

PASTOR'S NOTES: Sacramental Preparation

First and foremost: Parents need to know and bear in mind that they are the primary catechists of their children. Religion, like every form of human behavior, is learned by watching examples more than by memorization or classroom experience. For parents, the good news is that their children are much more likely to imitate your behavior than do what they have been taught. 80% of what they learn about religion is what they learn from you at home.

The FIRST PHASE: Good Example set by Their Parents at Home

Sacramental Preparation begins as soon as the little one starts to observe the world. They watch Mommy and Daddy very closely. In the first months of their human development their example is the “imprinting” that is the foundation on which their interpersonal skills are built. These skills are very important since those are the same skills we use to develop a relationship with God.

Whether a child is preparing for Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, or Confirmation the most basic religious behavior that needs to be learned is regular attendance at Sunday Mass. (Please note this includes Saturday Evening Masses.)

A child can only learn that it is a duty and an act of love for God to go to Mass every Sunday by watching its parents do it each and every week. Without this reinforcement from the parents by their own Mass attendance, the Third Commandment is broken. Every catechist who tries to teach it is contradicted by the actions of the very persons they are offering to help, namely the parents.

(Note: Catechists help children by helping their parents do their job of teaching the faith to their children.) Do you take your child to Mass every Sunday?

The second religious practice that children need to learn from their parents is the importance of life long study of the Catholic Faith. Again, children learn by the example set by the parents. If they see the parents going to Adult Formation Programs, like Why Catholic, Whole Community Assemblies, Bible Study Classes, or see you reading serious new and deeper Catholic material, they will learn that this is the normal way an adult Catholic acts. How often does your child see you go to formation classes?

The most important moral behaviors they learn at home, too: love. Most of all the learn how to express love by watching their parents love other adults, especially their spouses. Sacrificing for the welfare of others is the best way to model sincere love also called charity. Even parental love for their children can be contradicted by the way the parents treat other adults. I wonder how often we make these connections? Do your children see your example of love by the works of charity you do?

Do you remember how futile the saying is, “Do as I say, not as I do!” Imagine saying to a child, “Do as the catechist tells you to do (or to believe), not as I do.”

Talk about mixed signals!! **Imagine if we said, “Do as the catechist tells you, see, I do it too!”**

First things first, we often say. Without the First Phase of Sacramental Formation, namely, Good Example set by their Parents in Their Home Life by weekly Mass attendance by both parent and child, the example given by the parent of ongoing formation by their participation in adult formation programs, and the active demonstration of Christian Charity toward other adults the child is given mixed signals. Just what can we teach our little ones about the Kingdom of God if their parents behavior contradicts the faith and rules we teach? What value will the children see in the Catholic Religion they hear at Church for their own lives if they don't see it in the Catholic parent(s)? They will see the value we place on it (especially in the earliest years of their lives) and make it the value they place on Faith as adults. The natural root of Sacramental Formation is parental example in family life! Grace builds on our human nature! The healthiest human nature is one that cooperates with grace. This is the lesson that children need to learn by watching their Mom and Dad.