

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Summary of content

Level II

"Help Me Fall in Love with God"

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a method that believes that even the very young child has a spiritual life. God is present to them in their deepest being and they are capable of developing both a conscious and intimate relationship with God. We provide materials based on age-appropriate Scripture passages and liturgical signs that nurture their relationship with God. The method balances reading the Bible with the richness of our communal sacramental life in the liturgy. This method begins with presenting the New Testament to the child because it is the foundation of our faith. The youngest contemplate Jesus and the beauty and wonder of the Kingdom of God through carefully chosen Bible verses that foster a deep love for Jesus. As they grow older they are encouraged to think about how they can take personal responsibility to maintain this relationship with God and to consider their social responsibility in the world.

Each meditation the child is given has specific materials for the child to work with. These materials are always available to the child during their "work cycle" so that there is additional opportunity for the child to absorb the rich meditations.

The following is a summary of the meditations offered in the Level II atrium for the child in first through third grades. Time in the atrium allows for time of prayer and song, a time for the "meditation," and a time for individual work by the child. The work of the child is their prayer and the most important part of their time in the atrium.

Level II (The child in first through third Grade)

The overall theme for these years is the image of Christ as the True Vine, focusing on both relationship and responsibility. The History of the Kingdom of God is an important tool in introducing and illustrating God's work and planning on behalf of humanity. As the child begins to discover the vast cosmic history of God's plan of salvation, they begin to realize that they have something to contribute to it. The child at this developmental age has an increasing moral sensitivity/awareness which is satisfied deeply in the Level II atrium..

Meditations offered over this three year period can be divided into several large groupings. Below are listed the names of the meditations and their aim.

Prayer

Prayer Services – the child continues to pray at the prayer table, begins planning, and enjoys leading prayer services for their entire age group using familiar songs, readings, and prayers.

Song and Art – music and art continue to support the child's growth at this level with more advanced songs, including "part" singing and rounds. The child at this age the child may be interest in illuminated masterpieces and calligraphy. Frequently their art synthesizes work they have seen.

Bible

Books of the Bible – this meditation helps the child understand that the Bible is one book – made up of many books - which reveal the history of the Kingdom of God, it also begins to give the child a structure to locate various books in the Bible.

Bible Study – the child begins to read the Bible and participate in group studies of New Testament stories. This is a favorite work for the child once they begin to be comfortable with reading. Some of the Bible passages explored during these years include the announcement to Zachariah (Luke 1:5-25); the Birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-80); the Baptism of Jesus (found in all the Gospels); the Feeding of the 5000 (Mark 6:30-44 or parallel text); the Healing of the Man born Blind (John 9); the Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12 or parallel text) and various resurrection appearances in all four Gospels.

Land of Israel – a pin map is used to highlight additional cities and geographic features important in the Gospels. The child also use the Bible to locate biblical accounts of events which occurred in these cities or at these geographical locations.

Infancy Narratives: the meditations presented in Level I are represented in more depth. The Flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23) is presented for the first time with figures, the Biblical narrative and time to wonder at the work of God as seen through the actions of Mary and Joseph. The infancy narratives are looked at thematically as the child begins to see how they work together to demonstrate the love of God for his people through the gift of Jesus, and the response, still continuing, of all to this gift.

Paschal Narratives:

Passion Narrative Study – (Matthew: 26:57-68, 28:1-8; Luke 19:29-38, 23:1-12, 33-46; John 18:1-14, 28-37, 19:16; Acts 1:4-12, 2:1-11) this work includes a series of readings from the Bible associated with the Passion of Christ and the gift of redemption.

History of the Kingdom of God

History of the Kingdom of God – this meditation begins by introducing the child to the three great moments in sacred history – creation, redemption and Parousia (a time when God will be all in all, no more war or sickness, etc.). Once these terms are understood, the meditation progresses by unrolling a timeline of history and telling the story, rooted in the Bible, of creation over the expanse of time, focusing on the wonder of the preparation of our world for us, God's creatures; the coming of Christ; where we are today; and, what we know about the time of Parousia.

Unity of the History of the Kingdom of God – this more individual work helps the child personalize the information learned in the History of the Kingdom of God work.

Gifts of God – this meditation shows how over time, God has slowly, carefully and lavishly prepared earth to receive and nourish humanity. The gifts of God for humankind culminate in Christ and continue until Parousia. In response, humanity has a special responsibility to assist God, with both hands and heart, in the transformation of the world, bringing it into the fullness of the life that God desires.

Parables:

Wolf and Hireling – (John 10:11–16) this parable is read and wondered about to call the child's attention to the steadfast, protective and sacrificial love of the Good Shepherd.

Kingdom Parables:

Synthesis of the Kingdom of God Parables – this work revisits the parables heard in Level I and encourages the child to focus on two aspects of the Kingdom: its beauty and preciousness; and its growth and transformation.

Moral Parables:

Good Samaritan – (Luke 10:29–37) this familiar parable is read and wondered about to explore the idea of compassion and actions taken in response thereto.

Found Coin – (Luke 15:8-9) this parable is read and wondered about to deepen the child's understanding of God's love which is unconditional, active and unfailing even when we are separated from God. It also

continues the theme that when we are in unity with God and the people of God it is a time for celebration. Insistent Friend – (Luke 11:5–8) the parable is read and wondered about to begin to explore persistent intercessory prayer.

Pharisee and Tax Collector – (Luke 18:9–14) this parable is read and wondered about to explore our posture before God as one of humility and relationship.

Ten Bridesmaids – (Matthew 25:1–12) this parable is read and wondered about to announce the invitation to the banquet of the reign of God and the necessity of individual responsibility for preparation for Jesus' coming.

