



Feast of All Saints

What makes someone a saint? You have to dream big, do good, and love greatly. Saints are the heroes of the Catholic faith, men and women who—whether they have been canonized or not—provide us with an example of how to live as disciples of Christ. On November 1 we celebrate the Feast of All Saints. We remember the lives of ordinary men and women who loved God above all things. By their actions saints have shown us what matters most in life. The measure of a life lived for God is not what we earn or own, not the job we have, nor the people we know. What really matters is how much we love God, others, and ourselves, and how well we show that love in all we do. God calls each of us to be saints.

As parents you have an awesome responsibility: to form your child in the likeness of Christ, to foster good habits, and to nurture your child's natural inclination toward goodness. But you are not left on your own. The Church—in particular, the lives and examples of the saints—provide guidance on how to raise faith-filled kids.

- One of the great gifts of our Catholic tradition is the remembrance of and prayer with the saints. On All Saints Day we recall and pray with the saints. Make a point of celebrating Mass together as a family on this special feast day.
- Together as a family, name and tell the story of favorite saints. Prepare a list of some of the traits these people have in common, such as generosity, courage, and prayerfulness. Discuss how you might live like these saints at home, work, and school.
- Pray together as a family a Litany of the Saints. To pray the Litany of the Saints, the leader prays a saint's name, "Saint Elizabeth," and the rest of the family is invited to reply, "Pray for us." Take turns being the leader and the responders. Include in your list the saints and holy people you named in your discussion.





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Advent

Advent, which marks the beginning of the Church year, is a time for renewal. During Advent, we slow down and prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas. We also reflect on how Jesus is present among us in our daily lives. Finally, we prepare for the second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time.

The traditions of the season—Christmas carols, Advent wreaths, and Christmas trees—help us prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. One ancient tradition is the O Antiphons: seven responses, or antiphons, that are sung or recited during evening prayer from December 17 to December 23. Each begins with an invocation of the Messiah by a different name: O Wisdom (see Isaiah 11:2-3; 28:29), O Lord (see Isaiah 12:4-5; 33:22), O Root of Jesse (see Isaiah 11:1; 11:10), O Key of David (see Isaiah 9:6; 22:22), O Rising Sun (see Isaiah 9:1), O King of the Nations (see Isaiah 2:4; 9:5), and O Emmanuel (see Isaiah 7:14). Together, the O Antiphons express our longing for a savior.



Since Advent is a joyful time of preparation and hopeful expectation, help your child look forward to the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas by incorporating the ancient tradition of the O Antiphons into your family's Advent traditions. Try some of the following activities to get you started.

- As a family, write seven new O Antiphons that express the wonder of Advent. Write them down. Pray one of your new antiphons each morning (for example, "O Heart of the World, come to us"). Then pray one of the traditional O Antiphons in the evening.
- Choose a vivid image from each O Antiphon and have family members find an example or symbol of it (for example, a house key for O Key of David). Each evening light the candles of the Advent wreath, and then take turns placing your symbolic objects for that night's antiphon in the center of the wreath. Pray the antiphon together aloud.
- Give each family member a different O Antiphon. Have him or her come up with prayerful body language to accompany the antiphon. For example, hug each member of your family as you pray the O Wisdom antiphon. Each evening before prayer, spend time teaching and learning the motions. Then use the motions when praying the O Antiphons.



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Christmas

Sometimes the demands of preparing for Christmas can be such that we miss out on the joy of the season. While December 24 marks the end of the “holiday shopping season,” Christmas Eve is actually the beginning of the Christmas season in the Church. This is a special time of year to observe and share experiences with your child because he or she is beginning to learn more about the story of Jesus and the reason why we celebrate the birth of God’s Son.

Use this opportunity to draw your child’s attention to the many sights and traditions of the Christmas season and connect these moments to Jesus’ presence in our lives. After a simple meal, bring out some of your favorite snacks and gather near the Christmas tree. Turn off all the lights in the room except the lights on the Christmas tree. Get comfortable and cozy. Here are some ideas to spur conversation and togetherness.



- Take turns naming your favorite Christmas song and then sing it as a solo or together. If you enjoyed it, sing it again.
- Invite each person to point to a favorite ornament on the tree and tell why he or she likes it. If there’s a special story about how it came to be on your tree, share that memory.
- Tell your child about a favorite Christmas memory from your childhood. Be sure to tell lots of details about how it felt when you were that age. Share any special lessons and relate them to your child’s own experiences.
- Read aloud to the family. Pick a seasonal favorite such as Clement Moore’s *’Twas the Night Before Christmas*, or a picture book such as *Who’s That Knocking on Christmas Eve?* by Jan Brett or *Room for a Little One: A Christmas Tale* by Martin Waddell.
- Finish the reading with the following section from the Gospel of Luke 2:1–20, which tells about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.



