

## **Profile of a Third-Grade Child**

### **Characteristics**

Children at this level seek group identification — they have a special group of friends of the same sex, and they dislike being identified with the opposite sex. They define their roles and duties from the community in which they live. This is the “good boy” or “nice girl” period during which it is important to follow accepted expectations.

Eight-year-old children begin to take responsibilities seriously, but are very sensitive, at times moody, and easily disturbed by criticism from adults. They are developing a positive, though quite fragile, self-image. Strong adult support is still very much needed.

Because of their growing group consciousness, these children enjoy events in which they have a role in planning: planning prayer services and liturgies, dramatizing stories from the Gospel, and incorporating their handiwork for decorations at services and liturgies.

### **Faith Development Needs**

Because children at this stage like time to be alone, it is appropriate to introduce meditative and spontaneous prayer. Thus, third-graders are given the opportunity to reflect on what was said and to pray by themselves. This contemplative method of prayer does not in any way exclude public, private, spontaneous, and formal prayer.

Eight-year-olds need stimulating personal and group relationships that foster feelings of belonging and being cared for and cared about. To feel good about their exposure to the Christian community, they need constant reassurance that adults, even when they punish, love them, and will not turn away from them. Stories about the love of Jesus demonstrate that God always loves us, even though he does not approve of our wrong deeds.

Because of their need for group identification, children at this age begin to think they are not only different from others, but also better, thus learning prejudice for the first time. They need to realize that each person is good, created by God and deserving respect and love. They can be taught loving behaviors by hearing stories about missionaries, saints, and present-day persons involved in justice and peace issues. After Confirmation and First Eucharist, they will be even more capable of being a true witness of Jesus Christ.

The child begins to learn that happiness comes from knowing God, loving God, and following his guidance.

### **Implications**

Because third-graders are in the “hero-worshipping” stage, they need models of Christian behavior to emulate. During this time of sex role identification, the catechist should make sure that stories from Scripture and from the lives of the saints include both heroes and heroines.

Eight-year-olds are developing socially and becoming more aware of the effect they have on a group. The catechist can help the children to choose the good that God wills, reject the wrong,

and begin to accept greater responsibility for their actions.

Third-graders can be made aware of social ills and human needs resulting from injustice, greed, lack of mercy, violence, and war. They can be taught that Christians use their God-given gifts to respond to the needs of others.

The catechist must assume responsibility for involving the children in prayer and in Christian service according to God's unique call to the individual. It is through the catechist's *example* as well as his/her instruction that he/she will encourage the children in a life of prayer and response to the call of God.