

All About the Atrium

A newsletter for parents of children in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium

Baptism: The Gift of Life

Baptism is an immense gift. Young children who have already been baptized as infants need to become aware of this gift they have received as soon as possible. They need to be given the opportunity to contemplate and enjoy the gift already at work within them. And young children who come to our atrium who have not yet been baptized also need to know about the gift of Baptism. They too need to become aware of the great desire of the risen Christ to share his life and light with us in a most particular way through Baptism.

- Sofia Cavalletti, The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey, p 57

The gifts and signs of Baptism are introduced to the children in their first year of the Level One Atrium. The gifts and signs are actually presented over a series of three presentations. In the Level Two and Level Three Atrium, children look at the rite (ceremony) and prayers in depth. They also come to understand the relationship between Baptism and the other Sacraments, especially Reconciliation and Eucharist.

Light and the White Garment

Sofia Cavalletti explains, “For every subject we present to the children, we need what we might call “the linking point”, that is, an especially striking element that emphasizes the vital nucleus of the theme.” We look for that linking point in the language of signs. It may not necessarily be the most liturgical or theological element. Cavalletti found that in Baptism, the linking point is the theme of light. She says, “Light has an immediate effect on the senses and it is psychologically gratifying and reassuring; thus the child associates the image of Christ the Light with the Good Shepherd and the effect of the former image is reinforced.”¹

In the atrium, the children are called by name to come forward and light their own candle from the Christ candle. They are able to recognize the Light of Christ that is the Paschal candle, is the same light that they carry within themselves.



White Garment

The light 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 the light. The image of Christ as light has always been prominent in Christian tradition, starting with St. Paul and the Church Fathers through today. St. Paul associates “illumination” with baptism. The White Garment is placed on the child during the rite (ceremony) of baptism. The prayer language offered reflects that the child is “clothed in the light of Christ”.

The older child, in preparation for Holy Communion, prepares his or her own white garment. In some communities, church may provide the garment and the child stitches a red cross on the front of the garment. During the Communion Retreat, the parent(s) are again invited to recall the promises made at baptism, as the garment is placed on the child. The garment is worn upon the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and again for Holy Communion.

Helping Children Know the Gift of Baptism

The child who is living out his or her Baptism needs to know its richness, the new Rite of Baptism offers signs that are so obvious and, I would say, tangible, that catechesis has no need to invent anything in order to present it to children.

It is the first Baptismal sign that we present to children, and it already let us “see” the vertical and horizontal dimensions of that life which, in Christ, unites us to the Father and to our brothers and sisters. Children readily recognize that their own candles would stay unlit had they not been lighted from the paschal candle, which is the sign of the risen Christ. The light given to us is God’s gift and we receive it in ourselves because, in the first place, Christ’s light has overcome the darkness.

- Sofia Cavalletti, Way of Holy Joy, “Baptism: Foundation of Peace”, p 6



Baptism is a Beginning

This book with CD-ROM includes 18 different pamphlets that can be copied and given to the families, godparents, and sponsors. They include preparation, continuing support, and formation after Baptism.

This book, and other resources for families, may be found at <http://www.cgsusa.org/products/baptism-is-a-beginning/>