

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd – Winter Session 2016

Parent Updates from Week 1 to Week 7

Week1

Dear Parents and Grandparents;

For the last Atrium session of December (before the Christmas break) parents were invited to observe at the Atrium. The scriptural presentation was the nativity of Jesus and the adoration of the shepherds. In anticipation of the feast of Christmas, the children and parents were also invited to a feast of yummy food that was shared by all to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

For the first session of Winter 2016, we were lucky to finish our Christmas cycle with the presentation of the Adoration of the Magi.

The Catechists and children started the session at the church before the Blessed Sacrament where the children genuflected and adored Jesus (like the Magi). They processed to the front of the church to the Altar to note the colours (white for the feast of Christmas). It was a opportunity to re-visit what was previously learnt and to introduce the liturgical colours (in part) to the newest member of our Atrium family.

This was followed by a beautiful ceremony to change the colours at the Atrium prayer corner from Purple (for Advent) to white. The ceremony involved a lovely procession where the children carried the beautiful articles that go on the prayer table.

We are lucky to have some new practical life materials at the Atrium for this session -- all of which engrossed the children for the first part of Atrium.

The children found the scriptural presentation of the Adoration of the Magi riveting in large part because of the beautiful story and also because of the sensorial and visual component of the presentation. They watched attentively as the Catechist read the scripture and moved the hand-crafted figures to bring the story to life.

An aim of every CGS presentation is to provide a basis for meditation and prayer around our response to the proclamation of scripture. Both, Catechist and child listen and meditate on the scripture together. The Catechist provides no explanation of the meaning of the scripture that was presented. The Catechist merely proclaims and then humbly steps back. The Holy Spirit will do the rest as the children continue to work with the materials.

Each of them took quiet turns to smell and feel the precious gifts that the Magi had brought Jesus - gold, frankincense and myrrh. The children found the smell of myrrh to be either "funny" or "good". It certainly has a strong smell!

We look forward to learning with your children next Sunday.

God Bless,

Norma Dawes, Patti Hendricks, Suzanne Sheppard, Anita Kuriakose

Weeks 2 to 4

Dear Parents and Grandparents;

The children have completed so much work in the last month and a half and have been working on increasingly in-depth scriptural and liturgical work. They have been introduced to the Psalms, the Kingdom of God parables and immersed themselves in practicing the detailed liturgical gestures used during mass.

In Week 2, the children were presented with the parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10).

The entire parable is presented gradually over the three-year cycle in Level 1 with specific portions of the parable presented at different times depending on the child's readiness. The presentation of the entire parable unfolds in a deliberate manner with the littlest ones being presented only with John 10: 3(b) - 5, 10(b) - 11, 14 - 16 (the hired hand and the wolf are not presented to the youngest children).

The parable of the good shepherd appears to resonate more profoundly with the little ones who were eager to work with the Good Shepherd materials even before it was presented to them in week 2. Jesus speaks of the attributes of a good shepherd...he knows his sheep by name. They follow him. They will not follow a stranger. He leads them.

How beautiful it is to contemplate the joyful revelation in Jesus' words "I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me...". Jesus is not just any shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd. He knows and loves his sheep completely. He calls them by name.

As adults, we can ponder the promise that Jesus gave in this parable: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd." We wonder.

It is important to note that as Catechists, we stop ourselves from interpreting, explaining, or defining the parables. We simply proclaim and facilitate the children's joyful discovery of meaning and purpose. Parables speak uniquely to each individual. The same parable can provide a different message at different points in a person's life. But the power of a parable can only work within the child if the catechist humbly steps away and leaves space for contemplation and the Holy Spirit.

We had a special guest at the Atrium in Week 3. Father Pierre joined the children at the Atrium and received lessons from the littlest ones on how to carry a work, how to do puzzles, how to fold the chasubles etc. Fr. Pierre learned a lot in Week 3. Thank you for joining in our Atrium Fr Pierre.

In Week 3 and 4 the children delved into the world of Psalms. We talked about another shepherd, David, who was moved to write beautiful poems about how God takes care of him.

In Week 3 the catechist proclaimed the first part of Psalm 23: "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" and in Week 4 we continued contemplating the rest of the verse (Psalm 23: 1-3): "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul".

Psalm 23 provides a wonderful complement to the earlier parable of the good shepherd and perhaps the children have begun to recognize that the sheep are us.

God Bless,

Norma Dawes, Patti Hendricks, Suzanne Sheppard, Anita Kuriakose

Weeks 5 to 7

Dear Parents and Grandparents;

In Week 5, the children were presented with the first of many Kingdom of God parables. The Catechist presented the parable of the "precious pearl" or the "pearl of great price" found in Matthew 13: 45-46.

The children were told that "parables" are stories with hidden meaning. When Jesus lived on earth - when he walked and talked and breathed just like us - people would ask him all the time to tell them about the Kingdom of God. They wanted to know more about the Kingdom of God and what it was like. So Jesus used ordinary things that the people would recognize to talk to them about the Kingdom of God.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it."

The parable comes to life with the materials that are used to animate it. The materials consist of a model house, a two-dimensional wooden figure of the merchant, two jars filled with small pearls (i.e., the merchant's possessions), and one pearl representing the pearl of great price. The children touched the pearls and admired how beautiful and shiny they were.

In meditating on the parables and in the presentations in the Atrium, the phrase "I/we wonder" is used very often. Catechist and child wonder together.

I wonder how the merchant felt when he found the precious pearl. Why did the merchant want that pearl so much? What is so special about that pearl? I wonder.

As most parables, this parable speaks to each person differently. While an adult may read the parable and focus on how the merchant sold everything to gain the precious pearl, the children were instead focused on how precious the pearl was and the joy of the merchant in finding that pearl.

It was during this presentation that one of the littlest ones thoughtfully raised her hands to unequivocally proclaim to all that "My mommy's name is _____. She is a precious pearl". The responses of the children very often are unexpected and often startling and profound. Do we recognize and appreciate the precious pearls that we are given (whether people, opportunities, the kingdom of God)? Children can and do.

In Week 6, the children were eager to learn about liturgical gestures. As liturgical gestures are outward signs of an inner truth, it is important to expose the children to the gestures that the priest uses during mass.

As catechists, we are often awed by the richness of the gestures and awed by the deep meaning of each gesture that we present. This week, the children were presented with the gesture of the preparation of the chalice.

They were introduced to the the cruets (the jars that hold the water and wine). The Catechist poured all the wine in the cruet into the chalice and then slowly poured a drop of water to mingle with the wine.

I wonder what the wine represents. The children confidently answered: Jesus. If Jesus is the wine, I wonder what that little drop of water could represent. The children learnt that the water represented us.

The water and wine are one. Can we separate the water from the wine now? No. The water and wine cannot be separated.

Wow...we become a part of Jesus and Jesus is a part of us. How beautiful!

The children were eager to repeat the gesture of the preparation of the chalice by themselves. In Week 7, the children were presented with the gesture of "Epiclesis".

The Catechist showed the children the gesture that Father makes over the chalice of wine (and mingled water) and the paten that holds the bread. The children watched as the catechist raised her hands and slowly brought her hands down over the chalice and the paten.

They learnt that with the gesture, the Father was asking the Holy Spirit to come down and change the wine and bread to Jesus. The gesture was repeated by the children who were eager to demonstrate what they had just been presented with.

We look forward to seeing your children again this Sunday.

God Bless,

Norma Dawes, Patti Hendricks, Suzanne Sheppard, Anita Kuriakose