



Innamoramento: To Fall in Love with God

On Wednesdays we have begun a morning Level 1 Atrium session for homeschool and pre-school children. I love Wednesday mornings, because it is also my time to be in the Level 1 Atrium. On Sundays, I get to be with Level 3, on Mondays in Level 2, and so now my life as a catechist is complete with Wednesdays in Level 1. The pace to this session, possibly because of the excellent catechist/child ratio (1/2) is peaceful and calm. I leave our Wednesday morning 2-hour sessions as grounded and refreshed as I do after a Centering Prayer session and these mornings remind me why I love this work.

Today, one of the children, 8 year-old Aria, called me over to the Good Shepherd parable table and asked me to read "The Found Sheep" for her while she moved the 2 dimensional figures of the sheep and the Good Shepherd. I waited while she hid one sheep behind a blue scripture booklet propped on the table and then set the other snow white sheep figures in the sheepfold with the Good Shepherd standing guard by the gate. When she was ready we lit a candle and I began to read the words from Luke's Gospel: "What man among you with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one until he found it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders . . ." I read slowly, pausing as Aria moved the Good Shepherd towards the hidden sheep. At the last phrase "would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders," she picked up the sheep and held it up to the Good Shepherd, and under her breath said with delighted certainty, "Yeah, he would!"

I continued on with the parable, watching Aria as she carefully, and with her own deep joy, carried the lost sheep back to the sheepfold on the shepherd's shoulders.

Aria's response to this parable, which she has heard many, many times, reminded me of an Italian word I heard many times in my Level 1 CGS training: "Innamoramento." Having lived in Italy for a few months in my early 20s I love to say this word with plenty of Italian flare. It seems to be one of those words that sounds like it means. Sofia Cavalletti described it this way:

"I think that 'innamoramento' is the basis of religious life, and also of moral life because moral life and religious life are not two different things. If we help the child to establish a relationship with God in enjoyment, in 'innamoramento', then we have also done the best moral formation of the child. You all know how much psychology now stresses the importance of love in every field of human life. I think that a global 'innamoramento' is possible for everybody before six. It may happen, of course, for anyone at any moment of our lives, but before six it's possible and it's easy for everybody. It comes out quite naturally from the depths of their soul. They really fall in love quite naturally. There are many things to be done after six but there is one thing to be done before six—and it is to help the children to fall in love."

As Pedro Arupe, the Jesuit priest wrote, "Nothing is more practical than . . . falling in love with God." In Aria's encounters with the Good Shepherd through scripture, the sacraments, and her own rich lived experience of God's love, she has come to know the God who seeks the lost and who, with joy, brings them home. May we all so completely, fall in love with God.

Katy Beetle Rice