

In Spred we use the Method Vivre which emphasizes the bond between catechesis and liturgy:

“We are happy to be together,” is a catechesis about a community which prays together; instilling attitudes for worship. The operative words are “we” and “together.” We build a parish community of catechists who welcome and prepare persons with disabilities for worship. The catechists meet to pray and appreciate the mystery themselves. Later, on another day, they meet with our friends with disabilities whether young or old.

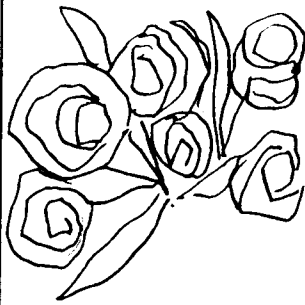
It is a catechesis taken seriously. It is not a pollyana endeavor; “happy” has many synonyms, the whole range of human emotions, in catechesis and in liturgy. We share rejection, grief, frustration, experiences of death in families, etc. If it is human and experienced, the event must be put in the light of the gospel within a community of faith.

As a child, I watched my father use a *plumb line*. A *plumb line* is a cord or string that has at one end a weight and is used to determine verticality, a line directed to the center of gravity of the earth. Also he was the first I saw to use a *level*, a device establishing the horizontal line by means of a bubble in a liquid that shows adjustment to the horizontal by means of movement to the center of a slightly bowed glass tube.

A catechist who evokes a human experience, has to juggle both the *level* and the *plumb line*. Self questioning goes on. The *level* is applied internally within the catechist: is everyone on board? Are we all of one mind? Can we move forward as a group? If so, then the *plumb line* is put into operation: Where are we going with this material? We begin to move from the perpendicular direction of the experience. We step into Mystery, the vertical aligning of the human experience, going below the surface of the experience. We immerse ourselves in the dynamics corresponding to the liturgical and biblical experiences that are within the human experience.

The *level*, the *plumb line* of a session in Method Vivre is the *intentionality* of a session, culminating in the imparting of the message of the Christ of faith by the catechist to each person.

In Liturgical worship, the *plumb line* ends at the altar. The altar acts like a net or magnet, pulling together all that is lived in the catechesis, all that is proclaimed at the Table of the Word and now enacted in ritual signs. We begin with the human experience but we know our terminal point, our aim is the altar.



The Hebrew word for altar is *mizbeah*, meaning 'to slaughter' and therefore 'to slaughter with a view to sacrifice.'¹ A poetic reflection from Ancient Jewish lore reads: "As the navel is set in the center of the human body, so is the land of Israel the navel of the world...situated in the center of the world and Jerusalem in the center of the land of Israel, and the sanctuary in the center of Jerusalem, and the holy place in the center of the sanctuary, and the ark in the center of the holy place, and the foundation stone before the holy place, because from it the world was founded."²

In the ancient Church there was for a long time no thought of attributing to the altar any special importance or of furnishing it after the fashion of pre-Christian cults. Some prided themselves that they had no altar. A table was merely a technical necessity, a place for bread and wine, nothing more. The Church possessed a sacrifice, but it was immediately added as against pagan cults: it is a spiritual sacrifice. But from the 4th century on, in its struggle with Gnosticism, i.e. that all matter is evil, and emancipation comes through gnosis - an esoteric spiritual knowledge of spiritual truth, the Church was forced more and more to stress the outward, the material and the objective in Christian worship. It was a *memorial sacrifice*.

And so, the many sided development of the altar set in.³ It is a table and an altar. A mysterious ambiguity. A paradox.

"the altar, the Lord's table is prepared as the center of the eucharistic liturgy. ... The altar, where the sacrifice of the cross is made present under sacramental signs, is also the table of the Lord. The people of God is called together to share in this table. The altar is the center of thanksgiving accomplished in the eucharist."⁴

Spred catechesis probes the signs of a Eucharistic liturgy in a simple way.

We are happy to be together.

When we are happy to be together, Jesus is with us.

When we are happy to be together in God's house, Jesus is with us.

When we are happy to be together around the book, Jesus is with us.

When we are happy to be together around the candle, Jesus is with us.

When we are happy to be together around the priest, Jesus is with us.

When we are happy to be together around the Bread, Jesus is with us.

When we are happy to be together around the Cup, Jesus is with us.

When we are happy to be together around the altar, Jesus is with us.

The Directory For Masses with Children..." is concerned with children who have not yet entered the period of pre-adolescence. It does not speak directly of children who are physically or mentally retarded because a broader adaptation is sometimes necessary for them"⁽⁶⁾ Nor does it speak of adult persons with developmental disabilities. "The principle of active and conscious participation are in a sense even more valid for Masses with (persons with disabilities). For this reason as many as possible should have special parts in the celebration, for example preparing the place and the altar, singing, bringing gifts to the altar, and performing similar activities (22) The development of gestures, postures, and actions is very important...in view of the nature of the liturgy as an activity of the entire person and in view of their psychology."⁽³³⁾ Among the actions which are considered under this heading, processions deserve special mention as do



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other activities which involve physical participation.” (34)

In the agape, the shared celebration following the catechesis, we mimic the things we do in the preparation of the altar and the presentation of the gifts. It is a form of para-liturgy.

We prepare the table for catechists and for our friends.

A catechist accompanies the friend in assembling the chairs for everyone.

A table cloth, mat, or covering is put in place for all.

Cut flowers arranged earlier in the preparation phase for the catechesis are now placed on the table.

Small candles are placed on the table.

Cloth napkins are arranged for each one.

Glass or ceramic cups are put at each place.

After everyone is seated, food and drink are presented at the table

Grace is sung by the total community and food is shared by all.

The associations, the bonds between catechesis and liturgy are hard to miss in the Method Vivre.

We prepare the altar.

A family member or a catechist walks with the person who has a disability to the altar.

An altar covering is carried and placed carefully on the altar.

Flowers in a vase are placed before the altar by the friend and a catechist.

A lit candle is brought forward by the person with a disability, accompanied by a catechist or family member and solemnly placed near the altar.

Purificators are brought forward and placed on the altar. The Children’s Sacramentary is put on the altar by a catechist and friend.

Extra cups for communion are placed on the altar. After the altar is prepared, the presentation of the gifts takes place. A slow procession begins, sometimes with a whole family, and the person with disabilities carries the bread on a large paten. The priest offers the bread. A second procession brings a large glass vessel filled with wine and a cruet of water. The priest offers the cup. Finally, a large pitcher, bowl and towel are brought by a catechist and friend for the washing of the priest’s hands.

The Eucharistic prayer is said and communion is offered to all.

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1. Ancient Israel by Roland De Vaux 2. Midrash Tanchuma 3. The Early Liturgy, by Josef A. Jungmann, S. J. University of Notre Dame Press, 1959 4. General Instructions of the Roman Missal, Catholic Book Publishing, 1974, (#49 - 259) 5. Directory for Masses with Children, Catholic Book Publishing, 1974

