

The Inner Teacher

It's one thing to teach it, but another to see it. How many times in our Catechesis Courses, as a Formation Leader, have I told those preparing to become catechists - that it is not they, but the Montessori concept of "The Inner Teacher", which we understand to be the Holy Spirit at work, that is the true teacher. Our role as catechists is to prepare the environment, make a brief proclamation of the Word, and step back with gentle guidance, to allow the Spirit within to do the work. As much as I believe this to be true, I find myself always surprised by joy, almost in amazement, when I actually see it – especially with the youngest child. Such was the situation this past Wednesday morning when I met with a new family in our parish to continue with a few orientation sessions for the three little boys who had already begun attending our Sunday morning Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium.

The youngest child, Oliver, just shy of 23-months-old, is to be baptized on All Saints Sunday next month. While I really wanted to address the child being baptized, I had in mind that I would more likely be understood by the older brothers, ages four and six, and their mom who accompanied them. I had barely begun my Presentation about the Paschal Candle whose Light symbolically is given to us in Baptism. To my surprise young Oliver jumped up and excitedly began to tap his finger on the picture of the Paschal Candle on the chart on the nearby wall – saying “candle, candle” and followed this by tapping also on the small individual candle picture beside it and naming it as well.

Before I could get much more of my feeble words spoken – this child had moved energetically to the small Model Altar behind where his mom was sitting and reached for the model sized Tabernacle (Aumbry), opened the door, and took out the miniature sized Ciborium (a small chalice shaped container) with a paper representation of the Reserved Sacrament. In astonishment I asked his mom quietly if he possibly knew that this was the next step after baptism. She said you wouldn't believe this child at the altar rail on Sunday morning stretching on tiptoes trying to reach the Bread – as the priest gave him a blessing. Perhaps she had told him he had to wait until after he was baptized to receive the Bread. But it was a mystery to me how he knew what was in the Tabernacle – as he has obviously never been given this Presentation. Unless, he had seen an older child work with this material – but certainly no explanation of it would have been given to him.

I gained further insight about this inner knowing and work of the Inner Teacher when the Sunday morning catechist for the younger children (ages 3-6) told me that Oliver had come with his brother one or two Sundays when the Nursery Care Giver was not available. She said Oliver had listened with great interest and intent to the Presentation of the Good Shepherd almost leaning into the sheepfold itself. And as the small sheep were gathered together with their Good Shepherd in the model sized sheepfold – young Oliver resisting falling into the Sheepfold himself – released from his tight little fist, his prized and beloved Hot Wheels car, insisting that it too belonged in the fold among the sheep. Was this a representation of himself? Surely he knows who he is, and Whose he is, as one of the Good Shepherd's beloved sheep. Typically he will be about four years of age when this unconscious knowing will become conscious and in

response to the question of, “Wonder who these sheep could be”? We might hear him say that, yes, one of them could be Oliver.

© Copyright 2013. Genelda Woggon has been ministered to and by children for over 40 years in her professional work as a Christian Formation Leader, most especially through the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for the past 20 years.