

HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

Sharing About

➤ Going to church on Sunday

Finding the Freedom to Go to Church by Leif Kehrwald

“Why do I have to go to church? It’s really boring, and I don’t get anything out of it.” What parent hasn’t heard this question?

We respond with the best wisdom we can muster at the moment. The guilt method might sound something like this: “You have all week to do what you want; Sunday morning should be given to God.” Sort of makes it sound like church is punishment for our weekly sins.

Sometimes we try the togetherness method: “Sunday is our family day, and we always go to church as a family.” Nice concept, but it doesn’t address the young person’s question.

When all else fails, we bribe them: “You’ll want to come to church with us this morning because we’re going to brunch afterward.”

The interesting thing is how eloquently some kids can say out loud what many adults feel yet never admit. There are legitimate reasons why a person’s Sunday worship does not match his or her faith needs. Perhaps some of us would be better off taking a cue from our teenagers and at least acknowledge that reality. Only if we do that can we work out a solution.

Make no mistake. I do not presume every adult feels this way toward his or her church. Many are quite satisfied and inspired by their Sunday worship. They genuinely pray and praise with their believing community, and that’s the way it ought to be.

But if church is only a “should” in your life and nothing more, if you go to church only to fulfill an “obligation” and relieve guilt, or if your Sunday

morning routine is nothing more than a grumpy habit, it is time to make a change.

Sometimes Sunday worship does not connect with our faith needs because we don’t know what those faith needs are. Resentment begins to build toward the church because it sounds too lofty and pious. We sense that the church is out of touch with our real life, when it might be that we are out of touch with our spiritual needs.

If Sunday is a celebration of faith and spiritual growth, we can celebrate only what has gone on the other six days of the week. How do we invest ourselves in our family spirituality? Do we step back once in awhile for personal and family reflection?

Over the years, our family has spent an occasional Sunday by ourselves at home. We might have a brief prayer service, take a walk in the woods, talk about one another’s ups and downs. All of us can get going in so many directions that there comes a time when we just need to stop and be together, simply and quietly. (That never happens in your family, does it?)

These pullback times put us in closer touch with our spirituality. They help us make a connection between the busyness of our lives and the real and active presence of God among us. These times enrich the meaningfulness of our faith community. We need those folks. We need to worship on Sunday. We need to sing with others. We need to hear the stories of God’s people down through the ages. We need to gather around the table with other believers.

Thousands of Thousands

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice,
Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

Rev 5.11–12

How does the vision of the “thousands of thousands, singing with full voice” in Rev 5.11–12 encourage you to be more bold in your praise of God? Can you sing out more loudly in Mass? Can you participate more from your heart in saying common prayers with others? (*The Catholic Youth Bible* [Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2000], p. 1489)

There is something compelling about gathering, sharing stories, and breaking bread. It is the ancient and ageless way to connect intimately with others. Through song, prayer, ritual movement, even sharing a symbolic meal, we respond in gratitude for the gift of life and the joy in knowing we do not have to make the journey alone.

Benjamin's Baptism

by an anonymous youth

(Excerpted from *More Than Meets the Eye: Finding God in the Creases and Folds of Family Life*, by Mary Jo Pedersen, Thomas Greisen, and Ronald Wasikowski, [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000], pp. 117–119)

The Story Told

I remember Benjamin's Baptism; he was born nine years after my youngest sister—we called him the caboose. Benjamin cried now and then throughout his Baptism. It wasn't a loud wailing but kind of a whimpering. Maybe he was just complaining about the temperature of the water and all the fussing over him. As his oldest sister, I helped Mom bathe him, apply lotion, and dress him before church. And people photographed him and begged him for smiles all morning.

There was some murmuring by my relatives and friends as Mom and Dad and Ben's godparents were asked some questions by the deacon at the beginning of the ceremony. Then all of us sisters, brothers, and cousins were invited by the priest to come up around the font so the little ones could see better. We watched him pour water on Ben from a large pitcher, then anoint him with some oil. He lit a small candle from the Easter one and gave it to Dad. Then Father held Benjamin in his hands and said to everyone at Mass, "This is our newest member, Benjamin Michael," and we all clapped.

I could tell Grandma and Grandpa were happy with all the aunts, uncles, and others who came. After church we all went to our house for dinner, with presents and champagne toasts (7-Up for the kids) wishing Ben good health, happiness, and lots of blessings. Everyone got to hold Benjamin in his long white baptismal gown, the one Grandma bought for her own children, and that all of us twelve cousins have worn.

Lots of pictures were taken, everyone wanting one taken with Ben. And

there was storytelling, especially funny ones from Uncle Stan, about the silly things Dad and my uncles and aunts did when they were growing up.

Too bad Benjamin fell asleep after dinner and missed all the fun. We all said this big day was for Benjamin, but I know inside it was for all of us too. It's our way of celebrating another new life in our family. That's the way we've done it for every one of my cousins. . . .

More Than Meets the Eye

. . . This gathering of grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends, in the parish church and at home demonstrates how Benjamin is an important part of their lives, a member of this family, this church. . . .

Family customs and church rituals complement each other, and are dependent on each other. The actions and traditions of Benjamin's family help us to understand the church's baptismal celebration. Benjamin was fussed over at home: bathed and dressed, passed around and held, toasted and photographed countless times. Such rituals express this family's belief that Benjamin is a priceless gift. The church's rituals provide deeper insight into the significance of the family celebration. White garments, anointing with sacred oils, an Easter candle, and blessed water are all part of the fuss God's family makes when initiating new members into the Body of Christ. Baptism is a reflection of what needs to be remembered in the home: respecting the dignity of life, seeing the giftedness and sacredness of new life, and knowing that we are forgiven and loved by our God.

A holy mirroring and interdependence exists between the family as domestic church and the larger parish community. Benjamin is, in fact, sacred to both his family and his church. It is right that both should fuss over him.

Singing Praise

In his book, *Raising Faith-Filled Kids* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2000), Tom McGrath writes:

Sing out at Sunday worship. If your kids hear you singing, they will pay attention. . . . In this age of consumerism, I'm glad that my daughters hear phrases like "Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life." And in an age of individualism, I like how singing joins our voices and demonstrates that we're "one bread, one body." Singing expands our religious imagination and opens us to the power of God in our lives. Think of the power of a church full of people singing, "And I will raise you up on eagle's wings" when a family comes together to mourn the loss of a loved one. (Pp. 197–198)

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