

Praying the Mass with Babies, Toddlers, Kids & Teens

ABOUT YOUR VOCATION

Your Vocation as a Parent

- Being a parent is not an obstacle to holiness.
- It is your path to holiness.
- Praying the Mass with your children is *your way* of growing closer to God.

Why does this matter?

WHAT HAPPENS AT MASS

What Happens at Mass

- Heaven opens up.
- The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross becomes present to us.

What Happens at Mass

Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is brought to us.

→ We can become part of it.

→ It can become part of us.

We are Made for This

- Intimacy with God is what we are made for.
- Your children are made for this.
- As parents, our mission is to help our children meet Jesus Christ.

What Happens at Mass

- My apologies if this is new information for you.
- TALK TO ME if you are interested in learning more about the Catholic faith, so we can make sure you have a group.

MY BABY IS SO LOUD!

How Much Noise is Too Much?

- Tip: Use the Cough / Sneeze rule.
- Occasional or quiet sounds are usually fine.
- Very loud or persistent noise = time to step out for a minute.

Don't be mortified. This is normal. All part of your vocation.

Nursery or No Nursery?

- There is no single rule for every family.
- Use your judgment.
- It isn't all-or-nothing.
 - Use for part of the Mass
 - Use for some Masses but not all.

Situations Where It's Better to Bring the Baby into Mass:

- If your child's other parent is not Catholic.
- If it's the eldest child.
- If you can.

These are not hard rules. These are general observations based on the experience of many parents over the years.

Use the Nursery If:

- Your baby is creating a significant disruption.
- You or your spouse get stressed out by baby noise / undue attention.
- You need the break. (Physically or otherwise.)

Use the Hallway (Courtyard, etc.) if:

- Your baby shouldn't go to the nursery (sick, immune issues, special needs)
- Your baby does not do well in the nursery (separation anxiety, etc.)
- But you still need to step out.

Advantages of Having the Baby in Mass with You:

- It's a chance to relax and hold your baby.
- Baby grows up used to being at Mass.
- Baby connects your love to the love of God.
- Baby will never remember a time when he or she didn't "know" the Mass. It will be integral to his or her experience as a human being.

Tips for Stepping Out

- Parent who's going to take baby out should sit on a side aisle for easy escape.
- If the other parent isn't there to stay with older children, partner with another parishioner so you don't have to haul the entire crew when one child gets noisy.
- If it is you alone with multiple young children, prioritize having with you in Mass the one or several children who will benefit most, and use the nursery for the others.

Alone with the kids?

A Good Mass Partner Is Someone:

- You trust with your children.
- With whom your children are comfortable.
- Around whom your children behave.

Meet People!

- It is hard to meet other parishioners. Make the effort.
- There are many parish and diocesan groups to choose from.
- Knowing other Catholic adults = increased chance your child will remain Catholic.

**OH, SORRY, THAT'S MY TODDLER
UNDER YOUR FEET.**

Tips for Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Practice being quiet and still at other times.
- Using a quiet voice is a learned art.
- Bring quiet toys:
 - Mass Bag
 - Children's Missal
 - Picture Book Devotionals

Tips for Toddlers and Preschoolers

Distinguish Problem vs. Not-a-Problem childish behavior. Consider:

- Child's age.
- Context
- Whether it is causing a disruption.

Sometimes weird is not a problem.

Tips for Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Narrate the Mass to your toddler / preschooler.
- Sit where your child can see.
- Whispered questions are okay.

Tips for Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Build up your child's endurance over time.
- Start with a partial Mass.
- Use goals and rewards.

What behavior can you expect from
“a” preschooler or toddler?

Wrong question.

What can you reasonably expect from ***your***
preschooler or toddler?

You DO want to teach your child self-control and appropriate behavior. You DON'T want to create a negative relationship by expecting more from your child than he or she is capable of giving.

If You Need to Take Your Little One Out

- Go someplace quiet such as the courtyard, cemetery, fountain, hallway.
- Hold or sit with your toddler / preschooler / older child.
- Avoid the playground during Mass. Stepping out is for the purpose of regrouping to get ready to go back in to pray, not a reward for naughty behavior.

For all children, until they are self-sufficient at Mass:

- Pray the responses to the Mass clearly, so your child can understand the words as you say them.
- Point to the words of the Mass in your program, missal, or hymnal.
 - Good reading practice for younger children.
 - Helps older children follow along.

A child who can read well and is familiar with the Mass but not yet self-sufficient may need you just to point to what line you're on.

