

The Woman Who Laughed With God

**1**

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

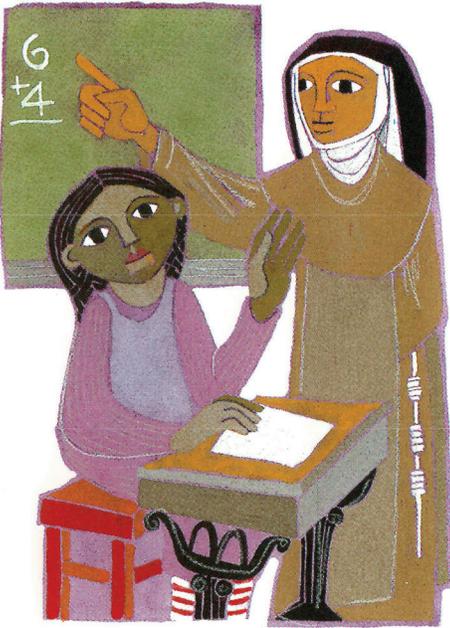
2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: What makes you laugh? Has there ever been a time when you “laughed with God” because you were so happy? What happened?

**1**

Read the story below out loud. If your child is old enough, he or she can read it to you. Otherwise, read it to your child. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

Not so very long ago, there lived a wonderful, joyful woman named Thea Bowman. Thea liked to talk about God. She liked to sing about God. Thea was a great talker and a great singer. People loved to hear her talk and sing about God. Thea had many, many friends because she was such a happy and loving person. But Thea's best friend was God.

Thea was born in 1937 in Mississippi. Her father worked very hard. He was the only African American doctor in the town. Thea's mother was a teacher and a good woman who helped everyone. Thea's grandfather had once been a slave.

Thea lived during a time when African Americans were often treated badly. But Thea's parents were both loving people. They taught Thea not to return hate for hate. Thea's mother would say, "Hate will just eat into your soul." Thea learned how much God loved her from her parents and from the people in her neighborhood, especially the "old folks."

When Thea was growing up she spent a lot of time with the elders in her neighborhood. Her parents wanted her to learn the old songs and old stories. They wanted her to hear from the elders' lips about slavery and what they had lived through.

The elders taught Thea lessons she would remember all her life. They taught her to be thankful and joyful during the good times. They also taught her to be thankful and joyful in the not-so-good times. Thea would tell people, "The old folks taught me how to face life and pain and even death."

When Thea was ten years old, some Catholic sisters came to her town. They opened up a school for all of the children. Thea liked going to the school. She liked learning how to read. She liked learning more about Jesus. She liked being with the sisters. Thea was a happy, active child. She liked to run and play. She liked to laugh and sing. She liked to learn and pray.

After a while Thea decided she wanted to become a Catholic. Thea's parents gave their permission, and Thea joined the Church. Thea liked to spend time with the Catholic sisters. She liked to help them as they worked for the poor.

After high school Thea decided she wanted to give her whole life to God in

a special way by becoming a nun. She wanted to become a Catholic sister just like the sisters who had taught her. And that is just what she did.

Thea left the South and traveled to Wisconsin to learn more about God and the sisters. Sister Thea went to college to learn how to be a teacher. She traveled to a university in Washington, D.C., to learn all about English literature.

Sister Thea loved to learn and she loved to teach. But it was not teaching English literature that made her famous. People all over the world came to know Thea when she began to write and teach about the music and the history of her people.

Everywhere Sister Thea traveled, she taught people to respect the gifts African Americans have to offer our country and our Church. She also taught all people to respect their own heritage. Thea used to say, “No matter who you are or what your background, always remember to be proud because you can say, ‘I am a child of God. I am somebody.’”

