

All Saints Catholic Church

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
An Overview of
First Communion
and
First Reconciliation
Preparation
2017



Eucharist

The Source and Summit of our Faith

(Lumen Gentium, 11)

The Eucharist is a mystery which perhaps none of us will fully comprehend in our lifetimes. The Church encourages the faithful to be committed to a life-long catechesis about this great Sacrament. Therefore, while we engage in preparation for First Holy Communion for children around 7 or 8 years of age, this preparation for First Eucharist should not be seen as just begun or complete. The Eucharist is both the summit of the child's whole religious life since baptism, and it is the source of the child's continued growth and development as a child of God.

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Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Although CGS is over 60 years old, it is more than likely that we as parents received a markedly different preparation for First Communion than our children. With this in mind, this booklet has been prepared to help explain the method and material that is utilized especially as relates to First Communion.

Preparation for Holy Eucharist in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is both comprehensive and particular. This preparation truly begins the moment a child enters the atrium. In a prepared environment with special material for the children to explore, the experience of the atrium each week becomes a special opportunity for the child to encounter the mysteries of our faith through the help of his catechist, and especially the great Catechist—the Holy Spirit.

Direct and Indirect Aims

Each presentation in the atrium has an album page with particular direct and indirect aims (sometimes several of each!), doctrinal content, liturgical time, and age recommendations. Regardless of the presentation, the direct aim of everything we do is explicit: “To help the child fall in love with God.”

Some presentations have a special character in that they are preliminarily (indirect aim) or positively (direct aim) focused on preparation for First Holy Communion and First Reconciliation. Some of these preliminary presentations begin with the 3 year old child, progressively becoming more and more directed at positive preparation for the child’s first and subsequent receptions of Holy Communion.

In the True Vine/Level II (6-9 year old) atria, there are several presentations that your child has/will receive that list “preparation for first Holy Communion” as a direct or indirect aim. Many of these are first presented in the Level I atrium and built upon in Level II. If your child has not participated in CGS prior to this year, your child’s catechist has taken special measures to ensure that s/he has received as many of these as possible *this* year.

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These are many (but not all) of the CGS presentations given in Level I and Level II that are of particular relevance for a child preparing for First Holy Communion.

Particular Presentations

Concerning First Holy Eucharist in the True Vine Atrium

Altar I, II, & III

These presentations give the children nomenclature for the articles of the mass: the paten, chalice, crucifix, etc. When we present the paten and the chalice they are introduced as “the plate that holds the bread that becomes Jesus,” and “the cup that holds the wine that becomes Jesus.” We point out the familiar aspects in which mass is a meal: there is a table (the altar), a tablecloth (altar cloth), candles, a plate and a cup.

Good Shepherd/Eucharistic Presence

This presentation follows the Good Shepherd presentation, once the children are aware that “we are the sheep.” The Good Shepherd calls his sheep to Mass—the sheep are replaced with 2 dimensional figures of children and adults—and He is present to us in a special way—in the bread and the wine. The small figurine which represents the Good Shepherd is placed

on the altar and we are very explicit: “It doesn’t matter if the statue of the Good Shepherd is here or not.

Where is the Good Shepherd present to us?” and the children answer, “In the bread and the wine.”

“Where is the Good Shepherd present to us?” The children answer, “In the bread and the wine.”

Gestures of the Mass—

Epiclesis, Lavabo, Offering, Sign of Peace

These presentations are given throughout the course of Level I and again in a deeper way in Level II. Each gesture of the mass is isolated and considered—which

both helps the children to understand what the gestures may mean and to encourage respect for every aspect of the mass: **no gesture is without meaning.** These gesture

presentations have as a direct aim “to help the child participate more fully in the mass.”

Preparation of the Chalice

The preparation of the chalice, while properly filed under the “gestures” tab, deserves special emphasis. In this presentation, the catechist takes the cruets and slowly and deliberately prepares the chalice, pouring all of the wine into the “chalice” and just one drop of water. After reflecting with the children about what she has done, she asks: “Who does the wine represent?” (Jesus) Who does the water represent? (Us!) Can we ever get the water out?” (No)

“Once we are joined together with Jesus, we are changed forever.”

