



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 Mustard Seed

This month in the Level One Atrium, we begin to speak to the children about the Parable of the Mustard Seed. We look at a point that Jesus mentioned many times when he was speaking to the people. And, of course, we know that he was not just speaking to the people long ago and far away from us, but he was speaking also to us. Many times, Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a very mysterious phrase. What can it mean: The Kingdom of God or of Heaven?

The children are glad to share what they know about kingdoms, castles, kings, and queens. But what do we know about the Kingdom of God? Jesus spoke about this mystery so often, so that we could begin to understand more about this Kingdom. He would use comparisons, so we could know a little more. It was not enough to offer us only one comparison, so he used many different comparisons. One time, Jesus compared the Kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed.

"He proposed another parable to them. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.'"

- Matthew 13: 31-32

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is found in all three levels (3-6 year-olds, 6-9 year-olds, 9-12 year-olds) of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and the children, no matter what age, tell us that it is one of their favorite parables. The older child articulates what they are able to discover within two verses of scripture, that something seemingly so tiny and insignificant contains such power and strength to grow into a gigantic tree. This parable is so short, yet we continue to offer it to the children throughout their years at all atrium levels: the child will hear it when they



are three or four years old, when they are older and again when they are eleven and twelve. What is it about this parable?

Jesus used the Parable Method. The parable is a method of teaching that invites us to enter where we are and takes us on an endless journey of discovery. The Parable of the Mustard Seed offers the child the beginning and the ending moments of the process of growth and transformation: the image of the seed and of the large bush. Jesus did not talk about what happened in between those two points. This further highlights the contrast between the smallness of the seed and the greatness of the shrub.

Parables at the Family Prayer Table

- It would be valuable to meditate on this parable with your children. It could be a source of prayer for your family. In the evening, at your prayer time, you could read The Parable of the Mustard Seed or one of the Kingdom Parables. The parent and the child meditate together on this mystery; the adult must not explain the parable or offer his or her own answers to the meditative questions; rather, she simply poses meditative questions regarding the parable:
 - What did you hear?
 - Why would Jesus tell us this?
 - I wonder what this could mean for us?

We do not want to put ourselves between the Word of God and the child. In parables, we let the scripture do the teaching. We do not tell the children how to interpret parables, offer definitions of the parable, as no one formula or definition speaks to everyone at the same time.

Sofia Cavalletti writes, “the parable is not to be explained. To explain the parable is to treat it like a definition, to take away all the force it has, to limit it to the interpretation that we may suggest. But, as the ancient rabbis said, on Mount Sinai the Word of God resounded in seventy languages, and we want to isolate one single note in this concert and impose it on all, so that all receive it in the same way. To explain a parable is to betray its nature, to lack respect for its infinite richness; the explanation of the parable is the pin that immobilizes the butterfly.”
(The Parable Method)

- Invite the child(ren) to create a prayer card, with words or a phrase from the parable. Perhaps the child would like to write a prayer or illustrate the parable. Place these items on or near the family prayer table.
- For parables that involve growth and transformation of the Kingdom, the children may want to discuss their own experiences that involve growth and transformation: planting a seed. You may want to plant a seed and watch how it grows in the coming weeks. This could lead us to wonder how could a seed produce a plant that is so much bigger than itself?