

Dear Atrium Parents,

We miss being with your children in the atrium!

We hope you are all keeping well and finding a “silver lining” to this cloud of the Corona virus. Father Val’s most recent e-mail, that included the prayer Bishop Talley had shared, was a “silver lining” for me.

At least one family among you has asked about “virtual catechesis”. Our national Association for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is fielding that question from all over the country. The truth is that our catechesis is not compatible with digital transmission; by its very nature, it must be a lived experience in a prepared environment with a community of peers and their catechists, in which the children’s personal work, silence, and prayer are a far more important part than the catechist’s presentation.

The home is meant to be its own sort of “atrium”, what the Vatican II documents refer to as the “domestic Church.” How the family cares for one another, confronts challenges together (such as COVID19!), lives and prays together is a very powerful “homily” for every family member.

While we will not be streaming the atrium presentations into your homes, we can underscore the importance of family faith sharing and prayer. We can also steer you to some CGS “sources” that perhaps can help with the contents of your faith sharing in this very particular time of Lent and the Corona virus threat.

During Lent, here are some of the main themes we reflect on:

#### Level I:

We refer to our liturgical calendar puzzle to note the 6 purple pieces signifying the 6 weeks we wait and prepare for Easter because it is the greatest feast of all when we will celebrate that Jesus, the Good Shepherd died and rose from the dead and remains with us always. A purple cloth will be put on the prayer table each week, along with a statue of the Good Shepherd and a prayer card (either just verse 1 of Psalm 23—“The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need.” (the Good News Bible translation) or verses 1-3 (from any translation).

The parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10, but only verses 3b-5, 10b-11, 14-16) is central to the paschal mystery because it’s all about the total giving of the Shepherd for his sheep, not just in his death; the Good Shepherd is always giving himself to his sheep, in a most particular way in the Eucharist. The parable of the “Found Sheep” (Luke 15:3-6 only) is another example of how well he knows and loves his sheep. With young children we place no emphasis on why the sheep got lost, but only focus on the shepherd’s love and action. (He’s so happy that he goes out to tell his friends and neighbors!)

We look at a raised-surface model of the City of Jerusalem and offer a BRIEF narrative about the passion, death and resurrection story.

We also recount the story of the Last Supper using a model of that “upper room” in the Cenacle with figures for Jesus and his Apostles.

And we plant wheat seeds for a reflection on “the mystery of life and death” as Jesus expresses it in John 12:24. **[Note: this would be a great activity to do together as a family with all ages of children.]**

### Levels II and III

The Level I themes listed above are still central to the atria of the older children, although with expanded detail. For example:

In Level II we will add verses 12 and 13 to the John 10 parable of the Good Shepherd (about the hired hand and the wolf) and verse 4 will be added to Psalm 23 (about the “dark valley”); whereas Level III will reflect on the whole of Psalm 23.

When looking at the map of Jerusalem, we will go on to read and reflect on some of those episodes in the Gospel such as The Messianic Entry: Luke 19:29-38, 45a-- that we celebrate on Palm Sunday, or the Arrest: Matthew 26:57-68 (saving the Luke 22:39-46 account of Jesus’ Agony in the Garden and the Crucifixion accounts for Level III)

Also in Levels II and III, we will be meditating on some of the “moral parables” and maxims of Jesus to foster our Lenten work of our personal “examination of conscience.” Some Level II parables are: The Sower (Matthew 13:3b-8); The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37a); The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:10-14). Level III parables also include: The Ten Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-12); The Debtors (Matthew 18:23-35); and The Talents (Matthew 25:14).

If you read these parables with the children, keep in mind that the most important thing is that you are listening to His voice together, rather than using the moment to “instruct” your children. Invite everyone present (yourself included) to simply share what message is being heard.

Finally, you are encouraged to “reply to all” if you have a message or anecdote to share about your family’s experience in this challenging time.

In the peace and love of our Lord,

Rebekah and all the catechists