**Our Mother of Consolation School**

**Atrium of Consolation**

**CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

**WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT FOR THE 3-6 YEAR OLD IN “LEVEL I’ CGS?**

**The child’s openness to love cries out to God in the infinite capacity God has to love.**  “It is not in a search for compensation that the child turns to God, but from a profound exigence (need) within the child’s nature.” (from the *Religious Potential of the Child,* by Sofia Cavalletti). **The nurturing of this relationship brings joy!** A child of this age has a deep need for relationship, is already in relationship with God, and finds joy in nurturing this relationship. Children, who are by their very being already in relationship with God, can turn all of us in new ways to enjoyment of the relationship with God.

“Who could these sheep be that Jesus loves so much?” is the question the catechist asks following the Good Shepherd proclamation. (John 10) As each child in comes to ‘know’ who it is, joy lights up his or her face. (We never ‘tell’ that answer- it must be discovered). When the Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd is announced, the children see that the ordinary sheep led by the Good Shepherd to the altar in the sheepfold of the Church are really His flock, from baptism, who hear His voice calling them to the altar.

There are **two sources** which you see so evident in the atrium- the Bible and the Liturgy. We learn to listen to the Inner Teacher (the Holy Spirit) as we take time together with the proclamation from one of these sources and as the child goes to do their own work. This listening is a lifelong gift that can bear great fruit especially when the parents and parish work together in the holy triangle of catechesis!—

The **absorbent mind**, a term coined by Maria Montessori, characterizes the period of life from birth to about six. A child is absorbing the culture of the family. At home, the deepest lessons of love and service are absorbed day in and day out. Here at OMC School, we have the opportunity to live this joy of faith daily and to celebrate it in a most particular way each week in the atrium. In the parish, the words and songs, rhythm of the Mass, the reality of the community of faith and the Real Presence of Jesus become knit into the child’s being because of the ‘absorbent mind.’

The child at this age is **sensorial**. What comes into the mind goes through the hand. More than half of the time together in CGS is time for the children to choose their own work. This work is done with their hands – and lets them continue their own meditation on Bible and Liturgy presentations. This is good for the little child and for the adults who enter into the simplicity and essentiality of the ‘good news’ with the child.

**Learning control of movement** so that they can enter into stillness or concentration is a boon for small children. There are various materials created just to give the child a chance, within the life of the atrium, to take a quiet walk with Jesus on an elliptical line (later with a bell that has to stay quiet!), to play the silence game, and to use their hands to listen to the ‘joyful noise to the Lord’ the beans make as they pour or spoon them… and more. This contributes to the life of the CGS atrium (prepared environment), where the children and adults live together in the presence of God a life of respect and care for each other, for themselves, and for the environment—

Small children have a capacity for a **wonder** and **deep respect for small things**; and life is very, very small when it first begins, both for the mustard seed and the human being. We lift up kingdom parables which help us to wonder about the mystery of life and the kingdom of God. We think about the Annunciation and Visitation, the wonder of beginnings and the joy in welcoming Jesus.

Small children live in a world where **life and death** are very close to the heart. Questions about death usually arise very naturally around the age of four. Jesus offers a profound image about life and death: the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and in dying, gives life to a plant which bears new grains of wheat. We plant wheat seeds and wonder about the seed dying in the earth and the plant growing…we wonder how this helps us to understand Jesus’ death, and the death of those who live in Him. We announce the events of Holy Week with a map of Jerusalem with moveable parts, including a small cross on Calvary, a small tomb and a candle which we light to show that He is risen and will be alive forever.

 **The joy of the child** enters into the life of the parents, too- with the child’s eagerness to come to atrium, with the parent letters sent home each week or two. The parents welcome the child, and through that child’s baptism surrender the child to God who created the child along with them. God, who calls the child by name through Jesus His Son, promises a lifetime and beyond of Love through communion with Him in the Church.

You have chosen a direction in the midst of the daily struggles and hardships of raising children! We know that our love, at best, is a sign that points to the greatness of the love of God for our child. In CGS, we want to join you as church family to nurture this child’s being-in-love with God (3-6 year old) and growing in love of God and neighbor (6-9 year old). In doing this we are responding to the child’s silent request, **“Help me to come closer to God by myself.”** In doing this, we are putting our feet along the way to Jesus to learn from Him who makes our burdens sweet and light… We hope youfind that the child’s time in the atrium is a wonderful part of the journey.

 This little prayer from St. Francis de Sales begins many of our activities throughout the day at OMC- you might want to begin this practice of prayer, too: ***My God, I give you this action. Please give me the grace to conduct myself during it in a manner most pleasing to you. May God be blessed. St. Francis de Sales, pray for us. Our Mother of Consolation, pray for us.***

For more on CGS, go to that page under ‘specials’ on the OMC school website and to [**www.cgsusa.org**](http://www.cgsusa.org)