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Feast of the Epiphany

On the Feast of the Epiphany, the Church recalls the visit of the Magi. In Matthew 2:1-12, we learn that the Magi arrived in Jerusalem from the East looking for Jesus, the newborn king of the Jews. They followed a star to Bethlehem, where they found the Holy Family. The Magi offered Jesus the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. While Scripture doesn't identify the Magi, tradition tells us that there were three who visited Jesus that night, and their names were Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. We celebrate their journey and their gifts on this feast. The word *epiphany* means “manifestation” or “showing forth.” The Feast of the Epiphany offers the perfect opportunity to share and appreciate one another’s gifts.



Every member of your family has gifts. Our families are places where we can discover, develop, and nurture these gifts.

- Like the Magi we are called to use our gifts—our time, our talent, and our treasure—at the service of one another. Discuss as a family ways you can share your gifts with others such as by volunteering, visiting the sick, or helping with projects at church or in your local community.
- In some cultures the Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated with cake, pastries, singing, and gift giving. Plan your own Epiphany party that includes any of the following activities and, of course, cake!



- Acknowledge people who are good role models. These are the people who let their light shine and lead others to Jesus. Make thank-you cards for these good role models using construction paper and markers.
- A Blessing of the Home is traditionally done on the Feast of the Epiphany. Bless each room of the house with this prayer or one of your own: “Lord, bless and guide each person who lives, eats, sleeps, and visits here.” If you have holy water, sprinkle each room as you pray. Conclude by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.



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Lent

Parents are busy people, and busy people usually don't like disruptions. We have our plans made and our schedules set. Then comes Lent. Lent is a season of interruptions, a disturber of complacency. It begins with Ash Wednesday, a day in which we bear upon our foreheads a sign that something different is happening to us. And it goes on for 40 days—a symbolic time echoing Moses' 40 years in the desert and Jesus' 40 days of preparation before beginning his public ministry. In Lent we take up practices that purposely disrupt our lives. We fast rather than feast. We add more prayer to our day. And we give to others rather than gather for ourselves.

Lent is a time to return to God with our whole heart. It's important to introduce your child to appropriate Lenten practices so that he or she will know the spiritual benefits of these sacred days of the Church year.

- Fast one evening a week from television and video games. Instead play board games, read uplifting books, or tell stories to your child about the spiritual heroes from your own childhood.
- Fast from criticizing family members, classmates, and coworkers. Instead seek the good in others, or hold your tongue.
- Begin each morning with prayer together, offering God all your “thoughts, works, joys, and sufferings of this day.”
- Teach your child to pray while washing his or her hands. Point out that the water, like God's grace, pours freely to help cleanse us and refresh us.
- With your child go through your closets and toy bins, and choose goods to donate to the St. Vincent de Paul Society or Goodwill.
- Give of your time together to visit a sick relative, neighbor, or fellow parishioner. Show your child how he or she can brighten the day of someone who is homebound.
- Have your child help you prepare a bag of nonperishable food and household supplies for a local food pantry or shelter.





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Holy Week and Easter

Holy Week is the time each year when we enter into the sacred mysteries of Jesus' suffering, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. The Church gathers to face the deepest questions that we have as human beings and to open our hearts to the lessons from the life and the example of Jesus. The events we observe this week are at the very heart of our faith and are the foundation on which we can build a life of faith for our families and ourselves.



The rituals and the retellings of the stories of our salvation are powerful. Participate in the Holy Week rites at your parish, and they will open up for you a sense of how these same sacred mysteries play out in our lives at home with our families.

- **Washing of the Feet:** A lot of what parents teach is conveyed by example. Jesus followed this model too, when he surprised his disciples by getting down on his knees and washing their feet. Think of the ways you serve your family by tending to their physical needs in feeding them, clothing them, and caring for them.
- **The Last Supper:** We celebrate the Last Supper on Holy Thursday. At this meal Jesus used the sharing of the bread and wine to make real his continuing presence with us and for us in the Eucharist. Think of all the meals you share with your family. How can you make them a source of real presence to one another and a point of awareness of God's presence in your home?
- **The Agony in the Garden:** Jesus agonized over the consequences he knew would come from his faithfulness to the Father's will. Think of the times you struggle with standing firm on doing what you know is best for your family. Know that you are not alone.
- **Jesus Is Put to Death:** Life in a family teaches us that there are many moments of dying to ourselves. We experience this when we choose to respect, honor, and serve the needs of others and not just our own.
- **Jesus Is Raised to New Life:** The reward for being faithful is new and abundant life. We experience that in families too, when we experience forgiveness, connection, joy, and hope.



