

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

- Family Living: Ordinary and Sacred
- Experiencing God with Your Children
- Faith: The Pearl of Great Price

## Hope for the Halo by Jean Buell

"Well," my friend said, "it sounds like you're handling the situation with a lot of grace."

Grace?! Isn't that reserved for holy people who wear halos? When I look up, I don't see one over my head, and I certainly don't see them over my children! We're just a family. We're too ordinary to be holy. Not only are we ordinary but we can be rather *unholy* at times. Is there hope for families like ours?

There is no question that family life is filled with trials and errors. It can be overwhelming, but there is hope, and that hope lies in Jesus. After all, Jesus came as a child who grew up in a family setting. In our faith tradition, we call Jesus, Mary, and Joseph the "Holy Family." It's tempting to think that *holy* means "perfect," but it doesn't. Recall that Mary and Joseph couldn't find Jesus when they returned from the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus deliberately stayed behind without telling his parents. Sounds like something a twelve-year-old would do, doesn't it?

We forget that the Holy Family was an ordinary family. They worked for a living. They followed the laws. They kept the traditions of their faith. Ordinary families are holy families. To be holy means to live like Jesus lived. It means to follow Jesus' example in ordinary, everyday activities.

Jesus broke bread. Families break bread every time they share a meal.

Jesus celebrated. Families celebrate every time they blow out birthday candles, applaud good performances, or display hard-earned diplomas.

Jesus forgave. Families forgive every time they acknowledge apologies,

compromise after arguments, or let go of grudges.

Jesus healed. Families heal every time they kiss sore fingers, massage aching muscles, or hug in times of sadness.

Jesus prayed. Families pray every time they say grace before meals, marvel at a glowing sunset, or worship on Sunday mornings.

Jesus served. Families serve every time they host gatherings, help their neighbors, or share with food pantries.

Jesus followed the traditions of his faith. Families follow the traditions of their faith every time they baptize their babies, place crosses in their homes, or sing holiday hymns.

The list goes on and on. Remember that Jesus was called Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." Because of who he was and how he lived, Jesus brought God's loving presence to the people of his day. When families live like Jesus lived, they love like Jesus loved. And when families love like Jesus loved, they bring the very presence of God inside their homes. How much holier can a family get?

Celebrate your family. Celebrate it in ordinary ways on ordinary days, and celebrate it on holy days in holy ways. The feast of the Holy Family comes on the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day. Whether it is ten days away or ten months away, mark your calendar right now. Make it a special day to acknowledge the sacred moments that

In her book *Experiencing God with Your Children* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), Kathy Coffey offers several lovely insights on family faith and spirituality:

Our first, most precious learnings about God can come only at home. If, in that small sphere, we do not fall in love with God, it would be pointless to continue our quest. . . . Parents and children who do meet God at home are more inclined to broaden their orbit and find God everywhere. . . . Using home as the starting point and the end of our theology should not seem so odd. For Jesus' earthly life began in the small circle of affection at Bethlehem, and ended in the circle of his mother's arms. (P. 14)

A friend who is completing a doctorate in theology tells how he agonized over a talk he would give at church on some point about God that was elusive. When his three-year-old daughter asked what was troubling him, he explained as best he could that he'd thought hard about God but still wasn't fully understanding God. She reassured him with a touch on his shirt, "Don't worry, Dad. God is right there in your pocket." All our struggles to nuance and refine can sputter into silence before a child's clarity. (P. 24)

take place in ordinary family life. Maybe, just maybe, you'll start to see your halos. They might need a little polishing, but you can trust that they are there.

# Just Give It Away

by Leif Kehrwald

Which of the following is more akin to parenting for faith growth: installing a new garbage disposal in the kitchen sink or installing a new software application on the computer? Installing a new garbage disposal, of course. Here's why. Based both on my limited (one disposal installed) and on my somewhat extensive (many software applications installed) experience, one receives vast amounts of instruction for installing software, but next to zero instructions for installing a garbage disposal.

The instruction manual for our garbage disposal consisted of one sheet of paper, with limited space allocated for each of the four languages in which the instructions were printed. The manual for my latest software package came on a CD that would print out to at least several hundred pages. I know this firsthand. One thing that was similar about both manuals, however, was that I understood very little and needed "tech support" for both projects.

Our kids don't come with CD-ROM instruction manuals, and the same is true for family faith enrichment. Why do such important jobs come with so little instruction? I don't have a good answer, but I do know some key facts that may help explain why. Every kid is different, and God's timing with each person is unique. Even if our church occasionally thinks it can develop a detailed road map for bringing all children to spiritual enlightenment, the church cannot do it alone. All this makes a good case for parents continually offering each other good "tech support."

Perhaps an image can help lead the way. Nearly twenty years ago I came across this lovely little story by Theophane the Monk called the "Pearl of Great Price" (in *Tales of a Magic Monastery* [New York: Crossroad, 1981]):

He asked me what I was looking for.

"Frankly," I said, "I'm looking for the Pearl of Great Price."

He slipped his hand into his pocket, drew it out, AND GAVE IT TO ME. It was just like that! I was

dumbfounded. Then I began to protest: "Do you really want to give it to *me*? Don't you want to keep it for yourself? But . . ."

When I kept this up, he said finally, "Look, is it better to *have* the Pearl of Great Price, or to give it away?"—

Now I have it, but I don't tell anyone. From some there would just be disbelief or ridicule. "You, you have the Pearl of Great Price? Hah!" Others would be jealous, or someone might steal it. Yes, I *do* have it. But there's that question—"Is it better to have it, or to give it away?" How long will that question rob me of my joy? (P. 10)

Faith growth occurs in the act of giving the pearl away. The small, simple truths that God reveals to each of us are never fully known until we risk sharing them with others. I'm a quiet, private kind of guy, so this presents a challenge for me.

Giving the pearl away means providing a faith response when the opportunity presents itself. The more I am in dialogue with my own faith, the more I am able to recognize those opportunities, especially with the folks in my family.

But the inspiration I find in this little story is the simple fact that it really isn't any more complicated than just giving faith away, sharing it with others. I don't have to try to find God somewhere out there, and I don't have to try to shove the Spirit into my kids somehow. I don't have to try to fill their heads with answers to faith questions

they're not yet asking. In fact, I don't even have to work at giving it away.

If I simply live my faith in a genuine way, with honesty and integrity, I will automatically give it away to those around me. And the moments will come when a child or a spouse or someone nearby will pose a question that can open the floodgates of faith.

## Worth Quoting

In *Family Spirituality: The Raw Ingredients of Faith* (Chicago: ACTA, 1994), Leif Kehrwald addresses the importance of recognizing God's presence:

Remember, then, atmosphere comes before content. Take advantage of those teachable moments with children, those precious moments of pure emotion with teens, and those moments of personal intimacy with yourselves to acknowledge God's gracious presence. God lingers in the folds and creases of our daily family encounters.

For God can only be fully present. God is there, not just in the places we expect God to be, but also there in our kitchens, dens and bedrooms. God's grace explodes from the unexpected moments and encounters of our daily family living. When you least expect it—expect it. (P. 106)

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