



Parent Pages

Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church*

* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

The Two Pillars: Bible and Liturgy

The Foundation of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd rests on two pillars: the Bible and the Liturgy. When we think of each of these individually, we can list many examples from our life experience and from the materials in the Atrium. We read the Bible. We have materials for many different Scripture passages including stories about Jesus' infancy, his parables, the Last Supper, and his resurrection. We look at prophecies and Psalm 23, reading and pondering his Word in the Holy Bible. We also experience Liturgy in our lives. We go to Church as a community to celebrate the gift of baptism and receive him in the Eucharist. In the Atrium we have the model altar and the gestures altar, the vestments of the priest and the liturgical calendar. However, the Bible and the Liturgy are not separate realities. Instead, in the Atrium we explore how deeply intertwined they are. As Sofia Cavalletti says in *Religious Potential of the Child*, "There does not exist a Bible that we read and a Liturgy that we live; there is a Bible that we live with the whole of our life and especially so in the Liturgy" (RPC, 49).

Bible and Liturgy, intertwined

From the youngest age, the Liturgy of the Eucharist forms the heart of the Atrium experience. The children set the model altar and enjoy the liturgical colors which are displayed by the chasubles of the priest. They ponder individual moments of the Mass, particularly the gestures or movements of the priest. At the same time, the Liturgy of the Word is encountered by the children as they come to know the Holy Bible as the Word of God, given to his people. They hear passages from the Scriptures which introduce them to the Great Light and the tiny baby growing within Mary, announced by angels yet laid in a manger. The Good Shepherd parable is read, and they hear about the one who calls his sheep by name with such great love.

The reality of the Good Shepherd, who gives all of Himself for His sheep, calls them to the best food and best drink, His body and Blood, at the Church, is concretized through an extension to the Good Shepherd material called "The Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd." This presentation, in particular, reveals the inseparability of Scripture and Liturgy. In Sofia's words, "[Here we establish]



the bond between the biblical dimension (Good Shepherd parable) and the liturgical dimension (the Mass) in a visible way" (RPC, 51).

The Holy Bible and the Sacraments

As the child moves into the Level II and III atria, he begins to encounter additional materials which nourish and expand the relationship between Scripture and Liturgy. In Level II, the work on the Last Supper grows into a material which shows that meal's connection with the Eucharist we celebrate today, highlighting the link between the apostles and the bishops and priests. The Level III children encounter a new way of looking at the liturgy through a material entitled "The Holy Bible and the Sacraments." Here the Sacraments are introduced as the actions through which Jesus has chosen to remain with us and help us in living out God's Plan, even until today.



In the Words of the Children...

Several years ago, three girls, ages four and five, received the presentation in the Atrium of how the Good Shepherd calls his sheep to the Church and then were asked, "Do you know what names the Good Shepherd calls when he calls his sheep?" The first replied, so quietly it was hard to hear, and yet filled with wonder, "Us!" The second said, "He calls them 'Joy!'" The third child just stared silently at the sheep and then asked to stay and work with the material, remaining with it for more than ten minutes, bringing the sheep to the circle we name "the Church," gathering the sheep around the altar table upon which was placed the paten, chalice, and the small figure of the Good Shepherd.

This past year, having looked, once again, at the Scriptural account of the Last Supper, several sixth graders (from *Way of the Shepherd Catholic Montessori School, Blaine, MN*) took some time to write out their thoughts.

- "At the Passover, Jesus said, 'This is my Body, which will be given up for you and for many. Do this in memory of me,' and at Mass the priest does the same thing. Then the same thing happens with the Blood. It becomes a perpetual memorial."
- "Jesus passed the words he said down to the apostles and they passed it down to the bishops and priests who preach it to us."
- "After Jesus has ascended to heaven, the apostles pray to the Father to send His Spirit, and they repeat Jesus' words. They still do."
- "Parousia: We don't know our fate on this day, but we do know this. God promised it will happen and God always keeps his promises."