Forgiving Father – (Luke 15:11–24) (also commonly known as the Prodigal Son) this parable is read and wondered about to announce that God's gifts are freely given and God's forgiveness is unconditional.

Wedding Feast – (Matthew 22:1–13) this parable is read and wondered about to announce the universal invitation to the Kingdom of God and the call to respond and prepare for it, it also begins to introduce the message of God's judgment.

Maxims and Summary of the Law – (Matthew 5:48, 5:42, John 13:24, Matthew 5:44, Luke 10:27, Matthew 7:12, Matthew 6:6, I Corinthians 6:19, Matthew 5:37, Matthew 18:21) this meditation introduces some of the passages from the Sermon on the Mount that give us the guidelines for forming our moral codes. It also highlights and explores the meaning of the most important law – “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and with all your mind and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Prophecies

Star and Scepter II – (Numbers 24:17) this revisiting of one of prophecies from Level I focuses anew on the child who Jesus is and what the kingdom He rules over is like.

Synthesis of the Prophecies – encourages the child to look again at the Level I prophecies as a whole to answer the question, “Who are you Lord?”

Valleys and Mountains – (Isaiah 40:35) through prophets, God prepares people for His gifts – including the vision of Parousia and in return, God's people are called to prepare themselves and their world to receive God's gifts.

The Peaceable Kingdom – (Isaiah 11:6–9) this prophecy provides a vision of the peaceable kingdom as an image of the Parousia that Advent anticipates.

The Shoot of Jesse – (Isaiah 11:1–3a) through the prophet Isaiah, God foretold the birth, lineage and spiritual gifts of Jesus.

Liturgy

Eucharist:

Mystery of Faith – this meditation explores the words of the liturgy, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again” and encourages the child to connect to these words in a personal way.

The Lord's Prayer – the child considers this familiar prayer that Jesus prayed and begins to meditate on it line by line.

Synthesis of the Eucharist – this meditation shows the structure and order of the Eucharist, including our response to each other and to God within the liturgy.

Origin of the Eucharist – this meditation traces the development of the Eucharist from the Last Supper to today and encourages us to enjoy the continuity of the gift of the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Prayer Book – the child begins working on their own, handwritten, version of essential prayers from the Prayer Book.

Liturgical Calendar - this meditation builds on the meditation in Level I and aids the child with how to find the date for Easter, a date set by the lunar calendar.

Gestures:

Fraction – this meditation introduces the breaking of the bread as a sign of Jesus' sacrifice for our unity.

Lavabo (Washing of the Hands) – the meditation focuses on the gesture as a symbol of purification of the whole person as well as the community in preparation for the sharing of the Eucharist.

Preparation for Solemn Communion – these meditations on several different parables are presented to the

child over a five-week period and are intended to deepen their understanding of the connection between the Bible and liturgy, strengthen their desire for the Eucharist and introduce the Rite of Reconciliation.

True Vine – (John 15: 1-11) presented in two different settings, the first meditation focuses on our union with Christ and one another and our call to remain in Him with God's help; the second study focuses on our personal obstacles to this union and God's desire to work with us to remove those obstacles.

Found Coin – (Luke 15:8-9) this parable announces that God's love is active, unconditional and diligent and that unity with God and the people of God is to be celebrated.

Forgiving Father – (Luke 15:11-24) this parable announces God's unconditional love and forgiveness when there is repentance.

Centurion's Servant – (Matthew 8:5-13) this parable explores faith as trust, belief in God's authority, power, love and mercy.

Baptism:

Rite of Baptism – this work introduces the prayers that accompany the liturgical signs used in the Rite of Baptism.

Celebrate the Growth of the 6-9 Year-Old Child

The elementary age child is captured by the image of the True Vine. "I am the vine, you are the branches, whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing." The proclamation responds to the deep need of these children to better know his or her relationship with God, family, friends, and the larger community. Moral parables offer a model for comparing their behavior with that of the Pharisee, the Tax Collector, or the Good Samaritan. The elementary children see the parts of the Mass—the Liturgy of the Word, the Preparation of the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the Communion—as one unified prayer made of many smaller prayers. Children prepare for the celebration of First Communion (or Solemn Communion) through a series of communion meditations focusing on the relationship with Jesus. Preparation of personal missals filled with illustrations and prayers is also part of this preparation which helps to deepen their love and understanding of the Eucharist.

A Catechesis Born of Joy

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was born from the joy of the children in their encounter with God and lives in being nourished by this joy. It has also been observed that children of the same developmental stage even though belonging to different cultural backgrounds, respond to certain elements of the Christian message in the same way. Over time through being with children in a specially prepared environment called an atrium, observing and listening to their responses, scriptural and liturgical themes developed that most resonated with children's religious needs according to their age levels. Thus the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd divests itself of any strictly scholastic character, so as to become an experience of life, an education in faith, and a celebration of the encounter with the Father, in listening to Jesus, the one Teacher, and in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

God and the Child with the Adult

An interpersonal relationship is always a mystery, all the more so when that relationship is between God and the child. We believe that there is a deep bond between God and the child which produces in the child the desire to draw nearer to God. The catechist's role is to prepare the environment and to give selected presentations from scripture and liturgy that "call forth" the child's response rather than "pours in" information. The catechist listens with the child and together they ask, "God, who are you? How do you love us?" The adult reflects with the child on the questions generated by the presentations with the materials offered to the child to aid the child's reflection. The atrium (or prepared environment) is one of the important elements that help the relationship between God and the child to flourish. After a theme has been presented, the child is free to choose an activity that will make possible the inner dialogue with the "Interior Teacher."