

- If they are not yet old enough to receive Communion, pray a simple Spiritual Communion with them, asking Jesus to enter their hearts and to prepare them to receive as soon as they are old enough.
- If they can receive, say a prayer of thanksgiving with them.
- Point out when the priest or deacon purifies the vessels.

Final Blessing

- Sing the hymn joyfully!
- Make sure everyone has a chance to bless him/herself with Holy Water on the way out.
- Leave with the joy of God in your hearts and applaud your children on their awesome behavior.

NB: Most of the lay staff and all of the religious education/youth ministry staff have or have had small children. Your challenges are ours! We pray for you and ask you to pray for us. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to assist you in this glorious mission of Christian parenting! Don't ever be discouraged!

A SPECIAL NOTE ON CHILD SAFETY

This is your parish home. It is also the home you share with many, many others. Please be considerate of the spaces, the furnishings, and your fellow parishioners. Please especially remember, that, though we work tirelessly to maintain the security of our building, and unequivocally uphold the standards of the Diocese regarding child safety, we rely on you to uphold your primary responsibility in disciplining and protecting your children. Please keep them with you. If they are attending any of our religious education programs, you must bring them to their rooms and retrieve them from those rooms.

Children are not permitted to wander the halls or the grounds unattended.

DEAR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN...

PLEASE know we appreciate your efforts to guide and inspire your children! May we suggest the following:

- Relax! God put the wiggle in children; don't be frantic about suppressing it in His house. All are welcome!
- Sit toward the front where it is easier to see and hear.
- Quietly explain the parts of the Mass.
- Sing the hymns, pray and voice the responses. Children learn liturgical behavior by copying you.
- This is sacred space. Think about ways you can teach your children to respect it as something different from everyday space. (Please remind them not to run in the aisles or at the back of the Church.)
- Be reassured; your efforts to pray with and through your children is one of the most beautiful and meritorious ways you live out your vocation!
- The more familiar they become, the more comfortable and engaged they will be. Bring them to daily Mass whenever you can!
- Strive to keep your own faith alive, and keep learning! (Resources on the Mass are listed at our website.)

If you are interested in our many religious education programs, please contact us or visit the FAMILY CORNER on our website at www.stauva.org!

TO THE MEMBERS OF OUR PARISH

A smile of encouragement is always welcome to parents with small active children. The presence of children is a gift to the Church. They give us "A future full of people and hope."

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE MASS FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish Religious Education

How do you explain the Mass to a small child? How do you help your child engage with the unfolding Liturgical Mystery? How do you stay sane when a toddler has a fit of the wiggles in the middle of the Consecration? It's one of the biggest challenges Catholic parents face! Here are some tips for unpacking the meaning and mystery of the words, gestures, and symbols of the Mass.



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Quick Guide to the Mass

Preparation

- Reading (or listening to) the Readings of the day can prepare you to help your children pay attention (as they can!) *and* it will give you an extra chance in case you aren't able to listen at Mass! The United States Council of Catholic Bishops* offers an email service that will send the Readings straight to you, with a link to lead you to audio files, so you can listen in the morning while you brush your teeth!
- Assemble a “Mass Bag” with a cloth rosary, holy cards, religious books, and perhaps a notebook with a pencil. Make this a special bag that is only used at Mass.
- Say simple daily prayers. Start small: a morning offering, and bedtime prayers. Work in one decade of the Rosary. Talk about the mystery behind the decade. Books with illustrations are very helpful throughout, as are religious art and articles in the home.
- For the littlest children, learning the words “Jesus”, “Mary”, “Amen”, and pointing to identifiable images and things at home and in Church helps ground them—even for just a few seconds!
- This is especially helpful when you need to take a child to the back of the Church. Try not to let a wig-gly child run, because this encourages naughtiness in the pew in hopes of escaping to the back; instead, stand and hold the child if he/she is calm and show him/her the Stations of the Cross, or point back to the priest and say: “Look what Father is doing!” The candles are another great focal point—little ones can be so intrigued by the whispered challenge to “Blow out the candles” that they might be distracted out of a melt-down.
- Make sure to visit the Holy Water font on your way in.
- Genuflect before entering the pew.

Opening Hymn & Greeting

- Encourage all children to sing when everyone else is singing, even if the children don't speak English (or Latin) yet. Point to the notes on the page (even if a child turns the page and it isn't the right hymn). They will love mimicking what all of the adults are doing.
- Call the children's attention to the priest and those who process in with them.

- Point out the Book of the Gospels.
- Make the Sign of the Cross together.

Penitential Act

- Encourage children to strike their heart when they say “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”. (Little ones will even want to help strike yours!)
- Explain that we are sorry for all things we do, think, say, and or fail to do which is hurtful to God or to others). We repeat this three times because we really mean it. We pray together as brothers and sisters—we all need God's mercy!

Gloria

Sing together from the hymnal. Point out that the Angels sang this song when they announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds.

Readings

- Look at a religious children's book, especially if you can find illustrations that are about the readings.
- Whisper to your children and point out when the readings include the names of people in the Bible who they may recognize (e.g. Adam and Eve, Noah, Joseph, Moses, Jonah, Jesus, Mary, Peter).
- Make doodles of the story (if you are artistically inclined). It is useful to have a little notebook in your “Mass bag” that is specially dedicated to this.
- You can prepare for this ahead of time at www.usccb.org/bible/readings or order a MagnifiKid magazine subscription.

Gospel

- Watch the altar servers bring candles up (Christ is the light in our world) and use incense (we offer our prayers up to God, like the smoke rises up to the heavens).
- Make the Sign of the Cross on your forehead, lips, and heart as you pray “Glory to you, O Lord” because you want the Word of God in your mind, on your lips, and in your heart.
- Let the homily be the time for children to return to their books or sketch book. Religious coloring pages will also work (though crayons are tempting to pull to pieces or throw!).

Find links for this & other resources at our Family Corner on our website!

- Talk about how special the Book of the Gospels is and why we stand (the fancy materials we use and our reverence show that we take what is being said seriously).

Creed

- Read the Creed and practice it at home.
- Make a profound bow together at “He came down from heaven and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.”
- Emphasize special words that have come up recently (baptism, light, world).
- It is okay to smile or make slight motions for a word to engage them and help them learn these prayers.

Presentation of the Gifts

- Let the children put the envelope/money in the offertory basket, even if it is just coins.
- If there is a special collection, tell your children where the money will go.
- Watch when the people carry up the bread and wine.
- Watch the priest prepare the altar with the chalice (cup) and ciborium (bowl for the bread which will become the Body of Christ).
- Explain that the priest prays that his sins be washed away just as the water cleans his hands.

Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy)

- Kneel as a family, but make sure everyone can see the altar. Little ones can stand next to you or sit (and bow) from half-kneeling lap.
- Explain that this is the “special part”, especially when the priest prays the words of Jesus and lifts up the Body and Blood of Christ.
- As the Body is elevated, whisper: “My Lord and my God.” As the Blood is elevated, whisper: “Jesus, have mercy.”

Communion

- Have your children process up with you.
- Teach them to fold their hands and make a reverent gesture (usually a profound bow) before you receive Our Lord.
- Make sure they don't take off back down the aisle; encourage them to walk calmly and quietly back to your pew.

Continued on the back cover.