



STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES AT MASS

WHOLE FAMILY

- ▶ Focus on the WHY of Mass. Words matter - Instead of "Hey kids, we have to go to Mass," consider "Let's go! Jesus is waiting for us at Mass." Our Lord and Savior loves us so much that He not only died for us, but He knew how much we needed Him constantly in our lives and created the Mass to nourish and connect with us! Be excited about Mass. But also, be honest - sometimes we may not want to go to Mass either. But we go because we love Jesus and He loves us, even when we're feeling lazy.
- ▶ Educate your kids about the Eucharistic liturgy. Mass is an amazing experience, but it's difficult to appreciate what you don't understand. Discuss it before, point things out during, unpack what you experienced on the way home.
- ▶ Make a point to offer thanks. The word Eucharist comes from Greek words that refer to giving thanks. Ask them to name what they are thankful for on the way to church. Offer it up when the gifts are brought to altar.
- ▶ Do a liturgical scavenger hunt. Ask your kids to pay attention to certain elements of the Mass: the color of the vestments, the name of the books the Scripture readings are taken from, the order of the procession, the option used for the penitential rite, etc. Discuss on the way home.
- ▶ Have family prayer time at home. If you have a regular (even daily) family prayer time, your kids will slowly learn how to pray, and to appreciate the deeper beauty and meaning of the Scriptures. This daily practice will help them participate more fully in the Mass.

YOUNGER CHILDREN (before First Communion)

- ▶ Sit up front. Sit as close to the front as possible, where children have the opportunity to observe the action of the Mass. Don't worry - seeing what's going on will be may keep them more engaged than hiding in the back. Give it a try.
- ▶ Explain what is going on. Before Mass, point out different features of the church—statues, stained glass, the tabernacle—and explain. Quietly point out key moments: "Now we're going to hear God speak to us." "We're kneeling because Jesus is here in a special way." "Hear those bells? Jesus is here!" Alternatively, redirect a disruptive child by asking her to (quietly) describe what she sees happening. Invite and acknowledge participation.
- ▶ Make a Mass Bag. Create a Mass Bag with religious picture books or dolls of saints or the Holy Family. Make it special and set aside only for Mass. Refresh it regularly.
- ▶ Make special Mass moments. Light a candle on your way in or out. Get or make a special treat together after Mass. Find something to look forward to.
- ▶ Introduce your child to the priest, lectors, musicians, and servers. Recognizing these people as they celebrate the Mass will increase their engagement.
- ▶ Practice makes perfect. Encourage them to play Mass at home. Practice whispering. Sing Liturgical music in the car. Recite Mass prayers at bed or dinner time. Practice sitting still without entertainment. Consider beginning with a few minutes after dinner while at the table. Model reverence for them during Mass.



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OLDER CHILDREN (after First Communion)

- ▶ Give them a children's missal. Once children can read, give them a children's missal to help them follow along and participate during the Mass. There are a number of children's Mass books, or you can purchase a subscription to Magnifikid!, a full-color subscription missal for children.
- ▶ Encourage children to serve in appropriate liturgical ministries. If your children are old enough, encourage them to become altar servers, to participate in the children's choir, to bring the gifts forward, or to serve as an usher or hospitality minister (with you). Directly participating in these ministries will give them a different perspective on the Mass and a sense of ownership.
- ▶ Walk through the Mass. Set aside some time to walk your children through a different part of the Mass each week. Have them act it out, then explain the meaning of that part of the liturgy. Explore the symbolism of the actions and elements of the Mass: Why do we stand and kneel? Why does the priest break the Eucharistic host? Why are bread and wine used?

TEENS

- ▶ Introduce a more mature understanding of the Mass. If the last time your teen learned about the Eucharist was while preparing for First Communion, it might be time for an update. Use a youth-friendly catechism or any of the many teen-friendly resources available online.
- ▶ Encourage service in appropriate liturgical ministries. Besides serving in the liturgical ministries listed above, teens who have been confirmed may also be eligible to become lectors or extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.
- ▶ Provide a missal. Offer your teen a missal from the pew to help him follow along during Mass. Teach them how to follow along. Remember it jumps around the pages.
- ▶ Should teens be forced to go to Mass? At the time of their marriage and at the baptism of their children, spouses promise to take responsibility for raising their children in the faith. Generally, this means insisting that children take part in the life of the Church. One way of thinking about this is as safeguarding your child's spiritual welfare, much as you would safeguard his basic health and hygiene. If a teen is persistent in rejecting the faith, consideration also needs to be given to respect for his religious liberty (see Code of Canon Law #748, §2). Seek the advice of your pastor for help in sorting out these difficult issues.

PRAY FOR HELP (and don't expect perfection)

Hundreds of generations of parents have experienced the same challenges as you; most of them are probably saints now, so you may as well ask them to pray for the strength and patience you need to get through Mass with small children. Remember, too, that the very work of lovingly managing children at Mass is a sort of prayer in itself.