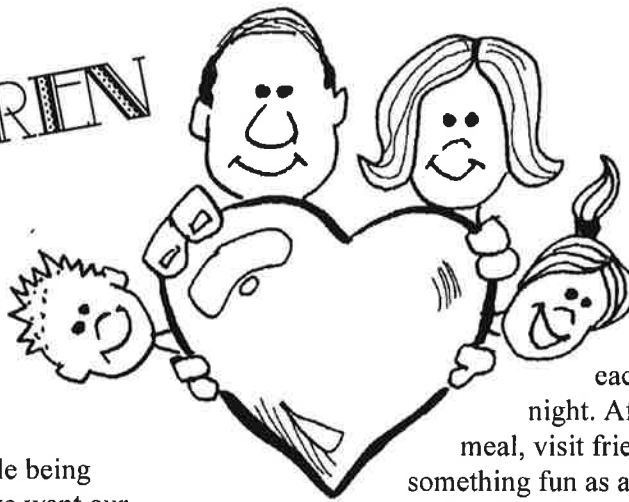


HELP CHILDREN LOVE THE MASS



Children of all ages can have trouble being “present” for the entire Mass. As parents, we want our children to grow up in God’s love, and to be close to him always. That’s why it is so important to help our children find their place at Mass. And, making Mass more meaningful for them will make it more meaningful for their parents, too.

♥ **Start with the basics.** Make sure everyone has had enough to eat and has visited the bathroom before Mass so they’re comfortable. Even adolescents will squirm when hungry.

♥ **Go to the same Mass each week.** They will look forward to seeing the same faces each week. Try to pick a Mass time close to when everyone wakes up. That way they will be fresh and rested.



♥ **Model.** Participate fully by singing, following in your book, watching what is happening at the altar.

♥ **Bring your own.** It can be daunting to a child to try following along with adult mass books. Look for age-appropriate Mass books youngsters can bring to church to help them stay

focused. Publishers such as Our Sunday Visitor (800-348-2440, www.oursundayvisitor.com) or the Daughters of St. Paul (800-836-9723, www.pauline.org) have Mass resources for children of various ages.

♥ **See and be seen.** Sit in a place where you can each have an unobstructed view of the celebration of Mass. Watching the priest, the altar servers, friends and neighbors on the Communion line makes children more aware of what’s going on during the Mass. As they get older, they understand that sitting up front makes them more accountable for their behavior.

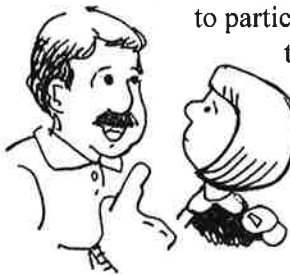
♥ **Teach the rituals.** Start early showing youngsters how to make the Sign of the Cross, bow or genuflect, give the Sign of Peace.

♥ **Make it special.** Have Mass be the start of special family time each Sunday or Saturday night. Afterwards, go out for a meal, visit friends or relatives, do something fun as a family. Then they’ll look forward to it each week.

♥ **Visit during quiet times.** At the beginning of Advent or Lent, pay a family visit your church when Mass is not being celebrated and remark on the changes in the church. When you next attend Mass, they’ll notice more.

♥ **Rehearse.** Go through your Mass book and pull out different prayers and responses to practice as a family. When the time comes during Mass, everyone will know what to say.

♥ **Spell it out.** Before Mass, communicate your expectations. For example, you expect everyone to participate in the prayers and rituals of the Mass, to kneel, stand, and sit when appropriate. Be specific, “Stand up straight with hands in prayer position. Whispering is okay, provided it’s quick and quiet and has to do with what’s going on.”



♥ **Say “hello” to the priest as you leave.** It will be more interesting to watch when they see their friend, “Fr. Thomas,” on the altar.

♥ **Recap.** As you leave, talk about what went on during Mass. Sing the song they liked best from Mass, restate the homily in simple terms, and challenge them to do one thing that week in response.

♥ **Praise.** Be sure to compliment good behavior so they will see Mass as a positive experience and the Church as a refuge from anger and negativity.

♥ **Be vigilant.** Watch them carefully during Mass and look at it as a learning experience. They’re learning manners and you’re learning patience. Jesus will understand if this takes away some of your attention from him. The end result will please him.

