



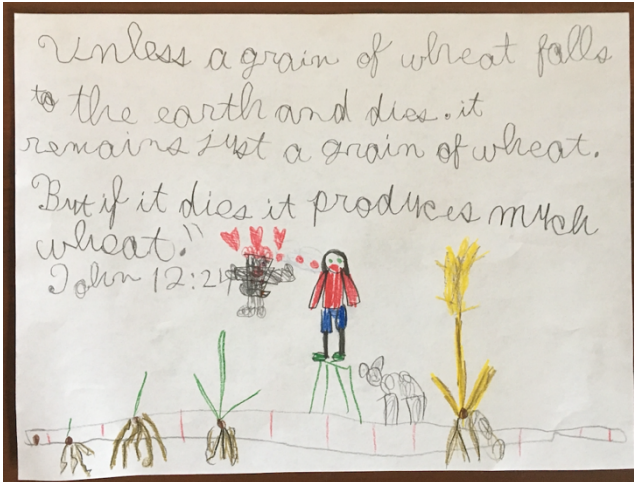
Parent Pages

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 Mystery of Life and Death

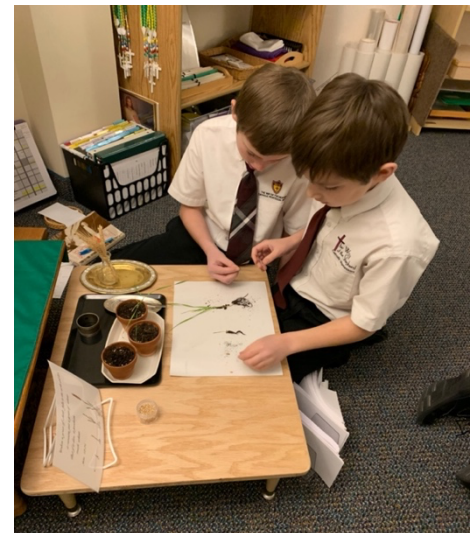
The entire life of the Good Shepherd was one of giving all that He had for His sheep. But He also knew that there would be a moment when He would lay down His life for them in a most particular way.



Just before Jesus entered Jerusalem, knowing that time had come, He spoke to His friends, offering them words which, along with all that He had ever said to them, they would remember, return to, and reflect on after His death and resurrection had been accomplished. In these words, He desired to both prepare them for what was to come in the next week as well as to speak truth about their own lives. Jesus said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (John 12:24).

Life and Death in the Atrium:

From the earliest moments of Atrium life, the children have heard "Jesus died, and He is risen," a truth which is at the heart of our faith! This proclamation is made each time candles are lit at the Model Altar, the Cenacle, the City of Jerusalem, the Empty Tomb, and at the Baptism area. It is the way that the City of Jerusalem is introduced on the Raised Surface map of Israel, the explanation of why we sign ourselves with a cross, and how Easter is announced on the Liturgical Calendar and celebrated in the Liturgy of the Light. For the elementary children, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life because of His great love for His sheep, and then rises again, sharing that risen life with His sheep, will show, visually, this truth which they have so often heard proclaimed. In each of these moments the death and resurrection of Jesus are held very closely together. We never speak of one without the other; they are one mystery.



The Presentation:

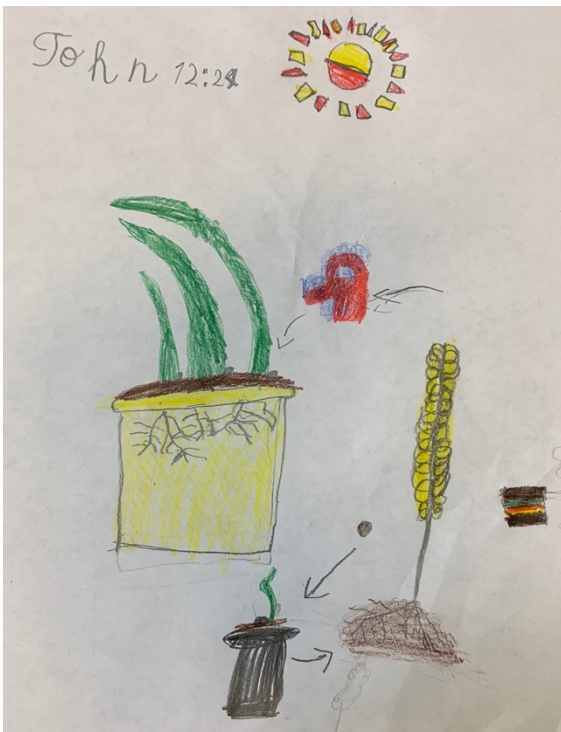
The Mystery of Life and Death material, in some ways, explains this Atrium practice best, as we hear Jesus Himself saying that death and life are intimately entwined. If one keeps one's life, it will simply remain a single grain, but if that life is poured out even to death, that life will become an abundance of life.

In pondering John 12:24 some of the following questions might be asked:

- Have you ever planted a seed and watched it grow?
- What will happen if the seed is never planted? Can it grow?
- When we watch seeds that have been planted, we see the shoots growing on top, but have you ever looked to see what is happening to the seed?
- If we dig up a seed that has been in the soil for a week, two weeks, or three weeks we can see that the seed is dying, being hollowed out, disappearing, and yet what has happened to the life that was in the seed?
- I wonder what Jesus was telling His friends. I wonder what He is telling us today.



Each year we offer this verse in the Atrium to the children from about age five and a half to age twelve. Here are several responses given by the oldest children...



- "Jesus died and brought life for all of us." (5th grade girl)
- "He's saying that the body dies but the spirit, the soul, lives in heaven." (5th grade boy)
- "We have something in us that will bring lots of life, but not everything in us brings life. We have to look for that seed in us and let it live." (6th grade girl)
- "He's saying something is holding you back and it has to be let go of so that you can live." (6th grade girl)
- "The seed is us as a baby and the roots are how we grow on earth and the shoot is after we die, when we go up to heaven." (1st grade boy)
- "The one seed is Jesus and heaven is all the seeds when we are there." (3rd grade boy)
- "It's like when the bread at Mass is broken, we die and go to heaven." (2nd grade girl)