“Once we are together with Jesus, we are changed forever.” This presentation draws from reflections of the early Church fathers as they sought for gestures which would communicate to the unlearned the truths of the faith. These gestures are still very powerful for us, and especially for children.

Epiclesis Expanded, and Prayers

In Level II, the liturgical gestures we began to study and think about in Level I are expanded, and some new ones are added. The Fraction Rite is isolated, when the host is broken and a piece is placed in the chalice. The prayers that go along with each gesture are also considered. My special favorite is the meditation on the “Offering” prayer:

“Through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is Yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever.” When the children were thinking about how close we are to God, and the meaning of the word unity, one child exclaimed: “That

“We are together with Jesus and the Holy Spirit!”

means together! It means we are

together with Jesus and the Holy Spirit!” Then he paused and said thoughtfully, “Whoa. That’s deep.”

The Cenacle/Origin of the Eucharist

This presentation details what happened at the Last Supper, drawing out the words of Christ: “This is my Body. This is my Blood,” and (this is very important)—connects it to Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. In Level II, this presentation is expanded to include the history of the apostles *after* Jesus’ resurrection. These apostles continued to offer the sacrifice of the mass, and as they grew older, they anointed successors to be bishops, and priests and deacons which would help them to accomplish their mission. The apex of the presentation happens when we place the 2 dimensional priest behind the “altar” and turn the backdrop around to reveal the backdrop of All Saints! The direct aim of this presentation is to help the child make the connection between the last supper and the mass that we experience each week in our parish.

“This is my Body.”
“This is my Blood.”

The Blue Strip/Unity Strip & the History of the Gifts

The great big blue strip and the “La Fettuccia” ribbon that the children work with detail the history of the Kingdom of God and also show the plan of God who created the world with the intention to send his Son in the fullness of time.

The History of the Gifts is perhaps one of the most important presentations, because it centers on theology of “gift” and calls for the response of gratitude. This work begins with all of the gifts that God gave us in creation—dwelling on how God prepared the creation as a gift to human beings, and ultimately desired to give us the

greatest gift: Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. This is a fun work that involves opening gift boxes and thinking about how fun and creative God was when he was creating the gifts, and how much he loves us! This presentation joins the blue strip and the La Fettuccia in the emphasis that we are not “there yet” and our ultimate joy will be complete only at the Parousia: the time when “God will be all in all.”

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The Synthesis of the Mass & the Missal Work

This work—which presents the timeline of the mass in a 3 dimensional form—gives the children a work to reflect tangibly what happens at each mass. As we read the poster, we place the bible, the cruets, the paten and chalice, and the appropriate prayer cards on the table in order. The children are then invited to begin work on their own missal, a color-coded binder that they make with many of the most important prayers of the mass. The colors of the pages coordinate with the parts of the mass (Liturgy of the Word, Preparation, Liturgy of the Eucharist, etc.), and all of the works in the atrium which are associated with the mass follow the same color coding.

Special Sessions

Bible Study and Reflection

While the parents attend adult catechesis that we have prepared for them, the children have 3 special sessions, each of which has a unique and specific focus as relates to First Communion/First Reconciliation preparation. Following the bible study time each night, children will be given an opportunity for private reflection, drawing a picture or writing a prayer. This is not unusual for the children, as they are accustomed to this kind of reflection in the atrium.

True Vine I

The first reflection night centers around the True Vine, John 15:1-11. This parable introduces the children to a new and different relationship to Christ into which they are being called. Early in his ministry, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, and we discover that we are the sheep—and we enjoy the loving relationship between a sheep who is called by name and the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Now, at the Last Supper, Jesus refers to himself in a new and special way: “I am the True Vine, you are the branches.” Even in the intimate relationship of the sheep and shepherd, there is still a separation. Now Jesus shares with us a deeper desire: that we become one with him. The children reflect on the question: what is the sap that flows between the True Vine and the branches?

