn’t anything. I’ve said far worse things than about myself.’”* The most effective criticism is to judge oneself daily in the presence of God.

“If anyone could see his own vices accurately without the veil of self-love, he would worry about nothing else in his life.” (St. John Climacus)

In judging others, we are really judging ourselves. Judging is self-revealing. We tend to criticize in others the faults we most hate in ourselves but do not have the courage to face. Our faults irritate us most when we see them in others. People who have the greatest faults or the greatest number of faults are themselves often the most merciless in their criticism of others. St. Paul said, *“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”* (Romans 2:1)

Polish your own windows. Remove the dirt of sin through daily self-examination, self-criticism and repentance; and you will be surprised how much saintlier your neighbor will appear to you.