

A Peek Into The Atrium

We have moved into the season of Lent in the atrium. The time has come for the presentation of several long-awaited works.

First Year Works (for children who are in their first year in the atrium):

The Good Shepherd

Early in Lent we present this work to the children. We share the scripture (John 10:3-5, 11-16) and engage the children in the movement of the figures of the Good Shepherd and the sheep. The children are attracted to the relationship of the sheep and the shepherd, particularly the love of the shepherd for the sheep. This is the foundation for many later works in the atrium.

Psalm 23

Following the parable of the Good Shepherd, we present this psalm to the children in the prayer corner. Very simple with just a single verse, this psalm reinforces the idea of the care of the shepherd for the sheep.

“The Lord is my shepherd.
I have everything I want.”

The Cenacle

This presentation is given close to the end of Lent, just prior to Holy Week. Using the figures of Jesus and the apostles, we share the scripture accounts of the last supper of Jesus and announce the Pascal Mystery, “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” This is another much-anticipated work that the children return to frequently in the atrium.

2nd Year Works:

Found Sheep

This is a continuation of the Good Shepherd work. We add the verses concerning the finding of the lost sheep.

Psalm 23:1–3 Again, we are sharing additional verses of Psalm 23 with the children, giving the child an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the love of the shepherd for the sheep. At this point, some of the children are realizing that “we are the sheep.” This is a point of discovery for the child, not something that we say to him/her. As the children work with the Good Shepherd, it becomes clear to them, each in their own time.

City of Jerusalem This work makes the events of Holy Week very real and concrete for the children. We have the walls of the city of Jerusalem set in a large box in a relief map style, so the children can experience more about what the city was like when Jesus lived on earth. The children initially are drawn to moving the walls; as they work with this material year after year, more details from the passion of Jesus begin to take root in their understanding. We share this work each year close to Holy Week, providing more of the scriptural context each year.

Mystery of Life & Death

This presentation is usually offered in Lent but may be offered during the Easter season or anytime a child has experienced a death in the family. Using wheat plants in various stages of growing and a mature seed, we share the scripture of the Grain of Wheat (John 12:24.) We talk about the cycle of the wheat seed in terms of the resurrection and new life. The children see that the seed fades away as the plant grows, but then a new cycle of growth brings for new seeds. What does this tell us about the Paschal Mystery?

3rd Year Works:

The Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd In this work, we introduce to the children the idea that the Good Shepherd is with us today in a very particular way. Over the next months and possibly year, through several “moments”, the children will reflect on the presence of the Good Shepherd in the bread and wine at mass. They will be introduced to the role of the priest and to the idea of the “sheepfold of the church.” Thus, the strong attraction of the children to the love of the Good Shepherd is transferred to what they see at mass in the liturgy.

Psalm 23:1–4 In this presentation the 4th scriptural verse is added to what the child has already heard in previous years. As the children grow, they go ever deeper in their understanding of the love of the Shepherd. The security and strength of the Shepherd resonates with the child