



# All About the Atrium

CGSUSA Parent Newsletter

## The White Garment

As parents, we know that the celebration of a Sacrament is a time of great joy for our family as well as the parish community. Through the language of the signs and experience of water, light, oil, bread and wine, our children enter into a relationship with and come to know the person of Jesus Christ.

“On the day of baptism, your child received the light, the life of the risen Christ. Prayer and a life lived in love has kept that light bright. A relationship with Jesus has been developing toward a new moment of radiance and splendor.

So much has happened in the atrium: the first presentation of the altar; the Good Shepherd calling the children by name to green pastures and fresh water, Jesus at the Cenacle, around the table, saying, “This is my body....” We can understand why a child at 7 or 8 (or sometimes 6) will express a desire for First Communion. What we have seen in the atrium is that the child enjoys a relationship – a moment of fullness.”

-Tina Lillig, 1994 Journal of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd article “*The White Garment worn for Eucharist...*”

### LANGUAGE OF SIGNS

Baptism uses many signs to indicate the reality of what is occurring. The Language of Signs is a language that needs to be learned. We assist the child in this learning by simply providing an opportunity to linger over the sign, to look at it closely and enjoy it.

It is a language that is accessible to all. It is a language used by the Church Fathers, who spoke in concrete images. It is also the language used by children. The child uses it naturally because the child is metaphysical. Even without spoken words, the child is able to grasp the reality of how God is present.

***“See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity.”***

*- from the Rite of Baptism*

In the early Church, to symbolize the life-giving transformation of Baptism, the newly baptized would be clothed in a white garment. Sofia Cavalletti writes in The History of the Kingdom of God: Liturgy and the Building of the Kingdom, Part 2:

“Finally, the catechumens went down into the Baptismal pool, which was considered both the tomb of the old self and the motherly womb of the Church, which gave birth to the new person. Going into the pool was like going down into the tomb, and coming up out of the pool was the return to a new life, the life of the risen Christ. To symbolize the transformation and the being set aflame by the radiance of grace, the old garment was removed and the baptized person was clothed in a white garment. Finally, dressed in the white garment, they entered the Church where the community was gathered, and welcomed them in their midst. Together with them, the new Christians took part for the first time in the

Eucharistic banquet. The white garment, received after the immersion in the baptismal pool, was the gown of worship necessary to take part in the banquet, the garment that the guests invited to the wedding of the king's son were supposed to wear (Matthew 22:1ff.)."

"This sign with which you are now marked, is the sign that you are from now on marked as a sheep of Christ. For a sheep, as soon as it is bought, receives the mark by which its owner may be known; and also it feeds in the same pasture and is in the same sheepfold as the other sheep who bear the same mark, showing that they all belong to the same master."

- *Bishop Theodore of Antioch, 350-428*

### THE WHITE GARMENT IN THE ATRIUM

The child knows that the light now present inside the heart shines on the outside in the white garment. The white garment is a sign of cleanliness and new life, it shows we are children of light. The image of Christ as Light has been prominent in Christian tradition, starting with the apostle Paul and the Church Fathers through to the present day. The youngest children have come to know Jesus as the Great Light from their first year in the Atrium. At the first presentation on Baptism, the children are shown the white garment, and realize that the white garment shows, even on the outside, that inside the children are in relationship with the Good Shepherd and a member of the sheepfold.

In many parishes, as the children prepare for the sacrament, their families are invited to prepare a white garment which they will wear at the celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. We have found that children preparing for First Communion are able to readily see the symbolism of a simple white garment. The simple sign allows them to experience "putting on Christ" as they did at Baptism. A simple red cross is stitched on the front of the garment. Every stitch is a

prayer for those who brought them to this day. Why a red cross? Just as with the branding of each sheep, the child is marked with the sign of Christ, and red is the color of love, of passion, of the sap flowing through the True Vine. The Church Fathers tell us that by this sacred seal, the sign of the cross, the shepherd is able to recognize his sheep.



*Mother and daughter prepare the white garment as a part of the First Communion Retreat, St. Pius X Church, Urbandale, IA*

### FAITH SHARING FOR PARENTS

As you consider the white garment your child wore at Baptism and will wear on the occasion of First Communion, reflect upon the following:

- As you prepare the White Garment, what is your prayer for the child who will wear it?
- How did your baptism clothe you with Christ?
- How do you put on Christ every morning?

### SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE

St. Paul writes often to the early Church about Baptism, for today, we lift up Galatians 3:26-27:

*For through faith, you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*