True Vine II

This week, we return to John 15, but with a different emphasis. As the children reflect on what it means to *be the branches*, we invite them to listen to the scripture and think about the word
“**Remain.**”

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When Jesus speaks of this relationship between the Vine and the branches, he invites us to **remain** and bear fruit. The call to communion with Christ bears with it the duty to “remain.” Recalling the previous week, we think about the “sap blocks” in our lives: the things that block the grace, love, and life of the Vine (and some children do make a strong

We think about the “sap blocks” in our lives—the things that block the grace, love, and life of the Vine from flowing to us.

connection between the sap and the Eucharist) from flowing to us. It is these things which we call, “sin.” We speak of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as “wiping out the sap blocks” and opening up the flow of grace. When we are open, the sap can flow! If we do not repent of our sin, the grace cannot flow. This night, children will visit the Reconciliation room and discuss the particulars of how to go about making their first confession.

Found Sheep/Found Coin

The third bible study focuses on two stories: that of the found sheep and of the found coin. Most of the children will have seen these presentations with materials in the course of the year, and they are already familiar with this scripture. The direct aim of this evening is to see the parallels and differences between these two parables and for the children to see similarities in their lives. A coin gets lost through no fault of its own, but a sheep may choose to disobey. Sometimes we get lost without being at fault, but sometimes we are lost and far away from where we want to be, and we know that we did something to cause it. The emphasis here, though, is not on the fault of the sheep or the coin, but on the action and LOVE of the shepherd and the

woman. It is God’s initiative which brings us back, not our own, so we never need to fear confessing our fault—or being found—because it is the will and joy of God that a sinner repents. Following reflection, we will discuss more

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of the particulars of the Rite of Reconciliation. This is also the night that the children will get to “sample” unconsecrated bread and wine with their parents present.

The Centurion’s Servant

This reflection takes place on the morning of the retreat. It is a meditation on the story of the faith of the Centurion when he asked for his servant to be healed. The words of the Centurion, trusting absolutely the authority and power of Christ to heal, are spoken at every mass—the last words of the faithful (besides Amen) before receiving the Eucharist:

“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. But only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

Retreat

Guided and Private Reflection

Saturday's retreat will begin with a short rehearsal, but will largely be a quiet and joyful time of prayer, special activities (such as making their own paten and chalice out of clay) as well as time with the final bible study. The retreat is not meant to be "material rich" but "time rich" so that the children have an opportunity to internalize the material and presentations they have received. We have a tradition of the child inviting one "special guest" to join them for lunch at the retreat. This meal is served by the parents with real plates, napkins, candles, etc. It is often a highlight for the children.

First Reconciliation

Following lunch and recess on the Saturday retreat

Forgiving Father

This reflection is done altogether as a large group with parents present as the close of the retreat and the prelude to the child's First Reconciliation. More commonly called "The Prodigal Son," this reflection is named the Forgiving Father to emphasize the direct aim of the presentation: "To lift up the LOVE and forgiveness of God toward us when we repent." This reflection also focuses on the garment that is given to the son, and the great feast that the father throws for his son. This is much like the experience the children will have when the child receives again a white garment (reminiscent of baptism) after his reconciliation, and will take part in a great feast (First Communion!) in just a few moments.

After the bible study, the children go back to the Reconciliation room, one by one, while the others and the

parents remain in quiet and prayer for the person in the confessional. Of great interest to the children is the moment when they can see through the glass Father's movement of Epiclesis, calling down the Holy Spirit upon their friend as their sins are forgiven. The child emerges to the music they will sing as they process in the next morning: "Let Heaven Rejoice!" The parents then present the child with symbols of baptism renewed: the candle and the white garment (the pinafore that the child has prepared). Lastly, they walk together with the child to pray his or her penance at the statue of the Blessed Mother.

**Repentance.
A Garment.
A Feast.**

First Communion

The morning of First Communion we gather about an hour early for photos and then the children take some time with their catechists to pray and sing and listen again to scripture as they prepare for Mass. The children will process in with a flower for the Blessed Mother.

Following Mass, the children will head downstairs for one final time of private reflection. We ask that you respect this time for the children as they may take a shorter or longer amount of time for their private prayer. Each child is different and it is their special way to say "Thank you!" to our Lord for His great gift.

During this time, a complementary family reception is provided by parishioners who wish to serve your family in a special way. Please enjoy the rolls, juice, and milk as you wait for your child to appear with the shining face of one who just received the greatest of gifts!