

Great Catholic Families Forgive Each Other (a Lot)

While Jesus commands us to forgive “not . . . seven times, but seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22), forgiving a family member can be tough to do even once. We try to teach our kids to take responsibility for their actions, admit when they are wrong and apologize. (I’m sorry I broke your toy, lied about the mess, ate your fries, etc.) But forgiveness requires an act of faith and trust.

Parents: When you’re wrong, admit it and seek forgiveness, even if that means delivering a sincere apology to a toddler. Your kids will see that forgiveness is not automatic and must be sought in order to be received. Children: Forgiveness isn’t a weapon to be wielded. When your parents or your siblings sincerely seek your forgiveness, give it. There is no greater feeling than that of genuine forgiveness wiping a slate clean and allowing a family to start again with one another.

Faith Builder: Experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a family. If your parish offers a communal reconciliation service, be sure to attend.

Great Catholic Families Remember Ritual

Family rituals or traditions help us define who we are and what we believe. Praying before dinner, lighting the candles at Advent, singing a special birthday song are all ways we express the unique bond that is our family. The best of family traditions are passed on for generations. Setting up grandma’s Nativity scene each Christmas is a way of keeping her spirit alive and a way for one generation to connect with the next.

Faith Builder: Bring back a family ritual that has fallen out of practice and notice the fruits of renewing this tradition.



Great Catholic Families Listen for Holy Moments

The prophet Elijah expects to hear the voice of God in the roaring storm raging outside his cave, but he is surprised when God’s voice is not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. Rather, God’s voice comes to Elijah in the silence after the storm, in a mere whisper (see 1 Kings 19:11-13). It seems that this is how God



talks to us today in the middle of our busy family life. It is important to pause and notice the holy moments, perhaps at bedtime or in the car, when we share our true selves with one another and genuinely enjoy each other’s presence. Turn down life’s noise, and give moments of grace the chance to break through.

Faith Builder: Make room for silence in your household. Turn off electronics for a time. Read, pray, meditate, or daydream. Give God the chance to speak!

Great Catholic Families Practice Lifelong Loving

In the Gospel of John, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment upon which to base their lives: “that you love one another; even as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). We are called to model Christ in the way we love — in serving each other, caring for each other and committing to a lifetime of selflessness. It isn’t always easy, but trying to love as Jesus does really is at the heart of creating and maintaining a great Catholic family.



Faith Builder: Choose a family member (draw names!) to secretly do nice things for, such as picking up a sibling’s dishes or sharing a toy. We are then reminded just how good it feels to be kind and loving to each other.

For Further Reading

Raising Good Kids, Ray Guarendi (Our Sunday Visitor, 2011)

Letter to Families (Gratissimam Sane), Pope John Paul II (1994) (available at <http://www.vatican.va>)

Parenting with Grace, 2nd Edition, Dr. Gregory Popcak and Lisa Popcak (Our Sunday Visitor, 2011)

Love, Warmth, and Discipline, Fr. Val Peter (Our Sunday Visitor, 2011)

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10 Things that Make for a Great Catholic Family



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Today's families come in all shapes and sizes. Amid all those differences, one thing is certain: maintaining a strong family takes a lot of time, energy and work — oh, and a good dose of prayer! Looking at who we are through the eyes of our faith, we see that, although we may not be the image of the perfect family every day, we are holier, indeed “greater,” than we think.

Great Catholic Families Make Sunday Mass the Center of Their Week

The foundation of solid Catholic family life — the glue that keeps us together — is Sunday Mass. If you have young children, getting out the door to church is almost as much of a challenge as keeping the kids quiet during the homily. If you have teens, the biggest

challenge (after getting them out of bed) is to get them to pay attention. Yet, going to Mass each week is worth the work. When we approach God's altar to receive the Eucharist, our share in Christ's Body and Blood deepens our communion with

him and, through him, builds up his Body, the Church. Together in community, we sing hymns and learn how our voices blend. We listen to the Word of God and learn how to follow Jesus. We pray together and learn about silence and humility. On Sunday we are reminded that the center of our family life is Christ.

