



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

A Guide to Catholic Parenting: CATHOLIC PARENTS MENTOR PRAYER

Baptism makes priests of us all! The dictionary defines priest as “a person having authority to perform the sacred rites of a religion.” That definition refers to ministerial priesthood, conferred through the sacrament of Holy Orders. In a broader sense, though, all baptized persons share in the common priesthood of Christ. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains it this way:

“The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ’s mission as **priest, prophet, and king**. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are ‘consecrated to be ... a **holy priesthood**.’ (CCC # 1546)

Priests pray, lead others in the ways of prayer, and act as intermediaries between God and God’s people offering sacrifice, interceding for others, and teaching the ways of forgiveness and reconciliation. Every baptized person is anointed to serve as a priest – a “pray-er” (*one who prays*). A priestly person imitates Jesus the perfect pray-er.

Parents are the first to teach their children to pray in the multiple ways that Jesus prayed. Jesus prayed on the spot – spontaneously, in the midst of ordinary circumstances. For instance, at the tomb of Lazarus he prayed aloud (Jn. 11:41-42). Accepting a little boy’s generous gift of five loaves and two fish Jesus looked to the heavens and said a blessing (Mt. 14: 19) before he multiplied the food and fed the people. Scripture illustrates that Jesus also prayed in the synagogue, alone on a mountaintop, at meals with friends, at the Last Supper, within earshot of his apostles in the Garden of his agony, and from the Cross. He prayed formally and informally; vocally and mentally; in solitude and in common. He prayed long and short prayers. He prayed aloud and in silence. In all prayer Jesus united his mind and heart with God the Father. Prayer is merely conversation with the One who loves you more than you can believe!

Prayer-ways develop as we grow. For example:

- **simple sentences** – Jesus, tell me what you want me to do and I will do it.
- **aspirations** – “Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in you.”
- **formulas** – Our Father, Hail Mary, Act of Contrition, Acts of Faith, Hope, Love; the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Divine Mercy Chaplet . . .

- **poems** – “Oh Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God’s love commits me here. Ever this day be at my side to light, to guard, to rule, and to guide. Amen.”
- **songs/hymns** – Sing aloud or within your soul a favorite spiritual song like, the St. Francis Peace Prayer.
- **psalms** – There are 150 psalms in the Bible. My personal favorites are Psalms 8, 23, and 139. What are yours?
- **Visits to the Blessed Sacrament** – Pray “ACTS,” that is, devote time during the visit for Adoration, Contrition/Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication/Seeking.
- **Participation at Mass** – Cultivate attitudes of attention, reverence, and devotion. Provide prayer aides like a child’s prayer book, missal or missalette. Teach the technique of Gospel ABCs (Attitudes, Behaviors, Consequences). Provide an expired issue of a missalette. Encourage children to underline phrases within the Eucharistic Prayer that have particular meaning for them. Practice sacred etiquette for approaching and receiving Holy Communion. Teach the custom of making a Thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion.
- **Meditation** – Introduce children to meditation. Many prayer aides are available. My personal favorite is titled, *In My Heart Room*, a booklet of 21 guided meditations, written by Sister Mary Donze, ASC.

Parents teach prayer best via **personal example**. For instance, how powerful would it be for parent to respond, “I have to pray about that. I’ll give you an answer tomorrow.” Or, several days after learning a child’s concern saying, “I’ve been praying for xyz. How are things now?” Or, in the midst of a crisis, respectfully saying, “Passion of Christ, strengthen me.”

Teach through example that God is present and interested in us – always and everywhere – and that we may lift our hearts to God at any moment with the ease and familiarity of taking a breath!

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