



Parent Pages

Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church*

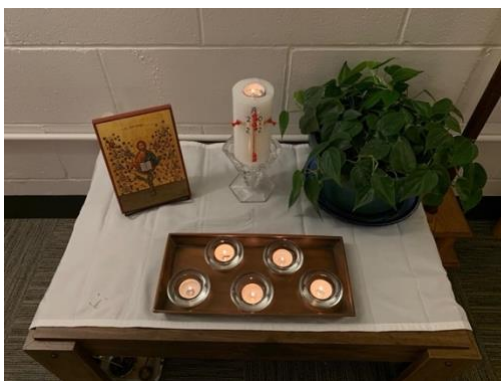
* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

The True Vine

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit"
(John 15:5a).

The Meeting of Two Mysteries:

The Atrium is a space prepared for encounter with God. As stated by Rebekah Rojcewicz in the "Forward" to *The Religious Potential of the Child*, "The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has been described as the meeting of two mysteries: the mystery of God and the mystery of the child" (p. vi). Yet time in the Atrium is not the first meeting but a place of continued growth in relationship. The youngest of children have shown that this mysterious relationship is best captured through the image of the Good Shepherd who calls his sheep by name, and they follow (John 10:3-4). In remembering this beautiful image older children have said, "The Good Shepherd took the sheep to still waters and good pastures." "The sheep only listen to him." "He had all those sheep and he looked for that one sheep. It shows that we are the sheep and that's how he cares for us." "He will lay down his life to save us."



Receiving the Gift:

The intimacy of the Good Shepherd and his sheep resonates deeply, and yet there is another parable from John's Gospel which provides an even closer look at the relationship between God and his people. In first encountering the Parable of the True Vine (John 15:1-11) the 6-9-year-old children are often surprised to discover that the difference between the branch and the vine is difficult to discern. When touching a branch, one is also touching the vine and without branches (plural!) there is not really a vine at all. The

relationship depicted is even closer than that of the Shepherd and his sheep, and this relationship with the Vine includes a relationship with the whole community. What a joy it is to ponder the beauty of the plant that is healthy, made of interconnected branches, filled with the sap which flows through the vine bringing life to every part of each branch. It is through remaining on the vine that

the branches bear beautiful fruit, fruit that brings glory to the Vine grower, God the Father. What a gift to be a branch on this True Vine!

Responding to the Gift:

It is only once the beauty of the gift of being part of the True Vine has been recognized and enjoyed and a desire to bear beautiful fruit has been enkindled that the children are ready to hear a bit more. In a second moment, a later presentation, the children are invited to reflect on what would happen if one of the branches contained a block to the sap which fills it with life. What sort of fruit would be borne? Would it be as beautiful? Because the branches are so interconnected would the block in one branch affect the other branches as well? In this pondering we lift up John 15:7 where Jesus invites us to “ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.” While we cannot remove those blocks to the sap, he can, and he will if only we approach him and ask him for this help. While we are invited to ask him for this help each and every day, we ask in a “most particular” way through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How very good he is to us!



In this half-finished drawing by a 1st grader, God the Father is watering the True Vine with love. The True Vine is growing from the Stump of Jesse and the branches (“us”)



A 2nd grader drew this at home, depicting Eucharist (overshadowed by the Holy Spirit) at the center of the True Vine and the fruit labeled as “Love! Joy! Parousia! Kindness!”

In the Words of Sofia:

By allowing the children time to enjoy the gift of their relationship with the Good Shepherd they begin to desire to stay close to him. By delighting in their place on the True Vine they grow in their desire to remain and bear beautiful fruit. This “falling in love” moment is an ongoing need for the children and for all of us as well. It is the joy of relationship which leads to a desire for right living, for an honoring and cherishing of this gift. As Sofia Cavalletti tells us, “What is morality in the Christian view if not the response to God’s love, our reaction to our encounter with Him” (*The Religions Potential of the Child*, p. 120).

Enjoying the Gift:

- In what ways do you experience the gift of being part of the Vine?
- How have you seen and enjoyed the beautiful fruits of the branches near to yours?
- What helps you to remain on the Vine and continue to be filled with life-giving sap?
- What sort of fruit does this sap help you to bear?
- When you examine your branch and see that there are blocks to the fullness of sap that God desires to give, how could you ask for his help in removing those blocks in order to remain even closer to him and bear, once again, the most beautiful fruit?