

**August 2009**

**Sunday 2nd**

**Ordinary Time 18**

The Bread of Life

*Jn 6:24-35*

**Tuesday 4th**

**St John Vianney**

Patron of Year of the Priest

**Thursday 6th**

**Transfiguration of the Lord**

**Sunday 9th**

**Ordinary Time 19**

Living in the Light

*Jn 6:41-51*

**Saturday 15th**

**Assumption of Mary**

**Holy Day**

**Sunday 16th**

**Ordinary Time 20**

Sing to God

*Jn 6:51-58*

**Sunday 23rd**

**Ordinary Time 21**

Words of Life

*Jn 6:60-69*

**Sunday 30th**

**Ordinary Time 22**

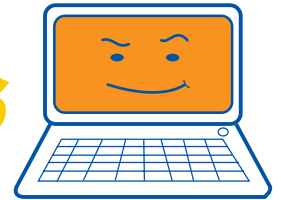
A Pure Heart

*Mk 7:1-8.14-15. 21-23*

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# cyber rascals



Digital communications have revolutionised our social relationships. Text messaging, email and social network communities mean that today's young person has instant access to friends and acquaintances across the globe. Unfortunately, like all innovative technologies, some young people choose to abuse the power of digital communications. A new brand of bullying has emerged and is wreaking havoc on the lives of its victims.

Cyber-bullying presents special challenges. To start, it's difficult for the target to retreat from it because digital communications enable the cyber-bully to access the target at any time and in any location. Home is not a refuge for the cyber-target and the relentless nature of some cyber-bullying has serious consequences on their mental and physical health. Moreover, the option of anonymity in digital communications makes cyber-bullies bolder in their attacks. Some common cyber-bully strategies include:

- Offensive text and email messages sent to the target continuously throughout the night and on weekends.
- Using their mobile phone to take photos/video of the target in a compromising situation and forwarding it to others or posting it on the internet.
- Using the target's phone or email account to send embarrassing or offensive text/emails to others and so disrupting the target's friendships and isolating them socially.
- Disclosing the target's personal information (or making it up) on social networking sites to cause embarrassment.

## the players

**The Target** is the person at whom the bullying is directed. They may be socially vulnerable, belong to a minority group or be the subject of envy because of a particular talent or privilege. For some targets, there is no obvious reason why they have been selected by the bully. The experience of bullying can have a profound impact, causing depression, anxiety, decline in academic performance, and in extreme cases, self harm and suicide.

**The Bully** is the person or group who directs the bullying. Generally, bullies suffer from a poor self-esteem, have a low tolerance for diversity, and are emotionally immature. Bullies often feel inadequate and insecure in their personal relationships. They are often the targets of abuse from older siblings or abusive parent figures. The experience of power acquired through dominating the target compensates the bully for feeling powerless in other aspects of their life. Bullies are often unaware of the impact of their actions – they may brush it off as just a bit of fun or even see the Target as somehow deserving of their meanness.

**The Bystander** is any person who witnesses or knows of the bullying but is not directly involved. They may be a friend to the target, to the bully, or a neutral observer. Bystanders can make the bullying worse by providing an audience, adding to the bully's sense of power. They can also be drawn into active participation by forwarding bully text and email. Bystanders also can be significant in breaking the pattern of abuse by challenging the bully, supporting the target, or reporting the bully to an appropriate authority figure.

## what parents can do

### Get informed

Ignorance is a fertile bed for cyber-bullying to take root. Try these sites for more information:

[www.netalert.gov.au](http://www.netalert.gov.au)

[www.cybersmartkids.com.au](http://www.cybersmartkids.com.au)

### Set some boundaries

Make it a home rule that digital communication ceases at a reasonable hour, say one hour before bedtime. Have black-out periods during dinner, family time and prayer time. Monitor your child's internet and phone use. Do a regular google search on their name and a history check on their internet visits.

### Talk to your children

Discuss the three players in any bullying situation. Talk about a Christian response to each role. Make sure your child knows an appropriate authority figure to whom they can turn if needed, such as a teacher, school counsellor or sports coach.

You can download some case studies from [www.cathfamily.org](http://www.cathfamily.org) to stimulate discussion.



## Discussion Starters for Families and Groups

### Nasty pics

For her birthday Jenny had a slumber party. She thought it would be funny to take a picture on her phone of Cassy on the toilet. Everyone laughed when they burst into the bathroom to catch her out. Cassy was really upset but Jenny just wouldn't let it go. At school on Monday she showed the whole class the picture. Cassy pretended to go along with it, but inside she was devastated.

1. Is it okay to take a picture of someone to humiliate them?
2. What could Cassy do to change her situation?
3. If someone shows you something about another person that you know that person doesn't like, what should you do?

