

Children and Communion: Signs and Symbols

I had written the parents on Saturday that I would be doing the Last Supper Presentation with the children and that this would be helpful in understanding the events of Holy Week and Easter – often difficult to explain to young children. I had said that we hope that through the use of sacred story, signs and symbols in the atrium, we would bring together scripture and liturgy that could allow the children to be able to enter into these Holy Mysteries in a way beyond what most of us adults could experience.

I don't think that 4 year old Aspen or 4 ½ years old Jacob read my e-mail – but surely they knew the essence of which I spoke. Both of these boys are quite precocious, and certainly intuitive, each in their own unique way - Aspen, with early and very expressive language skills, and Jacob with delayed verbal language but unusually expressive body language. Both boys had been working with The Good Shepherd and the Model Altar materials in one-on-one Presentations as early as 18 months.

I had barely begun the Last Supper Presentation putting the materials in place, and before I knew it Jacob had swiftly brought the Model Altar candles to place on either side of the upper level of the Cenacle (Upper Room "model" where the Last Supper took place). Aspen hovered over the Cenacle materials, which were sitting on a small table, and exactly at his height – surely he wanted to be there at the table with the disciples. Almost before I could get the words out of my mouth as I held the small paten with bread, and read the words of Jesus saying “Take eat, this is my body”... Aspen immediately jumped up with delight and pointed upward saying, “Upstairs.” And then, holding the small chalice, almost before I could say, ...”Drink this in remembrance of me,” Jacob is excitedly acknowledging that he too knows this to be the words said at the altar – with their younger siblings ages 2 and 2 ½ years also joining in this excitement of recognition.

I almost felt I need not say anything more – as they had it! However I discovered that it was they who had more to share with me. I finished the Presentation and was beginning to light the four candles before me to proclaim – “Christ has died, but He is risen,” when Aspen burst into spontaneous song... ”Light one candle for Hope.” He had not sung this since Advent and Christmas but surely knew how appropriate this also proclaims the resurrection!

Now before I knew it, Aspen moved immediately over to the Model Altar (his favorite) to begin his work. He had everything set up and somehow had managed to steal away from the Sheepfold, the key figure, and as he completed setting the table he carefully placed the Good Shepherd figure directly in the center of the paten, as if his hand were being guided by an inner Spirit – which of course it was. Then he invited everyone to join him at the table as he was about to begin the service. He stood at the small lectern with the model sized Lectionary - doing what he does almost every week...”reading” the words in a sing song, chanting fashion as he hears Father Norris do while he serves as the boat boy acolyte. He used all of the sacred key words from the Good Shepherd and Found Sheep Parables and Last Supper story putting the words

together in “his own order,” but in a most sincere way. He has set a pattern that the other children now follow whenever they can get a turn at the lectern.

When the time came, the children joined the congregation for the last part of the Liturgy of the Table upstairs. They sat on the front row eagerly awaiting the opportunity to be the first at the altar rail. Jacob sat at my feet on the kneeler, leaning half way out into the center aisle and busily leafing through the Prayer Book until he seemed to find the right page. At that moment Father Norris was facing the congregation with welcoming arms uplifting the chalice and paten inviting all to come to the table to partake of the Bread of Life and Cup of Salvation. A brief pause and short period of silence always follows these words, however at this point Jacob breaks the silence (before I can shush him), chiming in with a solemn proclamation, as if he is making a liturgical background comment that he is “reading” from the Prayer Book, saying, ”And one day... God.... gave us this sign.”

I am reminded once again, why I enjoy so much working with these younger children. They, themselves, are an untarnished, sure and certain sign of God’s Presence with us, and I feel humbled and privileged to be in that Presence with them.

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