

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Summary of Presentations

Level I

“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 I (child age three through kindergarten)

The theme for this level is the Good Shepherd who loves his sheep and gives everything for them. The child is introduced to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and discovers who the sheep are. The enjoyment of the gift of God's own self to the child is the foundation of further religious insight and moral development. This Level could be characterized as a “time of joy and wonder” in the lives of the child.

Presentations offered over this three year period can be divided into several large groupings. Below are listed the names of the presentations and their purpose.

Prayer

The Prayer Table - each atrium has a prayer table that is the central “gathering place”. Its purpose is to offer a place to support the prayer of the child. Prayer table cloths reflect the colors of the church year. child are encouraged to set the prayer table.

Prayer Cards – child are encouraged to select prayer cards for display on the prayer table which reflect their thoughts.

23rd Psalm – this psalm is read and explored; the psalm is a form of prayer and talks about God's protective and restoring love for us. The Good Shepherd (an image with which the child is familiar) will take care of our needs.

Song and Art – all presentations are supported by art and music.

Practical Life Exercises – are activities done to establish, maintain and restore order to the environment and to oneself. One catechist describes the benefits of these exercises as follows: “the Holy lives in our lives and we can experience God in our most simple acts when we open our hearts and minds to Him. God is present in our ordinary lives and His spirit can permeate our daily practical work.”

Bible

Scripture Booklets – most presentations are accompanied by scripture booklets that contain the scripture passages on which the presentation is based. Often we will read these passages directly from the Bible.

Land of Israel – a globe, a puzzle map and a large topographical map are introduced to encourage the child to realize that Jesus was a real person who lived in a real place – Israel. The cities of Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem are introduced as well as the regions and waters in Israel.

Infancy Narratives: all of these meditations are presented with figures, readings from the Bible and time to wonder at the events.

Annunciation (Luke 1:26 – 38)

Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39 – 49, 56)

Nativity and the Adoration of the Shepherds (Luke 2:1 – 20)

Adoration of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)

Presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:21 - 33, 36 – 39)

Paschal Narratives:

Jerusalem – a large topographical model of the walled city of Jerusalem is used to tell the events of the last days of Jesus' life. Jerusalem is a real place where Jesus visited, celebrated the Last Supper, was arrested, tried, condemned, crucified, died, was entombed and resurrected.

Last Supper (Mark 14:12–17, 22-26; Luke 22:7–13, 17–20) – figures of Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper are used and the meditation is read from the Bible. This meal was the first time the words, “This is my body, this is my blood” were said by Jesus. In this meditation we announce that Jesus gives himself to us in the bread and the wine.

Women at the Tomb (Mark 16:1-8) – a model of the empty tomb, with only the figure of an angel in it, and the figures of three women, are used, along with the Biblical text from Mark to announce the physical resurrection of Jesus in a historical setting. The angel instructs the women to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Pentecost – in this celebration we announce the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the disciples and to announce that these gifts are given to all.

Parables:

The Good Shepherd - (John 10:3b-5, 10b-11 and 14-16) this parable is read and a sheepfold, sheep and the figure of the Good Shepherd are used to announce the steadfast love of God. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are his beloved sheep.

The Found Sheep – (Luke 15:4-6) this parable is read and the materials from the Good Shepherd presentation are used to reinforce the image of how very precious we are to God as unique individuals and to explore concretely the love, care and trustworthiness of God.

The Mystery of Life and Death – (John 12:24) this parable is read and wheat plants at various stages of growth are used, to announce that death is the natural passage to risen life and that risen life is richer and fuller than life now.

Kingdom Parables:

Mustard Seed – (Mark 4: 30-32) this parable is read and a tiny mustard seed is given to each child to encourage

the child to wonder at the power and strength of the Kingdom of God.

Pearl of Great Price – (Matthew 13:45-46) this parable is read and a model of a home, figures and pearls are used to encourage the child to wonder how the Kingdom of God is like a precious, beautiful pearl which is worth searching and sacrificing everything for.

