

HOW WE SPEAK *in the* **KINGDOM OF GOD**

*First Eucharist
is an ideal time
to introduce
the language
of mystery*

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Any time we visit or relocate to a foreign country where another language is spoken, it behooves us to learn that language. Catechesis is nothing other than a process of inviting those we teach to enter into a “foreign land,” namely, the Kingdom of God, a place where people act dif-

ferently, think differently, and live differently.

Research shows that children around the age of six or seven are at their peak when it comes to second language acquisition skills. First Eucharist preparation is an ideal time to help children and their families “relocate.”

In order for us to help those we teach to become better acclimated to this new “place” called the Kingdom

of God, we need to teach them the language that is spoken there—a language that relies less on an alphabet and more on expressions that ignite the imagination. What are the elements of this language of mystery that we can help children to acquire?

SIGN AND SYMBOL

In the Kingdom of God, “sign language” is spoken. Think about how Moses was drawn to encounter God: not through a wordy invitation, but through the sign of a burning bush. Signs and symbols speak directly to the heart through the imagination. Set up a prayer space with important symbols of our Catholic faith such as a crucifix and a rosary. Invite children to bring in their own symbols.


RITUAL


Rituals are common in the Kingdom of God. Rituals awaken a deeper level of consciousness within us—that place where the spirit dwells. Take advantage of the opportunities to engage children in rituals in your learning space: blessings, processions, ritual “greetings” such as “Taste and see how good the Lord is.” R: “Happy are those who take refuge in him.”

MOVEMENT AND GESTURE

One of the ways of speaking to the heart (and not just the mind) is through prayerful movement and gesture. In the Kingdom of God, people are often on the move—not just mindlessly fidgeting, but moving prayerfully as though each action is saying

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

 **Play a game of “Simon Says” without using words!** Invite the children to repeat the movements and gestures that you reverently perform: bowing, making the Sign of the Cross, making the threefold Sign of the Cross on your forehead, lips, and heart, genuflecting, folding your hands, holding out hands as if to receive Holy Communion, and so on.

 **Invite children to do a “show and tell”** as they bring in their own signs and symbols to place in your prayer center. Have them explain the significance of the symbol they’ve brought in and, as they place it in the prayer center, sing a refrain from a hymn such as *Open My Eyes* (Jesse Manibusan).

something. Spirit and body are conjoined. Teach children reverent gestures like the Sign of the Cross, the threefold Sign of the Cross on our forehead, lips, and heart, bowing, and genuflecting.

SILENCE

The primary form of expression in the Kingdom of God is silence. Author Thomas Keating tells us that “Silence is God’s first language; everything else is a poor translation. In order to hear that language, we must learn to be still and to rest in God.” One of the gifts you can give children as they prepare for First Eucharist is the gift of silence. Don’t hesitate to take the children to Eucharistic Adoration and invite them to talk to Jesus in silence about their desire to receive him.

SONG

Few things can touch our hearts and transport us to another state of mind better than music and song. There are nearly 100 references in the Psalms that command the use of music to praise God and identify God as the audience for such songs of praise (i.e., “O sing to the Lord a new song,” Psalm 96:1). Lucky for us, God loves music. And of course, so do children. Music and singing are integral to your First Eucharist preparation.

STORYTELLING

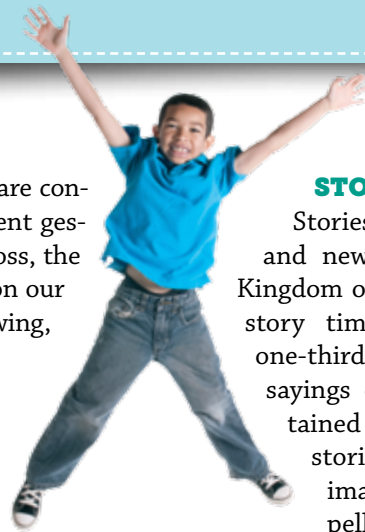
Stories create worlds and new realities. In the Kingdom of God, it is always story time. Approximately one-third of the recorded sayings of Jesus are contained in parables. Jesus’ stories tap into our imaginations, compelling us to consider the possibility of an alternate reality. At the top of your storytelling list for First Eucharist should be the Exodus/Passover story, the Loaves and Fishes, and, of course, the Last Supper.

The language of mystery predisposes children to the possibility of an alternate reality called the Kingdom of God. If things were simply as they appeared, we would have no need for catechesis. However, life’s ultimate meaning is veiled and mysterious. As such, we catechize others to incorporate these various elements of the language of mystery into their souls’ daily diet that will soon be fed by the ultimate food served in the Kingdom: the Eucharist. ▼

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for Reflection

- Of the elements of the language of mystery—sign and symbol, ritual, movement and gesture, silence, song, and storytelling—which is my favorite? Why?
- How can I better incorporate the language of mystery into my First Eucharist preparation?



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