Living Holy Week with the Heart of a Child

A resource for parents and children
We hear our Lord say in the Gospel of Matthew, “Truly I tell you unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). Therefore, the suggestions we share below for entering into Holy Week with children are, in a real way, for all of us, whatever our age. We are grateful to our friend Rossella Carone for sharing these, borne out of her experience as a Montessori teacher, accompanying children in their journey of faith.

She spoke on our panel of lay people on Holy Thursday, entitled “They Make it a Place of Springs”, which included lay people in various circumstances witnessing to God’s power to make the bitter valley of these times a place of life.

We pray for all of us that this is a time in which, by the grace of the Good Shepherd who knows all our needs, we allow ourselves to be changed and given the eyes of a child again.

**Prayer for the Heart of a Child**

*by Fr. Leonce de Grandmaison*

Holy Mary, Mother of God, 
preserve in me the heart of a child, pure and clean like spring water; 
a simple heart that does not remain absorbed in its own sadness; 
a loving heart that freely gives with compassion; 
a faithful and generous heart that neither forgets good nor feels bitterness for any evil. 
Give me a sweet and humble heart that loves without asking to be loved in return, 
happy to lose itself in the heart of others, 
sacrificing itself in front of your Divine Son; 
a great and unconquerable heart, 
which no ingratitude can close and no indifference can tire; 
by a heart tormented by the glory of Christ, 
pierced by his love with a wound that will not heal until heaven.

Amen.
Rossella Carone was trained and served as a 6-12 Montessori teacher, working for two years at a school offering the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd atrium in Ave Maria, Florida. She lives with her husband in Pennsylvania where she is currently working on a master’s degree in Secondary Science Education at the Pennsylvania State University.

Sofia Cavalletti (1917-2011) developed the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, along with her colleague Gianna Gobbi, to help children have “an encounter with the living God”. Cavalletti taught that the child’s first exposure to the faith should be centered in the person of Jesus. From her research she found that the aspect of Christ that most speaks to the young child is Jesus the Good Shepherd, who calls his sheep by name, creating a personal relationship with Him; who lays down his life for the sheep, nurtures and protects them. Because of this emphasis on Jesus the Good Shepherd, through this method, children soon realize that He is the center of the Christian faith.

The Atrium of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a specially prepared environment in which the furnishings are scaled to the size of the child. In this space children and adults live together a religious experience which facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the church and other social spheres. The atrium is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer. The atrium is a place in which the only teacher is Christ; both children and adults place themselves in a listening stance before his Word and seek to penetrate the mystery of the liturgical celebration.

From the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Resource Contents

Prayer
Ideas for Living Holy Week
Suggestions for each day
Suggestions for participating in Liturgies
Lectio Divina with Children
Additional Resources
The following are ideas that you can use at home to help your family in living Holy Week. You don’t want to force your children, so live everything as a proposal. The following are things that were done by some children, so perhaps your children will like them. Involve them as much as possible in the preparation, this will help them to be more excited about what you are proposing. Propose as much as possible what is personally helpful to you in living Holy Week. If things don’t go as you expected it is ok—welcome your children as they are.

- Preparing a prayer table at home (see this video on how to do this)
- Treating the prayer table as we would treat the church during the Triduum. You can use a cloth, a napkin. You can change the color during the days. The children can light the candle when you pray.

Each day of the week you will change what is on the table. You can process with the children bringing the items. Each member of the family will bring something. You can sing a song or hymn as you process. You can start in a place of your house where you have a table to prepare the items, walk around the house and end at the prayer table. Because it will be a procession, one person at the time will place the item he is carrying on the prayer table.

**Holy Thursday**

- Holy Thursday is purple. Place a purple napkin or cloth on the prayer table and a loaf of bread (you can prepare the loaf of bread with the children the day before or the same day), along with the other usual things that go on the table.

- Tell the story of bread: gather the family around the table, tell the kids the story of how bread is made: the days of the seed, the work of the grower, the rain, everything until you get the bread. Then simply say that for love Jesus transforms this bread into His body. At the end of the story take the loaf of bread you made together with the children, then break it and give a piece to everybody. We share it with one another.

- Wash each others’ feet.