Faith Builder: Enjoy Sunday brunch as a family and talk about the part of Mass that resonated most with each person. Hold on to that lesson for the week.

Great Catholic Families Give Thanks

In today's “grass is always greener” world, it is easy to look over the fence at our neighbors (or at our favorite television show where all of life's problems can be solved in 22 minutes) and long for what they have. But we have found that the key to a happy family is taking



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stock of what we have been given. It is important to remember (and to remind our children) that everything comes from God — our material goods, our friends and family, our gifts and talents. As American politician Frank A. Clark once said, “If a fellow isn't grateful for what he's got, he isn't likely to be grateful for what he's going to get.” Great Catholic families celebrate their gifts, no matter how meager they may seem. That means giving thanks even in times of struggle, but especially being mindful (and grateful) when times are good.

Faith Builder: Give your dinner prayer a boost by pausing during grace and encouraging everyone to share something they are grateful for today.

Great Catholic Families Simply Give

Part of being grateful for what we have is giving back. Catholic families remember that God does not grant us gifts so we can hoard them greedily (no matter what our three-year-old says). Catholic families blessed with resources are called to use them to ensure that those who have little have a chance at a better life. Children who see their parents giving of their gifts will follow suit — even if what they have to give is a fraction of what their parents have. After all, we learn from our families what is important, and we imitate those behaviors when we have families of our own.

Faith Builder: Talk together about the concept of tithing. Find out what is really important to your family, and devote some of your hard-earned resources to that cause.



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Great Catholic Families Let Their Lights Shine

Members of a faith community — and members of a family — are called to make use of their God-given gifts. You don't have to be the von Trapps to sing in the choir. If you're a competent pianist or can bring Scripture to life by reading the Word from the lectern, then by all means share those gifts. A great starting point is asking your pastor or priest how your family can better serve the parish. Maybe its sharing that gift of good home cooking with families in need in your parish. We have found new parents are especially grateful for homemade meals. Teens can help with your parish's VBS program or other faith-formation opportunities. If the family is feeling strapped for time, encourage everyone to be mindful of a unique gift they can bring to their usual activities, clubs, and conversations. There is no underestimating what a little patience, joyfulness, or simple punctuality can do for the people around us.

Faith Builder: Chart your family's talents. What can everyone give? Even better, where can you give together so you can combine volunteering with family time?

Great Catholic Families Fight Fair

As much as we wish family life were perfect, the reality is that all families experience conflict. We're going to fight. Not selling siblings into slavery like Joseph's brothers did is a good start, but even fighting has rules. Families that fight fair carry with them an application of the Ten Commandments, even when they are in the middle of a family crisis. Some examples: Steering clear of using the Lord's name in vain in a heated debate. Honoring mothers and fathers (and daughters and sons and sisters and brothers and so on). Telling the truth, gently, even though it may hurt.

Family members who fight for personal victory miss out on how great it feels to work through a struggle together, and win as a team. Great Catholic families check tempers, are respectful of one another's strengths and weaknesses, and always remember that obstacles make us stronger.

Faith Builder: Create and display your family's rules for conflict: “No sulking, no lying, no grudges, etc.”

Great Catholic Families Make Mistakes

As Catholics, we believe that we are created in the image and likeness of God ... but this doesn't mean that we are gods. The older we get, the more we realize how human we all are. We let each other down. We fail. We sin. And yet, to thrive as individuals and as a family, we have learned that there is a fine line between making a mistake and believing that you are a mistake. God does not make mistakes. We are each created with dignity, and we are all special in God's eyes. Great Catholic families know that shame is hard to undo once it's done. Even the biggest mistakes require a healthy dose of patience and love in order to ensure that they don't become weak spots in an otherwise strong family.

Faith Builder: Does your family keep alive old wounds? Take some time together to bury old mistakes and genuinely move on from them.



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