

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:



- The family is the “domestic Church.”
- Parents are their children’s first and most important teachers of the faith.
- Families can grow in faith through family rituals and traditions.

## Family Life

We naturally want what’s best for the children in our family. Society’s messages can lead us to think that fame, power, physical beauty, financial security, perfect health, success, wealth, and influence are what’s “best” and most desirable. While each of these things has its perks, we likely see deeper and more lasting value in internal characteristics such as patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, self-respect, compassion, tolerance, integrity, and honesty.

It’s our job as adult family members, through our love, care, influence, and example, to lay the foundation that will encourage a child to develop these deeper and more lasting characteristics.

That’s why the Catholic Church puts so much emphasis on the importance of family life. A happy and stable family provides the kind of atmosphere in which a child learns to relate to others: to care, share, love, and forgive.

- What do you hope the children in your family will learn from you? Why?



## First Teachers of the Faith

It’s within the family that children learn they’re loved and accepted. This forms the basis of their image of themselves, their relationships with other people, and their relationship with God.

Parents are their children’s first and most important teachers. In this role, they are never off duty. Everything they do and say rubs off on their children and has an influence for good or bad. The way they speak, treat others, cope with disagreements, and show tolerance and forgiveness are all very important.

*“The family is...the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children.”*

*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), 11*

*“Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child’s earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life....Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.”*

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- In what ways did your parents or other significant adults serve as role models for you? What are some of the main lessons you learned from their example?



## Building a Christian Framework

In today's world, it's challenging to bring up a family within a Christian framework. The values of a consumer society are often opposed to the values of Jesus Christ. Difficult sacrifices may be required. At times, we may feel under pressure because we can't keep up the standard of living we'd like or give our children all the things they want. But we have a much greater gift to give: the love, security, and life/faith lessons of a happy home.

Here are some ways we can pass on our faith to our families:

### Scripture Storytelling

Just about everyone loves a good story. Notice how people's posture changes at Mass when the priest or deacon starts the homily with a story. Some will sit back, relax, and expect to enjoy and be engaged. Others may lean forward as a sign of their interest. Stories are powerful tools for making a point in a way that's memorable and enjoyable.

Children love stories, too—both hearing and telling them. Young listeners are entertained, enlightened, and inspired; imaginations are awakened, and a bond forms between listener and storyteller. No wonder Jesus so often taught with parables!

Breaking Scripture into simple stories can give children a personal image of Jesus. By selecting stories from the Mass, we can also encourage them to listen more attentively at Mass. We can study the readings to find the "story element" and re-present it in a child-sized package. Making it "their story" is an important step in a **catechesis** that establishes them on their faith journey.

### Mass Helps

Mass isn't an easy activity for most children—or their parents! Little ones can get restless, and older ones can become bored. Here a few tricks that might help:

- Practice Scripture storytelling at home.
- Stop by church for a show-and-tell visit. Kneel together for quiet prayer before you leave.
- Before Mass, talk to your children about coming up with their own special petition and encourage them to bring it to Jesus at Mass.
- Purchase a Mass book for each child. For younger ones, choose a book with pictures to help them follow along visually.
- Show children how to make the sign of the cross with holy water when you enter the church.
- Choose a pew near the sanctuary so they can see what's going on. It's hard to be holy while staring at people's backs.
- Give younger children money for the collection. Older ones should give their own. Explain how the Church uses their money. Help them identify ministries they care about.
- Take small children with you when you receive Communion.

- *What is your experience of sharing your faith with a child?*
- *How might you offer support to parents of young children at Mass?*



## Moments That Matter

The hectic pace of today's society cries out for time to be quiet with God. But with homework, Church involvement, jobs, school, and sports activities, when can busy parents fit it in?

### Bedtime

A widowed mother of four finds her moment at bedtime. Her children sit on her bed while they read together. Then they pray a decade of the rosary with emphasis on the story behind the mystery. After adding personal prayers, it's a kiss and off to bed.

### Mealtime

For larger families with teenagers, dinner may be the only together time. To make it a special moment, slow down the mealtime blessing. Light a candle, perhaps read a short passage from the Bible, and have a child offer the blessing.

A divorced father may choose Sunday morning for his moments. The morning might begin with a big breakfast and discussion about the Gospel reading, liturgical season, or upcoming holy day. Some Sundays, they may go out for lunch and talk about how they see God at work in their lives.

### Anniversary of Baptism

Families may celebrate the anniversary of a child's baptism. Bring out photos, the baptismal candle, and the white garment. Talk about who was there, how you celebrated, whether the child cried or slept through it all. Give the child a small present such as a rosary, prayer book, a saint prayer card, or medal to mark the day as special.

### Forgiveness

Children learn to offer, seek, and accept forgiveness within the family. Parents must model this for their children—through openly admitting fault, offering an apology, and asking for and offering forgiveness. Reminding children of God's and their parents' great love and desire for reconciliation will help them internalize this important reality of our faith.

Make time for the sacrament of reconciliation. Go as a family and pray for each other and for forgiveness of family hurts. Celebrate afterward by going to the park or having cake and ice cream.

- *What are some of the key learning moments from your own childhood? What did you learn about yourself, others, the world, and God as a result?*



## Family Prayer

Family prayer time helps children make God central to daily life. Our prayer is an ongoing dialogue with our loving God. Whether memorized or spontaneous, the dialogue of prayer must be practiced, modeled, and encouraged.

Establish a family prayer plan. Begin with a moment of silence. Help children connect with God. When we share a spontaneous prayer such as "Thank you, God, for being with Jonathan during his test today," we make a quick connection with God for our children.

Opportunities to make our children more aware of God's presence can happen naturally. Encourage them to invite God to be with them as they study. Send them off to school with a blessing. At bedtime, ease their fears by assuring them of God's constant care. (If nighttime fears are a big concern, teach them the Guardian Angel Prayer.) By bringing everyday feelings and events to God in prayer, we help children recognize God's continual presence and create occasions for the God-child relationship to grow.

- *How comfortable are you with praying with members of your family? Why?*



## Saintly Role Models

If our children want to be athletes, musicians, or artists, we encourage them. We buy instruments or equipment and sign them up for lessons or a team. We introduce them to good role models within their area of interest.

The need for good examples or role models is also important in the area of Christian living. For this purpose, the Church encourages devotion to the saints. To enkindle a desire for Christian greatness, read to children about the lives of the saints. These models of virtuous living will encourage children to put the same virtues into practice in their daily lives.

Choose a family “saint of the week” and find creative ways to emulate and celebrate that saint. Imitate Mother Teresa’s care for others by visiting the sick or making cards for shut-ins. Imitate Francis of Assisi’s love of nature by building a backyard bird feeder or taking a prayer walk in the woods. An Italian saint’s day might be celebrated with an Italian dinner (or a Spanish dish for John of the Cross or French pastries for Thérèse of Lisieux).

Saints offer more than just their example. Explain that we belong to a special club, the communion of saints. As members of this club, children can call on those already in heaven to pray for them and help them every day.

God’s love can be found right in our homes—around the kitchen table, in the family room, at the backyard barbecue.

- *When have you felt God’s presence in your family? What can you do to promote this awareness?*



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