

## Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Since 1954, In Rome, Italy, Sofia Cavalletti has pursued the revelation of the young child's religious potential, marking over thirty years of research and published material at both the preschool and elementary levels. With the "self-teaching" principles of Maria Montessori and the theological moorings of Hebrew scholarship, Scripture studies and Roman Catholic liturgy and doctrine, Cavalletti and her co-worker, Gianna Gobbi, developed an approach which not only appealed to the profound religious intuition of younger and older children, but which evolved from the children themselves. Today the work (still active in Rome) has emerging centers in Italy, Chad, Argentina, Columbia, Canada, Mexico and the United States.

### For the Older Child (Ages 7-9)

While the heart of the catechesis for the child under seven revolves around the parable of the Good Shepherd, the elementary age child is captured by the image of the True Vine. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing." The proclamation responds to the deep need of the older child to know better their relationships with God, family, friends, and the larger community.

The child at this age seeks guidelines. The moral parables offer a model for comparing their behavior with that of the Pharisee, the Tax Collector, or the Good Samaritan. The Found Sheep, the Found Coin, the Prodigal Son are examined as the children prepare for the sacrament of reconciliation. The proclamation and meditation stress God's love, which is constantly forgiving.

The elementary children see the parts of the Mass – the Liturgy of the Word, the Preparation of the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the Communion – as one unity. Preparation of personal missals filled with illustrations and prayers is a process which deepens their love and understanding of the Eucharist.

The imagination of the older child and his or her agility with the concept of time are powerful stimuli to explore the past and the future. The first time line, a ribbon fifty meters long, focuses on the high points in the history of salvation from the creation through the redemption to the parousia. Another presentation focuses on the many gifts we receive from God – rocks, minerals, flowers, fruit, friends, family – culminating in God's gift of His own divine life, in the person of Jesus, a gift which will pervade the whole universe at the completion of history.