

The sole purpose of this article is to offer a few homily ideas for First Holy Communion

Some Homily Ideas for First Holy Communion

'X' MARKS THE SPOT!

This is a treasure hunt that involves planting clues in particular points of the church. As you work your way through you can gently share with the children on the various symbols of the Church. Begin by showing the children a big mystery envelope that is addressed to the First Communion Class. Ask one of them to open it. Inside is an old looking treasure map (I printed one off the internet!) with an 'X' on it. Ask the children what this could mean and so the excitement begins. Also in the envelope are two pieces of paper, one with the instructions and the other with the first clue. Read the instruction verse, which is as follows:

*Dear Children
Because this is your special day
With you always I want to stay
So to give you pleasure
I've hidden a treasure
Solving the riddles will show you the way.*

Unpack this a little with the children, generate excitement and wonder and then read the first clue which should lead them to the Baptismal Font. The clue is as follows:

*I remember your first day here
I promised to love you dear
I blessed you with water
As my son or daughter
This clue I think is really clear*

Once the clue is read, encourage children to put their hands up if they think they can help. When a child gives you the right answer send him/her off with a partner to the baptismal font to see if they are right! There they will bring you back another envelope. Ask them to open it and hand you the second clue. This leads to the Paschal Candle and it reads as follows:

*On special occasions
I stand tall and bright
And to people, happy or sad
I try to give light
Unless you are blind
This clue you will find
As really I'm not far from your sight*

The usual interaction will happen after each clue and as usual send the child who guessed correctly off to search with the child beside them. You could even encourage them to run if you were comfortable with this! Again ask them to open the new envelope and hand you the clue. This clue will lead them to the Ambo.

*We love stories both old and new,
Especially when we are feeling blue
Read loud and clear
God's word we hear
And these words show us what to do.*

Repeat the procedure exactly as before. The next clue will lead them to the Altar.

*We come as a family to share a meal
And at special points we hear bells peal*

*Once found in a stable
But now on this table
Bread blessed to nourish and heal.*

Repeat the procedure as before. The next clue will lead them to the Tabernacle.

*The treasure that's here is hidden within
And it is greater than gold or anything
Finding the treasure
Will give you great pleasure
But this treasure chest isn't made of tin.*

Once they have figured out that the treasure chest is the tabernacle, send them off to get what will be the final clue. And so the last envelope is opened and it reads:

*Congratulations!
Well done you did brilliant,
you got each clue right,
You must all be so clever and very bright
Nothing greater can there be
Than to give you the gift of me
To help you always both day and night.*

Along the way you can share gently on the symbolism of each of the items visited. Finish by chatting about the treasure in the tabernacle that they are to receive. If you wanted you could also show the original treasure map with the 'X' and turn it sideways so the 'X' becomes '⌘' and you can again talk about how the 'X' that shows you where the treasure is, is really the Cross turned sideways. As always Christ leads us to treasure.

IT'S PARTY TIME

For this homily have a little table set for a party in front of the altar. Ask the children what are the things that are usually at a party. You basically want to lead them to words such as family, friends, food, drink, candles and music. Compare the things present at a party with the things present at Mass and help them see the similarities and realise that Mass is a very special type of party where Jesus wants to nourish our bodies and spirit and make a fuss of you. Then ask what is needed before you can go to a party – an invitation. Pull out a really big invitation that you have made on a sheet. It can read as follows:

You are invited!
(Yes all of you!)

When: Every Saturday & Sunday (& even every morning, but you may be in school!)

Where: Any church, but especially – Name the church/churches in your parish!

What to bring? No presents, just yourself and your family.

RSVP: Now
(because I can't wait to see you!)
Signed Jesus

You can be a lot more creative about this. Then finish by saying we are going to play a version of a game they play at parties called pass the parcel (no doubt the adults will be relieved you didn't say musical chairs!) Explain that you have a parcel with only one layer of wrapping. Be sure to highlight strongly that this present is something that Jesus treasures, it is something Jesus loves so so much. It is something that means the world to Jesus. You may ask your musicians to play something (try to give them prior warning as my poor musician was taken by surprise!). When the music stops, ask the child with the present to hold it for a second. Remind the children of what is in this present again and then ask the child to tell us what is the very first thing he/she sees when the present is opened. A child may say 'a mirror' or probably something even more unhelpful. But you lead them to say 'I saw myself' or 'my reflection'. Remind the children that Jesus treasures them, loves them, that they mean the world to him and today he gives you the greatest gift he can give you, himself.

GUESS HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU

This homily is based on a beautiful children's story called 'Guess How Much I Love You' by Sam McBratney (ISBN 0-7445-5439-X). It is hard to explain but if you read the story you will hopefully understand what follows. You won't use the full story and should decide in advance how you will adapt it. Begin by saying to the children that you want to tell them a story and choose a child who you know will make a reliable volunteer. Usually it is a boy as the story can be told in an active way and boys are better dressed for activity! Explain that the story is about a 'Little Nutbrown Hare' (your volunteer) and 'Big Nutbrown Hare' (yourself or a suitable adult volunteer). The greater the difference in height between the two the greater the effect. The little hare is trying to explain to the bigger hare just how much he loves him and so he begins each example by asking, 'Guess how much I love you'. It really adds to the experience if you encourage the children to repeat this line as you work your way through the story. In the first instance the little hare explains that he loves the bigger hare 'this much' and



stretches his arms out really far. Comment and interact with the children on how well he is doing. Then continue with the story whereby the big hare says 'But I love you this much' and stands behind the child and does a similar action and draw comparisons. Explain how the little hare thought hard and got another idea and so firstly asked – the children repeat the line 'Guess How Much I love You' and go on to say the little hare said, 'I love you as high as he can reach.' Encourage your volunteer to go up on his tippy toes and reach really high, again interact with the children on how well s/he is doing. Then do the same behind the child and

draw comparisons. You may only feel the need to do one more action – 'I love you as high as I can jump, as far as I can see, as far as I can hop' – obviously choose ideas that you or your volunteer are comfortable repeating. The story ends with the little hare getting tired but still eager to express his love. Explain it was getting dark and the hare got an idea when he saw the moon. The children repeat the usual line and explain how the little hare said 'I love you right up to the moon'. Explore how far this is and then explain that as the big hare tucked the little hare into his bed of leaves he whispered into his ear 'but I love you right up to the moon and back!' This is the punch-line and usually captures the children's amazement, so flesh it out. Go on to explain how today is a day of realising that Jesus loves us right up to the moon and Get them to shout out the 'BACK' – they love it. This love doesn't depend on whether you are a good singer, or good at Irish, or good at football or good at reading. Jesus loves you because you are you. Then ask the children, 'What was the first thing the hare did to show his love?' – he stretched out his arms. Ask them to look

around the church and see who else has stretched out his arms really far and is saying 'Guess How Much I love you'. They will see Jesus on the cross somewhere (I hope!) and then ask them how much does he love them – does he love them just up to the moon, no he loves them right up to the moon ... and back! Later during the elevation I find it fits to say, 'This is Jesus, the one who loves you right up to the moon and back, this is the lamb of...'

Conclusion

I am aware that using some of these ideas may feel uncomfortable for some celebrants. Rather than dismiss them I hope you could adapt these homilies to your style. However, it is also good to remember that both the *Decree for Masses with Children* and the more recent *Lectionary for Masses with Children* offer permission for the homily to be given by someone more familiar with working with children. This would be a good possibility if you had a suitable person and if you could invest time with them into the preparation of the homily.

Fr Chris O'Donnell
Limerick Pastoral Centre