**DEAR CHILD, WHY ARE YOU PRAYING
WITH YOUR ELBOW IN YOUR SISTER'S
FACE?**

Improving the Odds for Good Behavior at Mass

- Make it a routine. Practice, habits, and familiarity help.
- Plan ahead so you aren't in a crazy rush in the morning. Easy breakfast, church clothes already picked out, etc.
- Allow extra time because there **WILL BE** disasters (exploded diaper, lost shoes, etc.)

Improving the Odds for Good Behavior at Mass

- Review behavioral expectations before you go inside. (“What kind of voice are we going to use?” “Do we walk or run inside the church?”)
- Pick a seat where your child has a good view.
- Pick a seat that doesn’t stress you out.
- Arrive in your pew in time to get settled, take a trip to the potty, etc.

Improving the Odds for Good Behavior at Mass

- Arrange kids for reduced likelihood of fights breaking out. Separate known antagonists
- Position your child away from temptation (does toddler like to run down the aisle? Block escapes. Does child like to flip manically through hymnal? Put the hymnal behind your back or under your bag.)
- You can put older children in the pew directly ahead of you so you are staring at their backs the whole time, if that helps.

Improving the Odds for Good Behavior at Mass

- Save minor corrections / explanations for at home
- Give kids positive feedback on good behavior during Mass. (Smile, nod, thumbs up, hug, whispered “you’re doing a good job.”)
- Give kids affection during Mass.

Improving the Odds for Good Behavior at Mass

- Set realistic goals for each child.
- Use positives as recognition for good behavior.
 - Treat after Mass (at home, or at parish if offered).
 - Playground time.
 - Getting to light a candle.

Improving the Odds for Good Behavior at Mass

#1 Most important: Make sure your kids know what is going on at Mass.

This may require you to learn more about the Catholic faith. It will definitely require you to personally teach your child.

Resources for Learning More

- Our local Catholic bookstore.
- Formed.org – parish membership
- Catholic.com
- Our local Catholic Radio station

CHALLENGE: SOMEONE'S ALWAYS SICK

Challenge: Someone's Always Sick

CCC 2181 The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, **unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants)** or dispensed by their own pastor.¹¹⁹ Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.

Challenge: Someone's Always Sick

- Parent relay.
- Bring the healthy people to Mass, sick people stay home.
- Can your healthy child attend Mass with another family, if the parents are both sick?
- Is there anything I can do to help this situation so we are more likely to be able to attend Mass?

Chronic Illness, Disability, Special Needs

- What parish and Mass has the best overall set-up for the specific problems we're having?
- TALK TO YOUR PASTOR, event leader, DRE, etc. Explain the problem you are having and what would help. Some parishes are staffed by complete jerks, but this one is NOT.
- DO Find a way to be in communication with someone who can be your ally.
- DO build up your relationships with other Catholics. It is way too easy to drop off the radar and disappear.

CHALLENGE: SPORTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Sports and other Sunday Activities

- There is not a blanket prohibition on Sunday sports and other forms of recreation. This is a question for personal discernment.
- There **is** an obligation to attend a Sunday Mass. (Saturday evening – Sunday evening).

Sports and other Sunday Activities

- Is it really a good idea for us to do this activity?
- Often better served by choosing an alternative that doesn't complicate your Sundays.
- If yes then . . .

Sports and other Sunday Activities

- Speak to your coach before you join the team.
- Explain that going to Mass is a non-negotiable.
- If the coach can't work with you, find a different team.

Sports and other Sunday Activities

- Look up your possible Mass options at Masstimes.org
- Confirm at the parish website.
- Map your routes.
- Print out the map if there's any chance you won't have cell service.

Sports and other Sunday Activities

- Choose the Mass that is the least disruptive to your team, even if it's less convenient for you. Work with your coach if necessary.
- Get to Mass at first opportunity (even if it means skipping the team dinner, etc.)
- If you need help with logistics, find the other Catholic parents in your sport and work out a carpool to Mass.

**CHALLENGE: MY NON-CATHOLIC
FAMILY IS RESISTING**

Your Non-Catholic Spouse

- Explain that this is important you.
- Acknowledge that it creates an inconvenience for your spouse (if it does).
- Find out what concerns or objections your spouse has.
- Agree on ways you can make this less difficult for your spouse, taking into account your spouse's concerns.

Your Non-Catholic Spouse

- Conflict resolution is important in any marriage. Get help (counseling, etc) if needed.
- If your spouse has concerns about the Catholic Church, it IS your job to research those concerns and come back with an explanation.
- As the parent of his or her children, you DO have an obligation to satisfy concerns about your children's safety.

