



Second grade is a momentous year for our young students because they receive First Confession and First Holy Communion. When children reach seven years of age they are considered by church law to have reached the age of reason. In other words, they are capable of understanding right from wrong, especially in regards to knowing what they themselves have done wrong—what we call a conscience.

Part of the preparation for First Holy Communion includes a tour of the sanctuary of the church, an area that is normally off-limits except for priests, altar servers and lectors. The second graders get to see the altar from close-up. The highlight of the tour is the tabernacle. I first explain the meaning of the veil, particularly that it is always composed of two parts, or it has a slit up and down the middle, which calls to mind what happened at the time of Jesus' death to the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple. The students all know that the curtain was torn in half at the time of Jesus' death. To this day, it is traditional that tabernacle veils are composed of two parts or have a slit down the middle. I lift or remove the veil completely to reveal the gold-covered bronze doors, then insert the key. I briefly explain the sculpture decoration, which contains angels holding a host and a chalice.

Next, I open the first set of doors, and inside is another set of doors which, when opened, reveal sculpture work on the inside of those doors. We all genuflect when the tabernacle is opened. While the tabernacle

is open, I point out to the children that the artwork on the inside of the doors has the Latin prayer of the angels—*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth*. This artwork is intended for Jesus to see from the inside of the tabernacle; it actually reads left to right on both doors from our Lord's perspective within! The angels remind us of how the Mass is very heavenly. There is still yet another veil, also split in two, that I pull back so students can see the ciborium, likewise veiled, that contain our Lord, truly present: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

At this point I like to explain to our young children that although our Lord is present in all Catholic Churches with tabernacles, He desires most to be present in their hearts. Jesus wants these young people to think like Him, love like Him and to act like Him, all with the help of His grace and His personal presence.

We conclude with a simple prayer and allow each student to come up and peer more closely. We genuflect one more time and close the tabernacle.

May all of us receive our Lord worthily and with great love at Holy Mass, and may we always do so with the same excitement, anticipation and purity as second graders.

Saint Agnes, pray for us.

In Christ,

Rev. Mark Moriarty