Leaven – (Matthew 13:33) this parable is read and yeast, flour and water are used to illustrate the wonder at the mystery and power of the Kingdom of God, the additional message of patience is also present in this meditation.

Grain – (Mark 4:26-29) this parable is read and wondered about to encourage the child to understand that the Kingdom of God is eternally growing and expanding through faith and beyond our own understanding.

Hidden Treasure – (Matthew 13:44) this parable is read and wondered about to encourage the child to think about the mystery of God's grace and unsurpassed worth/value of the Kingdom of God.

Messianic Prophecies:

Prophecies are presented to the child to increase their understanding of Jesus and to increase their understanding of the plan God has for us.

Prophecy of Names – (Isaiah 9:6) this prophecy introduces some of the many names for Jesus – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Prophecy of Light – (Isaiah 9:2) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus is the light of the world.

Prophecy of Mary, the Mother of Christ – (Isaiah 7:14) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus was born to a young woman and is God incarnate.

Prophecy of Bethlehem – (Micah 5:1) – this prophecy proclaims the birthplace of Jesus as Bethlehem.

Prophecy of the Star and Scepter – (Numbers 24:17) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus is a historical figure from the lineage of Jacob who will be an eternal light and ruler of the world.

Liturgy

Eucharist:

Altar and Articles of the Eucharist – through the use of models the child learns the names and uses for the: altar table, fair linen, paten, chalice, cross, candles, lectern, pulpit, ambry, lectionary, altar book, gospel book, sanctuary lamp, corporal, purificator, lavabo bowl, lavabo towel, book stand, cruets, ciborium, credence table and sacristy cabinet.

Liturgical Colors – this meditation introduces the colors of the church year and the vestment – the chasuble.

Liturgical Calendar – through a puzzle of the liturgical calendar, the child learns that God's time is different from our time and the church year revolves around the important events of Redemption. There is no beginning and no end to the church year. The child also learns the great feasts of the year – Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd – this meditation uses the materials from the Good Shepherd meditation and a new sheepfold (the church) to show how the love of the Good Shepherd can be found in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is present in the bread and the wine and that is God's gift to us.

Gestures of the Eucharist:

Preparation of the Chalice – this meditation helps focus the child on the gesture of the Preparation of the Chalice as a visual sign of our union (water) with Jesus (wine).

Epiclesis – this meditation helps focus the child on the gesture of the Epiclesis as a visual sign of our asking for God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

Offering – this meditation helps focus the child on the gesture of the Offering as a visual sign of our response to God's gift to us.

Peace – this meditation helps focus the child on the gesture of the Peace as a visual and tactile sign of unity and sharing within the Body of Christ.

Baptism:

Light and White Garment – candles and a white garment are used to announce that Jesus is the light of the world and that through Baptism we become part of the light.

Water and Word – water, the Bible and chrism are used to announce that we are given the gifts of new life, joy, the strength of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God at our baptism.

Gestures – the gestures are visual signs with great meaning. The gesture over the water asks God to send the Holy Spirit into the water so that it might have the power to give us new life. The sign of the cross on the forehead marks us as Christ's own forever. The cross over the congregation is a sign of Christ's help and protection over all of us.

Join in the Wonder of the 3-6-Year-Old Child

The 3-6-year-old child is particularly capable of receiving and enjoying the most essential elements of our faith—the announcement of God's love especially experienced through Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who died and is risen. Materials on the life of Jesus Christ and his teachings help to make the mystery of God concrete for the child. The heart of the catechesis for children under six revolves around the Parable of the Good Shepherd. Jesus announces that he is the Good Shepherd who calls each one by name. The sheep listen to the voice of the Shepherd and follow him.

The 3-6 year old child enters the mystery of the Eucharist by first learning the names of the articles used on the altar and then through the most important gestures including the preparation of the chalice, the epiclesis and offering, and the sign of peace. Through the experience of seeing these gestures, presented one by one, the Eucharist emerges as the Sacrament of the Gift. The child becomes acquainted with the historical character of the liturgy through the events of the Last Supper, Christ's death, and His resurrection.

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."