- Bury the Alleluia cards (remind them that this is a word you do not say during the Lent): each person in the family can take a card and write “Alleluia” on it, draw Jesus resurrected, flowers, write verses from the Bible, etc. Put cards in a bag, close it, put in a pot, and soil is placed on top of it and this is left there until Easter. On Easter day or at Midnight the cards are taken out and Alleluia can be said again.
Suggestions for Each Day

**Good Friday**

- Friday is red. Place a red napkin or cloth, place a cross on the prayer table.
- Do the Stations of the Cross at home. You can tell your children: “Let’s think about what Jesus did for us when he died and then we can think of His presence in our house.” Put 14 candles throughout the house and put something simple at each (piece of cloth for Veronica, etc.)
- Children could draw the stations of the cross to put at each station.
- Make a crown of thorns with foam and sticks (above, third from left). Every sacrifice or act of love a person in the family does for Jesus that person secretly takes a stick out of the crown.

**Holy Saturday**

Saturday is a day of silence. Take everything out of the prayer table. You can propose to your children to have a day of silence as a family. Silence doesn’t mean you don't talk at all, but you only say the important things- this is a day when we are essential. Silence means staying in front of God.

**Easter Sunday**

Sunday is white. Place a white tablecloth, flowers, the candle, the Bible, the Alleluiah cards, an image of Jesus Risen on the prayer table.

Another idea could be to place a figure of Jesus in a cloth and then in a tomb. At Midnight on Easter the children could take out Jesus, open the Allelujah Cards, and you could process as a family to bring them to the prayer table.

Suggestions for Participating in Liturgies

You can follow the liturgies online with the monks. If you do it, watch it live. If you watch it online sit as you would sit in the church, don’t be on the couch. This will help the attention of the children.

Your children may get more out of praying around a table with family than watching the liturgy online. In many rural areas of the world, Catholics, who don’t have the possibility to physically attend mass due to the lack of priests, gather with their community to pray together the “Celebration of the Word.” In place of watching the liturgies online, you might want to consider doing something similar in your home: have a daily “Celebration of the Word” every day during Holy Week around the prayer table. Judge what you want to do based on your children’s attention.

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Lectio Divina with Children

*Lectio Divina* (or Sacred Reading) is an ancient practice in which one reads and meditates over scripture. You could have Lectio Divina with your children in the morning. This is something you want to propose if it is helpful to you. We can witness only what we live, and the more we find something helpful, the more we have the desire to share it with the people we love.

- The best is for each person to have a Bible to underline and read from it. Also give to each child a beautiful notebook. Tell them that that is where they can write the Word of God. They can decorate it beautifully.

- Make with your children a schedule to read the readings, the Psalm and the Gospel. You can assign longer readings to older children, but try to involve all of them as much as possible. The younger ones can read the Psalm or verses of the Psalm taking turns. You can ask them what they prefer.

- Start with a prayer to the Holy Spirit, asking Him to come to your minds so that you can understand that Word, to come to your hearts so that you can love It, and to come to your whole being and will, so that you may have the strength to put that Word into practice.

- Start reading as decided in the schedule.

- Go back to read a second time, but this time the adult can read, so that the children can take notes and underline on their Bible what they think God is telling them, what He is calling their attention to.

- Explain together what happens in the first reading and what they think God was telling to them, giving them turns. They may start seeing connections between the Reading, the Psalm and the Gospel.

- Allow time to respond with a prayer or to say it in silence in their heart. Everybody will have a journal, at the end give them time to write down what God is telling them and a resolution they have.

- It may be a long prayer, so you can just read the Gospel if you don’t have time. Also skip readings if they are not appropriate to the age of your children.

- In some families the parents can read from the beginning. Later, when children understand how it works, you can start involving them.

*The following are pictures from a 7 and a 8 year old.*
Additional Resources

If these suggestions are of interest to you and you want to learn more we recommend the many resources that have been generously made available by The United States Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd on their website: COVID-19 Coronavirus Response & Praying with Children.

Under the tab “For Families- Parent Pages” you will find many useful resources including:

Preparing a Prayer Space at Home
The Gift of Silence
Observation as a Tool for Learning for Parenting
Living with an Horarium

And more suggestions for each day of Holy Week, starting with The Last Supper.

The images used in this booklet are from Giotto di Bondone’s (1266-1337) series of frescoes on the life of Christ on the walls of the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy.