

# The Spiritual Life: The Classroom as a School of Prayer

Authored by Lori Eyth in Issue #2.4 of *The Catechetical Review*

As a Catholic school teacher, I know how important it is that we know Jesus not only in our minds but in our hearts too; so we need to spend time with him every day. This article offers a little introduction on how I turn my sixth grade classroom into a school of prayer.

## Creating a Sacred Space

Immediately visible when walking into the classroom is a picture of Jesus smiling and a holy water font. The classroom is filled with images—a statue of Mary, Jesus on the cross, and prayer posters. Rosaries are always available to the students. Quotes from Mother Teresa (“do all things with great love”) and the Bible are displayed as well as the Ten Commandments. We have a prayer wall, which is a big, blank laminated sheet of poster paper on which students write their prayer intentions. Students often ask, “Ms. Eyth, can I add something to the prayer wall?” or “Will you pray for this special intention?”

Class starts with prayer and special intentions. The student offering the opening prayer picks a specific prayer from our prayer book and then asks the other students if they have any special intentions. This helps build community in the classroom.

In addition to opening prayer, we employ a variety of prayer opportunities. Here are three examples.

**Meditation:** This has become a favorite prayer of our class. We turn off the overhead lights and turn on white Christmas lights. Everyone takes a seat on the floor and gets in a comfortable position. I remind them this is a safe place and ask them to close their eyes to block out distractions. I take them through an imaginative encounter with Jesus, their best friend. This is an opportunity for them to meet him and spend time with him. Then I lead them through *lectio divina*, frequently with the Sunday Gospel. I prepare them for the reading by posing relevant journal questions, asking them to insert themselves into the Gospel story or asking them to pick a word or phrase that speaks to their hearts. I read it three times very slowly. We then sit quietly, either with soft background music or in total silence, so they can spend quiet time with God and hear what God is telling them through the Gospel or journal questions. Students love spending quiet time with God because it is what they were made for! An added benefit is that the students experience much needed relief from their overly busy lives.

After they finish journaling, each student shares one thing he or she heard God saying. If time permits we pray over or for one another. The leader asks what an individual wants to pray for, and the other students in the circle extend their hands over the person. Using the student's name, the leader gives thanks for the individual. Then the prayer leader says, “Come Holy Spirit,” three times; and each time the group repeats in unison, “Come Holy Spirit.” This is followed by a time of silence to allow the Holy Spirit to pour down his grace. After a few minutes, the prayer leader closes by once again using the student's name and thanking God for the gift that this person is to all of us.

**Adoration:** With the help of a priest or deacon, we adore the Blessed Sacrament. We start with a welcome, a meditation, and then move into *lectio divina*, followed by silent adoration for about 20 minutes. After our time of prayer, we break up into small groups to share what the Lord has pressed upon our hearts during adoration and *lectio divina*. We conclude by praying over or for one another.

**Lenten Devotions:** At the beginning of Lent, we write our sins, or what we plan to do to become closer to Jesus, on little pieces of paper. While listening to music, students fold their papers and nail them to a wooden cross. This is a powerful experience for the students, reminding them that Jesus died for us. The students then have the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

During Lent, we cover large bulletin boards with black paper and my most artistic students paint the body of Jesus in white. In chalk under the arms of Jesus, we write words describing those sins keeping us from Jesus: gossip, hatred, etc. During Holy Week we use red hand paint to block out those words keeping us from the resurrected Jesus. Each student splatters paint on Jesus as a reminder that our sins brought Jesus to the cross and that he is forgiving and loving. We come back to the circle and share our experience. The sharing is so powerful, and the students experience a strong connection with Jesus.

Transforming my classroom into a school of prayer has been a beautiful, grace-filled experience.

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