

# All About the Atrium

## The Sound of Silence

In a recent interview a priest was asked to share advice for those who are just learning to pray. His beautiful response speaks to our life with the children in the atrium. He suggested that one should learn to enjoy silence. So, if you come to enjoy silence and when you are alone, you will come to find out that you are not alone and then you can start a conversation. If you do not like silence, it will be very difficult.

In the Atrium, we offer opportunities for silence both at the prayer table and during presentations. At the prayer table, or during an activity like the Silence Game, we begin with a short period of time and progressively lengthen it. The moments of silence will extend the child's attention span and develop his or her listening skills. Silence helps to focus the child's inner calm and keep every part of his or her body still. The silence becomes a vehicle for contemplation. There is no prayer without silence.

### The Silence Game

To read about silence in the Atrium, we look to Gianna Gobbi, who writes in her book *Listening to God with Children*, (available at [www.cgsusa.org](http://www.cgsusa.org)) about how silence needs to be nourished and practiced. It is not something that the adult imposes on the child. Maria Montessori noticed a woman who came into the room with a sleeping baby. The children were fascinated. Dr. Montessori said to them that none of you could breathe as it does, without making a sound. They tried. She said you could barely hear the baby breathe. They said, 'yes we can do that!' She saw what delight they took in making silence. Later, she tried it with the children. I'm going to practice silence. I am going to see if I can even make my body quiet.

**"The atrium is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer."**

Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, #3

### How to Nurture Silence At Home

- Unplug. Our world is full of noise. Try to turn off the TV, the computer and unplug from all your devices. As unnatural as it may seem at first, remember that silence is essential for the soul!
- Notice your speaking voice and allow for time to speak to your children in a quiet manner. Even if your child responds in a loud voice, simply make your own voice quieter. Your child will eventually realize the volume of your voice. We must model for them how to be silent.
- Invite the children to be still. Young children may not be able to exercise control of movement right away. Make sure he or she has had an opportunity for movement prior to offering this time of quiet and stillness.
- After you have had an opportunity for silence, discuss with the children: What sounds did you hear in the room? What sounds did you hear in nature? In your own body?