Your Non-Catholic Extended Family

- Recognize healthy vs. unhealthy responses.
- Healthy: I don't share your faith, but I respect that it is important to you.
- Healthy: Voicing questions or concerns.
- Healthy: Friendly debate, if you enjoy that.

Questions or doubts are NOT an attack. Accept the challenge!

Your Non-Catholic Extended Family

- Unhealthy: Demeaning, spiteful, mocking, or obstructive behavior.
 - Not about Catholicism; deeper underlying behavioral problems.
 - May signal need for you and spouse to seek advice on healthy relationship patterns.

Your Non-Catholic Extended Family

If you have crazy relatives:

- Set boundaries and stick to them.
- Make conscious decisions about what you will and won't do.
- Own your decision. You made the “yes” or the “no.” Take responsibility.

You and your spouse should be in agreement. Seek assistance if needed.

**CHALLENGE: THE EX HAS CUSTODY ON
THE WEEKENDS**

When You Don't Have Weekend Custody

- Do what you can.
- You cannot control another person's actions.
- Look for ways to give your kids time with God when they are with you.

The Catholic faith speaks for itself. Trust in God and be the best Catholic you can be.

**CHALLENGE: MY KIDS DON'T WANT TO
BE CATHOLIC**

My Kids Don't Want to be Catholic

- We're just coming back to the Church and my kids don't want to go to Mass.
- My teen isn't interested in Mass anymore.

My Kids Don't Want to be Catholic

- Research shows that children raised Catholic start leaving the faith as early as late elementary school.
- By the time they reach college-age, statistically speaking most children raised Catholic will have left the Catholic faith.

My Kids Don't Want to be Catholic

Things that improve the odds:

- Parents have a strong relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Mother and Father BOTH are active disciples of Christ – not just showing up for social or cultural reasons.
- Child has strong relationships with other adult disciples in the parish.

My Kids Don't Want to be Catholic

- None of this erases free will.
- We live in a fallen world.
- Expect that some young person is going to need you to help them rediscover and return to the Catholic faith.
- If you are new to the faith, or just returning yourself, your mission as an evangelist is to help your children discover and come to the Catholic faith for the first time.

My Kids Don't Want to be Catholic

- Recommended Reading: *Return* by Brandon Vogt.
- Short, readable, and explains to you how evangelization actually works. Cuts through a lot of myths.

My Kids Don't Want to be Catholic

Evangelizing 101

1. Pray.
2. Fast.
3. Build a strong relationship with your child.

Everything else follows from those three.

**HOW DO I HELP MY KIDS LEARN TO
PRAY THE MASS AS AN EXPRESSION OF
THEIR LOVE OF GOD?**

The Mass as an Act of Love

- Make Mass joyful – this is an exciting opportunity; it is an expression of your love.
- Explain what's happening at Mass.
- Give catechesis at home so the Mass makes sense.
- Celebrate feast days with your family.
- You can use weekday Mass as a teaching tool, special time together.

The Mass as an Act of Love

- If you are still looking for that joy and that intimacy with God yourself, don't panic.
- Be patient with yourself, and keep on seeking it out.
- It is okay to be honest with your kids: *I don't really understand this yet myself, but I know it's important. I know this is where God wants me, even if I'm not sure why.*

THE SPIRITUALITY OF MASS WITH KIDS

The Spirituality of Mass with Kids

- I don't feel like I can pray when I'm so distracted. What do I do?
- Distraction is even more frustrating when you've just converted or reverted to the Catholic faith.

The Spirituality of Mass with Kids

- Mass with children isn't *about* perfect stillness and uninterrupted prayer.
- It is about:
 - Showing your children your love of God.
 - Giving them the opportunity to meet Jesus in the Mass.

The Spirituality of Mass with Kids

Spiritual Benefits of Mass with Children:

- You will get to know the Mass better.
- You will develop the skill of snapping-back-to-attention. Everyone faces distractions in prayer. By the time your children are grown, you will be a master of re-focusing after a distraction.
- You will get to see a physical re-enactment of what is too often the state of your soul.

The Spirituality of Mass with Kids

- Bringing children to Mass is an opportunity to practice Mercy.
- Be merciful like you want your Father in Heaven to be merciful with you.

Questions?

Share your experiences?

Take time now to meet other parents?

PRAYING THE MASS WITH BABIES, TODDLERS, KIDS & TEENS