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THE MODEL ALTAR AND ITS APPURTENANCES

Some Suggestions how it can be used

One hears a great deal these days about the educational value of Visual Aids, for as the poet puts it "Things seen are mightier than things heard". But the more one understands the psychology of the Montessori method the more clearly one comes to realise that for children - and the smaller they are the more visual aids are not enough: they require sensory-motor aids.

Suppose you wish to teach children about the Mass, the altar and its appurtenances and their uses. Well, first you could simply talk about it. Next you could talk and illustrate your lesson with pictures, which would be better. Better still to have a set of miniature models - altar, chalice, paten, bourse, candles, vestments etc. and after describing them show the action. But best of all would be to do this first and then allow the children to handle the objects, name them and go through the actions themselves. We give below two accounts ~~xxxxxx~~-taken from our own observation - from two different schools, which indicate in a practical way how the models can be used.

(I) A Collective Lesson

The lesson described below was given to a group of about a dozen children who were gathered in an informal group around the Teacher and the altar, and was given in one of the classes at the Dowanhill Montessori school in Glasgow, which is run by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. It is only fair to add that it was not a specially "got up" lesson, but just a part of the ordinary school routine at which, without any warning, the Editor was permitted to be present. The average age of the

LESSON WITH A MODEL ALTAR - SECOND EXAMPLE

Very different was the school and the general conditions in the next example we give of the way in which a model altar can be used. It was in a Primary School in a slum district in Dublin run by the Sisters of Charity. There were fifty-six children in the class - average age about 6-7- and Sister Maty had to cope with them all alone. The class was run on Montessori lines as far as Sister M. was able to do so on account of the limited means at her disposal. (I noticed a child who was working out her tables on a Montessori Multiplication board was using dried cherry stones instead of the usual red beads and many other ingenious substitutes which would have horrified orthodox Montessori teachers) But the spirit of Montessori was certainly there and the children were all busy working away individually with great gusto. Some twenty of them had taken their little chairs and tables into a small playground where they worked away with surprising concentration and self-discipline. Some of the children were busy at little household jobs, some with the sensorial materials, others with the elements of "The Three 'R's'", but what interested me most that morning was something that was going on near one of the windows. (To quote from an article in the Dublin Standard :-

"Two little girls were going through the whole action of preparing an (see paper)

"Jesus is Alive Again "

This being so, we are confident that Montessori would never have allowed these "representative scenes" to remain for ever in a state of despondency on account of Our Lord's death. She would certainly have completed them with another scene in which the sadness was dissipated by the news of the glory of His Resurrection. In fact Montessori herself implies ^{as much} ~~this~~ in the phrase underlined just above -....." a continuation of what took place at the Lord's Supper". This is even more directly implied in the ^{underlined} phrase "and Resurrection", a few paragraphs further back.

We have no intention of rushing in where angels fear to tread, ~~and~~ trying to emulate, still less ~~complete~~ ^{complete} a work of genius. But in some way or other ^{an} ~~the~~ attempt ought to be made - for the sake of the little children - to have them ^{act} ~~present a~~ ^{portrayed.} scene in which this change from sorrow to joy could be ^{shown.} ~~shown.~~ In whatever way we did it we should have to bear in mind what Montessori says above, that these little scenes aim at ~~evoking~~ ^{evoking} a sentiment through action rather than through ^{or intellect} words like a play.

So when the last scene, as described above, has been carried out a number of times, and perfected, the Directress ^{one day} could call the children together again ~~one day~~ and make a second and further explanation. She could tell them ~~(or remind them)~~ in simple terms how Our Lord, after being put to death and buried, rose again ^{and} triumphant ^{and} alive, from the tomb on the Third ^{Day} ~~Day~~ ^{That} ~~and~~ that He is still alive and will remain ^{so} alive for ever more. He lives now, with His Mummy and the Disciples and ^{all} the Saints, in Heaven. But that He loves us so much - each one of us - that He comes down from Heaven to visit us ^{here on earth.} ~~here on earth.~~ And how does He do this? At a certain moment, when the Priest is saying mass, Our Lord comes down from Heaven on to the altar

where He is really present just as much as He was at the Last Supper. We cannot see Him because He hides Himself under what looks like Bread and Wine ~~so that He can come to us.~~

He does this because He wishes to come to each one of us, in Holy Communion, as our special Friend and Saviour. So there is no need ^{for us} to be sad any more ~~because~~ because Jesus is alive again -- and will be alive for ever ~~and~~.

How Montessori would have worked out the action ~~for the~~ little ones representing these truths we do not presume to say; for genius such as hers is inimitable. But, following up on the lines described above, we should do the best we can for the children, always remembering that at this very ^{early} stage it is something to be done through action ^{that is required} rather than words ^{directly to the intelligence}.

We might, for instance, in lieu of anything better, suggest a scene ⁱⁿ something as follows. First, the children would carry out the little drama, the last one as described above, in which the whole atmosphere was one of sorrow and sadness.

The scene could end up with the child representing St Peter in the ^{middle} middle of the ^{altar} table, facing, and the ^{other} children sitting ~~on~~ on their stools in a line facing St Peter before the altar. Then

Then at a given moment another child - dressed as an angel - could come in, and go straight to St Peter. At his appearance all the children would kneel. When the angel reaches St Peter he whispers something in his ear -- and then departs. St Peter, his face all smiles, gets up and goes to the first child at the end of the line and whispers ^{something in} the good news in his ear. He in turn smiles and claps his hands with joy, and passes on the good news ^{to} in the ear of the next child, who responds in the same way -- and so the glad tidings are passed on (children love telling a secret) ~~in action~~ to the end of the line.

ⁿ
The all the children could get up and go to a side table ,
take off their black robes of mourning and put on white or
gold ones . This done they could make a joyful procession round
the room, singing a glad hymn, and perhaps expressing their
gladness in a dance .

The procession would pass by a table on which were
placed blessed candles ; and as each child passed it it could
take a candle and proceed towards the altar ~~again~~ ^{with it.}

Meanwhile St Peter, at the altar, has uncovered the chalice
and the paten with the Bread . Then he places a statue of
Our risen Lord in ~~front~~ front of the crucifix (which has
already been placed on the altar - see above) ^{and puts} ~~with~~ the
Chalice and Bread on each side of the Statue .

He also places ^{the 2} multiple candle sticks - ~~perhaps two~~
like ^{these} ~~the~~ ones used at Benediction on the altar - one towards one
end of it and the other towards the other end..

The procession approaches the altar , each child carrying
a candle (~~those who are able - if any - could carry a~~
^{these} ~~lighted candle~~) The candles are placed in the candle sticks
either by the children or St Peter - who lights ^{them all.} ~~the all~~ .

When all is ready St Peter , who might have a small thurifer
to use , and all the children (behind him) in one or two rows
~~in one or two rows~~
kneel before the altar . There could be a concluding hymn . (1)

Footnote (at bottom of this page)

^(idea)
The above is only a suggestion . Readers who have thought out
and attempted with the children any other ~~actions~~ form of scene
to bring out this ~~idea~~ - through action - that Our Lord is Alive
again, are invited to send them to the editor, c/o the publisher -
in case we run to a second edition .