

Celebrating Liturgy of the Word with children

Liturgy of the Word is celebrated in many parishes. Here are some pointers that may enhance our celebration with children, the young of the Church:

Creating a liturgical space:

How do we create a sense of the holy, a place to help our children listen, reflect and pray?

The three factors that are often overlooked are:

Lighting and music

Many places use florescent lights for practical reasons. But they can be hard and harsh.

Introduce soft lighting – dimming or switching off the lights promotes prayer and reflection. A simple way would be to switch off the lights as the children process into the room. Light some tea lights or candles. Play music softly and have children seated quietly before you begin.

If the room is dimly lit, the light of the candles by the Book of the Gospels will heighten the sense of the sacred.

Seating arrangement

Chairs may sometimes hinder the movement of the children.

Try to have the children sit in a semi circle; this is more symbolic of a community gathered to share and pray together. A straight row arrangement of chairs gives the idea that Liturgy is another lesson.

The assembly

Sometimes we don't realize that **we** form the liturgical environment.

- How do we welcome the children?
- What does the expression on our faces during Liturgy say about us?
- What about our posture?
- The way we dress? How are those involved in Liturgy as lectors, cantor, and homilist dressed?
- Do we police the children – (“fingers to your lips”) in our effort to maintain discipline?

Music:

- Choose liturgical music i.e. those songs that bring out the “We” element and not the “I” element. Over time the children will know that on Sunday we come together as the Body of Christ.
- The lyrics should be in inclusive language and be within the vocal range of the assembly.
- The children should understand the vocabulary of the hymns. Occasionally take time to explain the meaning of the words; even those that we use regularly. Not even all adults know the meaning of “Alleluia” or “Hosanna” or “Amen”!
- Don’t be too quick in introducing new hymns. Children need repetition. If the song is suitable repeat it at the following Liturgy.
- Tempo is important too! Slow down the tempo a little if it’s a new song.
- Reflect the liturgical seasons in your choice of songs and music. Sing the same tune for the Psalm, the Gospel Acclamation, the Kyrie and so on for each liturgical season.

The Liturgical Seasons and Liturgy

The seasons of the liturgical year should be differentiated by our choice of music, the décor and our prayers. In time the children will see the cadence of the seasons and appreciate the unfolding of the life of Jesus Christ through the liturgical year.

Advent:

This is a time when we prepare ourselves to celebrate God becoming one of us (the Incarnation). It is quietly penitential. The Gloria is omitted.

Liturgical colour: Violet; include some element of rose if Liturgy is celebrated on the 3rd Sunday of Advent.

Music:

This is not the time to sing Christmas carols!

Christmas:

This season is a celebration of the Incarnation.

Liturgical colour: White.

Décor: The decor should reflect our celebration; an abundance of flowers is an effective way of conveying the meaning of our celebration.

Ordinary Time:

Here the different facets of Christ are celebrated such as the Body of Christ, Good Shepherd Sunday and Christ the King. The underlying theme or idea is "Come follow me" and the community's response.

Liturgical colour: Green.

Interestingly the colour of Ordinary Time is green, like the colour of the leaves we see throughout the year.

Lent:

This season is definitely penitential in tone.

Fasting is multi dimensional. During Lent, we fast from doing certain things at Mass.

If you are a cradle Catholic, you may feel that something is missing when you don't sing the Gloria. This is the power of ritual. We get so used to the sameness of the Mass that it disturbs us when there is a break in the ritual. We also do not sing or say "*alleluia*" (this word conveys an element of joy).

Liturgical colour: Violet; include some element of rose if Liturgy is celebrated on the 4th Sunday of Lent.

Décor:

It should be low key and austere.

Easter:

Following the ancient tradition, the Church celebrates Easter for 50 days; Easter Sunday to Pentecost. These 50 days are regarded as one "great Sunday".

Differentiate Easter from the other seasons, as this is the high point of the liturgical year. There are many ways to do this; through décor, the music, the choice of prayers and rites.

Liturgical colour: White.

Décor: Colour is an inexpensive way of decorating. Pull out all the stops with colour. Why not hang balloons and streamers and have lavish flower arrangements?

The Penitential Act

Easter is the ideal season to have the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water because it is most closely linked to our dying and rising to Christ. Publications such as OCP (Rise Up and Sing) or GIA (Singing or Faith) offer many choices for the music during the sprinkling.

Gloria:

You may want to introduce a different tune for the Gloria.

Gospel Acclamation:

Sing an elaborate Acclamation or one that has lots of Alleluias.

Reflection:

- ❖ Will what we plan to do at Liturgy:
 - enhance the prayer of the children?
 - distract them?
 - bring the assembly to Christ?
 - unify the assembly?
 - elicit a response to the Gospel?

- ❖ Are we aware of the spiritual life of our children?
- ❖ How does this affect our celebration of Liturgy?