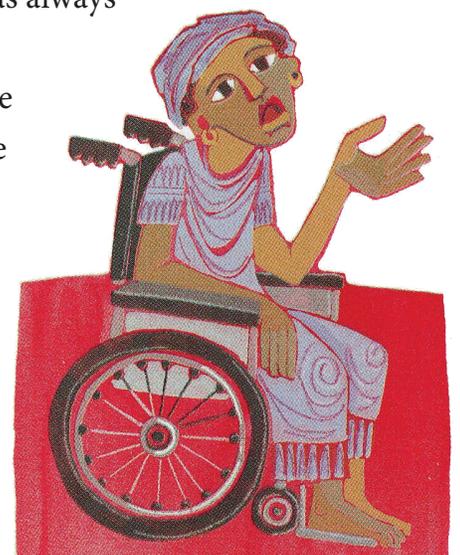
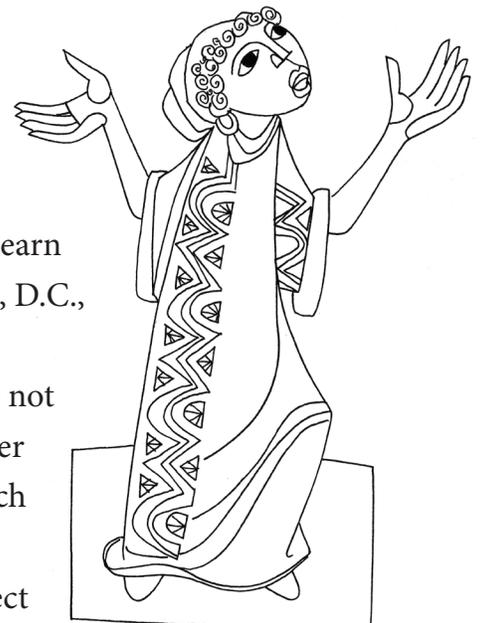
Sister Thea had many talents. She was very smart. She was a great teacher. She was a powerful singer. When Sister Thea sang, she would get everyone to sing. Sister Thea would clap and get everyone to clap. Sister Thea also had a special talent of making people feel good about themselves. She kept telling people, “Always remember who you are and whose you are.”

Sister Thea had friends of every race and color. She had friends from all different countries and of all different religions. Sister Thea had so many friends you could not even count them. But Thea’s best friend was always Jesus.

Sister Thea prayed all the time. She liked praying at Mass. She liked praying every day with the sisters with whom she lived. She liked to pray when she was alone in her room. She liked to pray with the thousands of people who came to hear her speak. Sister Thea and God were so close that Thea’s whole life was a prayer.

In 1984, Sister Thea learned she had cancer. The doctors told her she only had a little while to live. Thea remembered what the old folks had taught her: “Even when you are scared, you got to keep on ‘steppin.’” And that is what Thea did. Even when she was in great pain, she would still talk and sing about the God she loved so much.

Hundreds and thousands of people would come to see Sister Thea and hear her. She would look tiny and weak as her wheelchair was lifted onto the



platform. But then something wonderful would happen. As soon as Sister Thea began to sing, she became filled with great strength and power. Even when she spoke in a whisper, everyone could hear. Sister Thea was filled with the Spirit of God, and she shared that Spirit with everyone who heard her.

On March 30, 1990, Thea Bowman died. Now she is singing and talking with the God she loved to laugh with all her life.

All through Thea's life, God called to her and Thea answered. The great and Holy Spirit was not just with Thea but also in Thea. Sister Thea let the Spirit move her and great things happened. Sister Thea's singing and celebration of life were her ways of praying. By getting other people of all races and cultures to sing and celebrate their lives, she taught them to pray, too.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What is your favorite part of the story? Why?
2. What does the story about Sister Thea teach YOU about how to live as a Catholic?
3. When do you do your best praying? Where? Alone or with others?

2

Get your child started on the activity on the next page, making sure they understand the instructions. (The words hidden in the picture are "I am God's child.") Then continue to read below.

