

Helping Your Child Prepare to Receive the Eucharist

Our children grow up multitasking. They play video games while they throw a toy for the puppy and watch TV and do homework. How can we help them learn to be present at the Eucharistic liturgy? How can we help them understand the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist? The following are a few suggestions for helping your child cultivate and appreciate the gift of the Eucharist:

- Model to your child by putting everything else aside when you come to Mass. Turn off your cell phone, put your car keys into your purse or pocket, and avoid reading the bulletin or other papers or constantly looking at your watch.
- Make a practice of sitting close to the front when in the church. This helps your child keep focused on the action of the liturgy and become more involved in the sights, sounds, and prayers that are taking place.
- Get to the church early enough before Mass to allow for a transition from home life or other activities. Arriving early allows time to bless oneself with holy water, notice the liturgical colors or seasonal decor, hear the bells ring, see other people gathering, and quiet oneself in preparation for the liturgy.
- Encourage your child to listen closely to the words of the Eucharistic Prayer. Point out when this is about to take place in the liturgy. Have your child listen especially to the words of consecration and observe how the priest genuflects after the consecration of the bread and again after the consecration of the wine. Remind your child to look at the host and wine when the priest lifts them up: they are the Body and Blood of Christ. If it is customary in your parish to ring the bells at consecration, be sure your child understands that this is another way of saying that Jesus is now truly present with us in a different and miraculous way.
- Use opportunities as they arise to talk about the presence of Jesus in your everyday life. As First Eucharist approaches, remind your child that when he or she receives Holy Communion, Jesus will be totally present.
- Introduce symbols and practices such as silence, a candle, and music that will help your child focus on God's presence both at home and in the classroom. Gradually accustom your child to short periods of quiet so she or he can learn to become aware of God's presence.
- Take time to teach your child why, how, and when we genuflect. Genuflecting reminds us that Jesus is present in the Blessed Sacrament.



- Before the celebration of First Eucharist, emphasize to your child that it is very important to be ready to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. We prepare our hearts by sincerely praying the Penitential Act of the Mass or by celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We prepare our bodies by not eating for an hour before Communion, not chewing gum in church, and making sure our hands are clean before Mass.
- Your example when receiving Holy Communion is extremely important in forming your child's understanding of what is happening. Try to remain prayerful and focused as you approach the altar, bow deliberately, say "Amen" firmly, receive the host and drink from the cup reverently, and pray quietly when you return to your pew. By observing these actions, your child will understand that something special is happening. You will be witnessing to your belief in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and your child will take note.
- Remind your child that he or she is carrying Jesus into the world. The Eucharistic presence of Christ is a great gift. Jesus is truly within us. Our gift to Jesus in return is to be like him. Everything we think, say, and do can be a way to help others see and know the love of Jesus.
- Take your child to church to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Ask your child to close her or his eyes and picture herself or himself alone with Jesus. Invite your child to spend a few moments talking to Jesus in silence.