### Blake's mistake

It started as a bit of a joke. A few blokes were talking about the girls and giving them a rating. It was just the normal guy stuff. But then Jack put up a website on the weekend and got them all to login and rate the girls online. Blake thought it was harmless but at school the next week, every one was talking about it. They'd all seen the website, including the teachers. The girls were really mad. Some of them had been crying. Blake felt really bad. When he got home, his parents were furious. Turns out, some one put his little sister up on the website too. She'd been crying all afternoon and wouldn't talk to him. He couldn't believe he'd been so stupid. He really wished he could take it back, but he couldn't.

1. How can you tell the difference between a joke and something that it is really harmful?
2. Is it ever okay to talk about other people as if they were a sex object?
3. How does the internet make the joke worse?

### Love Games

Samantha was 14 and was dating a boy from the local boy's school. Things were getting pretty hot between them and Samantha was sure that they were in love. She took a photo of herself topless and sent it to him from her phone. When he started showing it around and forwarding it to his friends, she felt humiliated. She had a big argument and broke up with him, but it was too late to get the picture back. Soon someone had posted it on the internet and then her parents found out. They called her school, and the principal called the police because she was under 16. It caused such a scandal the local newspaper ran a story about it.

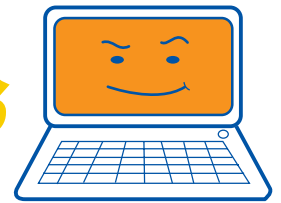
1. Where did Samantha go wrong?
2. Is it okay to forward private photos and messages without the permission of the owner?
3. What might be some of the long term consequences for Sam now that the photo is out on the internet?

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Based on real situations, these short stories are designed to stimulate discussion with your children. Parents should screen the stories and select the ones that are age appropriate for their children. News reports are another valuable source of 'case studies' that can be used to help children think about and talk through how to handle bullying incidents. Some of these represent tricky moral situations. Use these dilemmas to help your child develop a healthy moral standard, firmly rooted in Christian ethics.

#### Some general guidelines:

- Affirm the dignity of every individual and their right to feel safe at home and school.
- Examine the issue from all perspectives – the target, the bully, the bystander.
- Pose the question: What would Jesus do in this situation?
- Encourage the practice of seeking the advice of trusted adults when faced with uncertainty.



## Discussion Starters for Families and Groups cont.

### Nowhere to hide

Katlyn was 13 and finding it difficult to settle into her new high school. When some of the girls showed an interest in befriending her, she eagerly joined 'the group', giving them her mobile phone number and email address. At first, the text messages were welcome – at least someone knew she was alive! But then they got nasty, and more persistent, calling her 'fatty' and other names. Soon Katlyn was having trouble sleeping as silent calls began to arrive late at night. She was tired and distracted at school and her grades fell. Her teachers called her parents in, but she didn't tell them what was really happening. She was so on edge, expecting abuse at any time, she just couldn't concentrate. She often felt sick in the stomach from the worry and would skip meals, only to binge on junk food. She didn't know what to do...she had no escape and nowhere to hide.

1. What could Katlyn do to change her situation?
2. How does internet and mobile phone technology make bullying worse?
3. Why do you think the bullies are doing this to Katlyn?

### Friends gone bad

Andrew was short for his age. He liked music and played the piano really well. He was good friends with David who played the clarinet with him in the school orchestra. They weren't very popular with most of the other kids in the school but they were good buddies. Then someone started a rumour that he was gay. Boys and girls started to openly tease him at school and on Facebook. Then they posted photos of him on Facebook that had been edited – his face on a naked man. Anonymous messages came in on his phone. His friend, David, was afraid to get involved in case the bullies turned on him. Unable to cope and feeling totally alone, Andrew took his life.

1. What makes some people more likely to be the target of bullying?
2. Have you ever been bullied about something that wasn't true or you couldn't help? How did you feel? What did you do?
3. What could David, as a bystander, have done to help?

### Parents behaving badly

13-year-old Megan met Josh at MySpace. Their friendship blossomed until one day Josh turned vicious. He told Megan that people hated her and posted her emails to him on MySpace. Megan was devastated. She'd struggled with depression and ADD for years. Her parents found her in her room where she'd hung herself. Turns out, Josh didn't exist. It was a hoax made up by the parents of a girl down the street who Megan wasn't friends with anymore.

1. When adults behave badly, it's hard for kids to challenge them - what can kids do when this happens?
2. What are some of the risks of internet relationships? How can people protect themselves from hoaxes.
3. What can schools do to help kids avoid the pitfalls of cyberbullying and internet hoax?