

Homily
Holy Family A
December 28/29, 2019
St. Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

FAMILY PRAYER

We have a problem in the Catholic Church that Catholic families are in the best position to fix.

I'll start with some basic questions.

How important is Jesus to each of us? If someone asked us, "Why is Jesus important in your life?," what would we say, in just a sentence or two?

What is the connection between our Catholic faith and our relationship with Jesus?

You see, it seems that for a large majority of Catholics, we think that being Catholic means we go to Mass. That's what defines Catholics. We tend to measure how we're doing as Catholics by how often we go to Mass.

It's having the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, that separates us from other Christians. So we place great emphasis on the sacraments. And, of course, the sacraments are a great gift to the Church.

The big problem I want to share with you about the way most of us understand and live out our faith is identified in two sections of the Catholic Catechism.

We'll start with Section 1072: "The sacred liturgy [the Mass] does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church": **it must be preceded by evangelization, faith and conversion. It can then produce its fruits in the lives of the faithful; new life in the Spirit, involvement in the mission of the Church, and service to her unity.**
(REPEAT)

What happens BEFORE we walk through the doors into the church has a great deal to do with what happens AFTER we enter the church.

Next is a quote from Section CCC 2111: "...To attribute the effectiveness of prayers or sacramental signs to their mere external performance, apart from the interior dispositions they demand, is to fall into superstition." In other words, Jesus does not automatically force His grace upon us in the sacraments. Something is required of us.

What these sections of the Catechism mean is that the impact of the sacraments on our lives depends on the depth of our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus is always present and available in the sacraments, but the graces we receive from the sacraments will be proportional to the level of our faith in the power of Jesus to change our lives.

Pope Benedict expressed all of this so well in 2009 when he wrote: "Faith is above all a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus, and to experience His closeness, His friendship, His love; only in this way does one learn to know Him ever more, and to love and follow Him ever more. May this happen to each one of us."

Having the relationship with Jesus described by Pope Benedict is essential if we want the sacraments to make a real difference in our lives.

How do we develop this relationship with Jesus? This is where the family has such an important role. It's primarily in the family where the evangelization, faith and conversion spoken of in the Catechism should be taking place.

What I'm going to focus on this morning is family prayer and how family prayer can establish and nourish a relationship with Jesus that will lead to a much deeper experience of grace when we receive the sacraments. The family should be a school of prayer.

I'm going to list the essential elements of our prayers with and for one another in the family, whether children are in the home or not.

- We should acknowledge in our prayers that we all make mistakes, that there are things we do, called sins, that interfere with our relationship with God.
- We need to acknowledge in our prayers that heaven is real, that getting to heaven is our primary goal in life, that in heaven we can experience the most amazing bliss, and that none of us, no matter how good we are, will deserve to live in heaven for eternity. Our salvation is a function of grace.
- Our prayers should express gratitude to Jesus for His suffering and death that open the doors to heaven for all of us who believe in Him and obey Him.
- Our prayers should recognize that, by making Jesus the center of our lives, it becomes possible for us to share His divine life, His grace and His power. We should use our prayer time to share how grace is at work in our lives.
- God created each one of us for a specific meaning and purpose. The key to our happiness and fulfillment is to discover that meaning and purpose and live it out. So we need to pray to know God's will and to faithfully carry it out.
- God is constantly communicating His specific will for each of our lives. Our family prayer should include how we are listening and looking for God's

communication and where we think God is leading us. Parents should help their children discern God's will.

- When we make specific prayer requests, we should monitor as a family how God is responding to each request.
- Children need to know from their parents how their Catholic faith has changed and enriched their lives.

Parents have a special power and grace to pray for their children. Here's a short list of specific prayers that parents might consider offering, regardless of the ages of their children.

- As Hannah did in the Book of Samuel, dedicate our children to the Lord, asking God to do for our children what we as parents cannot. [Example: son telling me how much he helped my prayer life]
- Ask God to help us as parents to be good examples of living a fully Christian life.
- Ask God to help our children overcome the hardships and challenges they face in life and to help us to be a source of support and strength for them.
- Ask God to help our children overcome the forces in our culture that lead them away from doing God's will.
- Pray that God will bring people into the lives of our children to help them do God's will and to carry their crosses in life.
- For protection of our children, plead the power of the Blood of Jesus over each of them, their spouses, if married, and their children. "I plead the power of the Blood of Jesus over _____." [Example: how we got our children doing things they weren't supposed to do]
- Pray that our children will embrace their primary goal in life as being saved through grace by their faith in Jesus Christ.

If you find these suggestions helpful, a copy of this homily will be available on the parish website under the Peace and Justice heading (go to Evangelization/Blog)

I'll close with this beautiful prayer from the Bible that we can say often for our children. It's from Colossians 1:9-12:

I pray that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, with joy giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones. Amen.