3

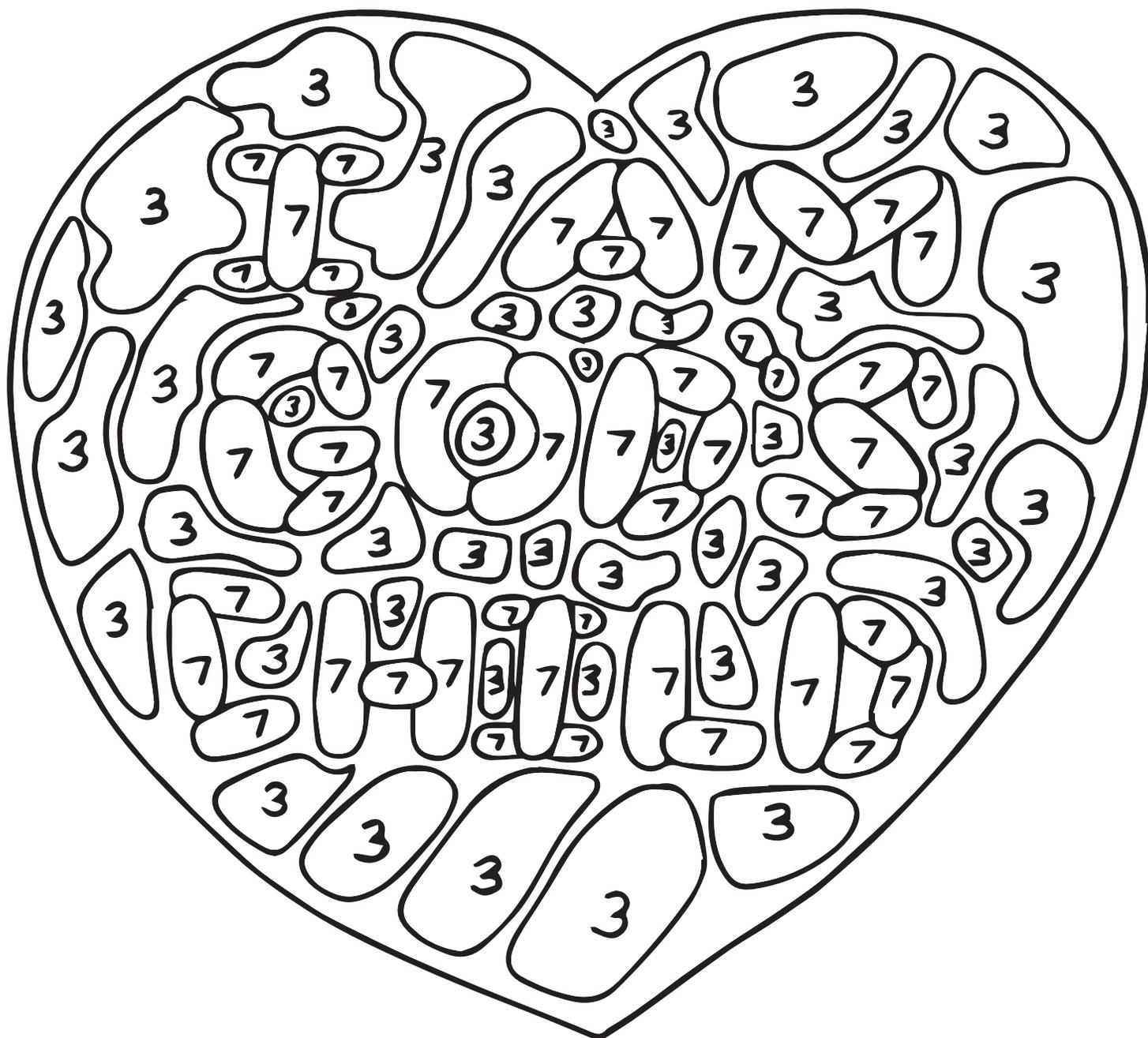
Just for you: When we pray individually, we bring back to God the rich diversity of creation.

If we limit ourselves to one way to pray, the way most common to our culture, we will lose opportunities to grow in our awareness at God. We are created as individuals who bring our own experiences, background, and stories to our prayers. The beauty of the Spirit of Jesus lies in our recognition of the diversity of humanity. There are many ways to pray!

Who We Are, Whose We Are

Sister Thea used to say “Always remember who you are and whose you are.” Using the color code below, fill in the spaces in the heart. Inside the heart is the answer to Sister Thea’s reminder.

3 = red 7 = yellow



How Do You Pray?

1

Help your child get started on their activity on the next page, and then continue to the next step.

2

Just for you: There are many ways to pray, and we use them at different times. Sister Thea was very clear in her message to us: It is not important *how* we pray. It *is* important *that* we pray.

3

Please look at the list below (your young person has a similar list). How many of these “ways of prayer” have you tried?

1. Place a check mark by any of these you have tried.
2. Place a star by the ones you like best.
3. Place a question mark by the ones you would like to try.



- Drawing pictures or writing letters to God
- Meeting God outside in nature
- Sunday Eucharist
- Weekday Mass
- Saying the rosary
- Sitting alone and talking to God
- Singing a song about God
- Listening to music that brings you closer to God
- Creating artwork while chatting with God

Many Ways to Pray

There are many ways to pray. Some may not seem like praying, but they can be. Read the list below.

X Put an X next to the ways you have prayed.

***** Place a star by the one you like best.

? Place a question mark by the ones you might like to try.

- Drawing pictures or writing letters to God
- Meeting God outside in nature
- Sunday Eucharist
- Weekday Mass
- Saying the rosary
- Sitting alone and talking to God
- Singing a song about God
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Exploring Prayer

1

Talk with a variety of people about when they most like to pray and how they pray. This group could include your pastor, a pastor from another tradition, members of your family, your Church, or other faiths.

Go to the library and see if you can rent a DVD or borrow a prayer book from another faith tradition. How are we different? How are we alike?



Closing Ritual

2

Think of a song you could both listen to and reflect upon together. Where is God in the lyrics of this music? Thank God for all our differences and for the rich diversity in our world!

