



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 Religious World of Young Children

When we are with children between the ages of three and six, we are really with persons in a different world. Children live in a different religious world. The way they live their relationship with God is quite different than ours. All of us know, for instance, that it is not possible to speak with a child of three about God as we would with an adult, and this can make things difficult for us. Let us pause a while and step into their world.

One special feature of the religious life of children is the joy they are capable of when they are helped to draw near to God. They feel a particular kind of joy.

Many things make children happy, but there are different qualities of happiness. There is a kind of happiness that is more a state of "emotional excitement" and often leads to nervousness, fatigue, and irritability. The happiness they feel when they come close to God is a quality of joy that makes them peaceful, relaxed, as if something very deep has been struck in their heart and they go on listening to this sound in the depths of their heart. It is like the response of someone who has found a life-giving place and, having found it, does not want to leave.

It is the kind of joy that involves children completely. After some children and I had prayed for a rather long time together, a little girl, Stefania, said, "My body is happy." It was as if she felt a physical joy in being with God. Children are totally involved in what they live. There is nothing left out when they pray or they hear the words of God.

There is always a response of this kind of joy when children listen to the Good Shepherd parable. They give the impression of being so comfortable with the Good Shepherd. The ease and spontaneity of young children's religious expressions and feelings spring from the depth of their hearts, as if it were completely natural to them.

These joyful responses are very significant since nothing is more gratifying than the satisfaction of a vital need. They tell us that religious formation is not something we impose. The religious experience is so deep and the serenity it gives is so great that it responds to a vital need in the child. When we help the child to encounter God we are responding to the child's unspoken request: "Help me to come close to God. Help me to be fully who I am."



- Cavalletti, Sofia. *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey, Revised and Updated* (pp. 22-23).