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Family Faith Formation
"You are a Priest Forever" Psalm 110

As it is mentioned in several Church documents, the home is the domestic church and the original source of faith for all of us. It is the duty of the parents to pass along their faith to their children and to raise their children to know, love and serve the Lord.

Often times this is a big struggle and we are faced with busy schedules, challenging social environments, and very few notions of what "being a Catholic family" really looks like. The secret answer to this, of course, is that no two "Catholic families" look the same, but all of them do have some things in common: prayer, weekly Mass attendance (if not more often), and time spent together. These are the essential pieces to passing on the Faith tradition. Each of these aspects can easily be expanded with several great ideas from your own creativity or the creativity of those who have tried and succeeded (see our resource section below). Here are just a few practical suggestions on what these may look like in your home:

Prayer

- Offer a prayer before and after every meal, no matter where the meal is eaten – consistency in praying before meals and after shows your children that faith is not something meant only for home and church, but always and everywhere.
- Each morning before everyone starts to get ready for school and work, come together and ask God to bless your day and all that you do. Ask each child to offer any special prayers he or she has for that day. (This can take as few as 3-5 minutes and begins the day positively with a focus on God. The trick to this is making sure everyone's alarm is set a few minutes earlier. This can also be done at the breakfast table before the meal begins.)
- At the end of the day, set a specific, non-negotiable time, to come together as a family and pray a rosary or at least a short prayer of thanksgiving for the day and for all the ways God has blessed you. Again, ask each child to add his or her own special intentions.
- Spend some time on Saturday briefly studying the readings for Sunday Mass. Encourage your kids to ask questions about the readings and do your best to answer them. If you don't know an answer, do what you can to find it.
- After Sunday Mass, take time to discuss the priest's homily or your children's experience at Mass. Perhaps use the quizzes on CatholicMom.com (found in our resources section below) to help your children and you pay attention even more to the readings and other aspects of the Mass.
- Read the Bible together and act out some of your favorite scenes.
- Pray together some of the traditional prayers of the Church that you like (e.g. Angelus, Divine Mercy Chaplet, Act of Faith, Act of Hope, Act of Love, Memorare, etc.). This may require a little research on your part, or you can purchase the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* which offers a multitude of prayers for nearly every occasion.

Attend Sunday Mass

- “Play Mass” with your kids at home to get them used to the motions and activities of each Mass. This may make them more attentive at Mass and less fidgety.
- Sit up towards the front to lessen the number of distractions for your younger children. As Mass goes on, you may want to explain what is happening (especially at the consecration and elevation of the Eucharist).
- Utilize the cry room only when necessary to calm an upset child. Using this room as a play room during Mass makes it difficult to teach them later of the sacredness of the Mass and takes away from your ability to participate fully in the Mass.
- To keep little hands busy, get some religious toys (e.g. plastic statues of saints, plush Noah’s ark sets, etc.) and coloring books so that their minds are still on the sacredness of the Mass.
- Again, have a follow up discussion about the Mass, the readings and the homily each Sunday. This can easily be done over breakfast after Mass or even on the drive home.

Spend time together

- Schedule family dinner as often as possible. At least 3 or 4 times per week have everyone sit down together and share a meal. Just be with your kids and talk about their day and about what’s going on in their lives. Again, take some time at the beginning and end of the meal to pray. See the video at www.familydinnermovie.com to see the benefits of this time spent together.
- Get help from your children in preparing the meal.
- Plan a family game night at least once a week. Make sure that there are no distractions and that all members are present. Be creative with this idea; make the night themed with special treats or costumes for the family just to enjoy.
- Celebrate birthdays and the feast days of your child’s patron saint. Make these days special for the child by letting him or her lead prayers throughout the day or pick the menu for dinner, etc.
- If one of your children is in sports, attend the games as a family.
- Volunteer together at local charities and pass on the importance of showing love and generosity to all God’s children.

All these things (and many more that you may come up with on your own) will help to develop the idea of a personal call that God has for each one of us. He is asking each of us to hear him and step out in faith and follow his will. This is an act that requires courage and knowledge of who God is, who *I* am in relation to God and a desire to know what God has planned for *my* life. All of these questions must arise in the home and be nurtured by parents through their constant example of seeking and doing God’s will in their own lives.

Resources

- www.familylifecenter.net
- www.catholicparenting.com
- www.catholicparents.org
- www.catholicmom.com – Weekly liturgy quizzes. Good for discussing the Mass with your family each week.
- <http://www.familylifecenter.net/families.asp> - Pope John Paul II’s Letter to Families
- www.gracebeforemeals.com – Great site for food recipes as well as ideas on how to make meal time even more meaningful.