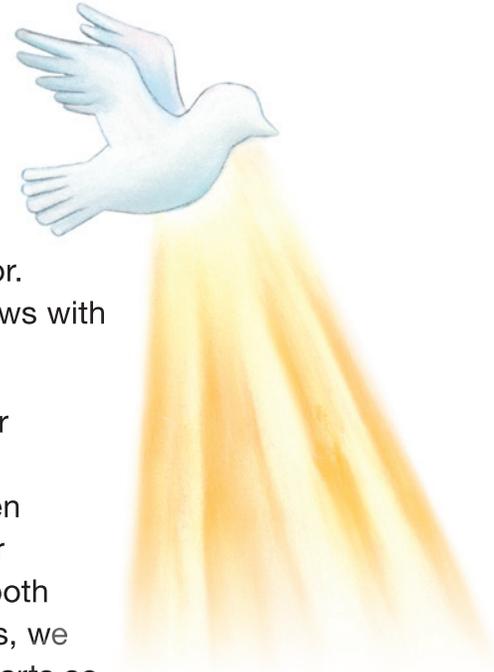


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Pentecost Sunday

The coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples at Pentecost marks the beginning of Christ's Church on earth. In the upper room, Jesus greets his fearful followers with the gift of peace. Then he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. Immediately they are changed. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples accept Christ's commission to go out and proclaim that Jesus, the Crucified One, is raised from the dead and revealed as Lord and Savior. Transformed, the disciples begin to share the Good News with the world.



Families are places of transformation too: when a father bandages his daughter's skinned knee, when a mother encourages her son to try out for the soccer team, when children help their parents discover patience they never knew; when a husband and wife rely on each other in both good and bad times. Within these grace-filled moments, we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit transforming our hearts so that we can live with others peacefully and love others greatly.



Find opportunities to experience and appreciate the Holy Spirit moving and working in the lives of your family members.

- Share a story of how you have experienced a change of heart. Talk about times you have felt the Holy Spirit working in your own life. Then guide your child to identify times when he or she has made a good choice or overcome a difficulty. Remind your child that he or she can always pray to the Holy Spirit for help.
- Give an example of a poor decision that someone might make. For example, a friend wants to invite another child to play ball with you, and you get mad. Then share a change-of-heart decision for that situation that would bring peace. For example, be a caring friend by welcoming all to your game.
- Discuss the power of forgiveness and how forgiveness brings peace. Practice with your child not only saying, "I'm sorry" for things done wrong, but model and encourage the response, "I forgive you."



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The Presentation of the Lord

The Gospel of Luke reports that when Jesus was 40 days old, Mary and Joseph presented him to God in the Temple at Jerusalem. (Luke 2:22-38) Upon their arrival they met a man named Simeon. Simeon was a venerable old man enlightened by the Holy Spirit, who spent his days in the Temple praying that he would live to see the Messiah. When he saw the Holy Family, Simeon immediately recognized, received, and blessed the infant Jesus as the Savior he had been waiting for.

As parents we naturally want what is best for our children. Like Simeon, who saw Jesus as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32), we hope our children will be lights in the world today. We strive to raise them as faith-filled people who recognize that God is with them not only in their joys, but also in their sorrows. We encourage them to know that God celebrates their successes and comforts them in their pain, and we model for them ways to be lights for others through good deeds and loving actions.

Find ways to encourage your child to recognize his or her own light and be a light for others.

- At Baptism children are given a candle to remind them, their parents and godparents, and the entire community that they are a light unto the world. Celebrate the Presentation of the Lord with your child by recalling his or her Baptism. You can prepare a special meal and light the baptismal candle (or other candles you keep for special occasions).
- Make a habit of saying grace before meals, thanking God for the special gifts your child has received—and the gifts each member has given to the family. Occasionally encourage those gathered at the meal to share what they admire and appreciate about one another, recognizing and affirming each person’s light.
- Talk with your child about how he or she can share Jesus’ light with others each day, such as giving someone an unexpected compliment, helping a family member with a chore, or freely sharing toys with a sibling.





The Birthday of Mary

The Bible does not address Mary's birth, but Tradition tells us that she was the daughter of Joachim and Anne. Tradition also tells us that Mary's parents took her to the Temple when she was very young. They cherished her and understood that she was special. Filled with gratitude for the gift of this child, they dedicated her to God and raised her to have great faith. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, her strong faith and trust allowed her to say yes to God's plan.

When we celebrate Mary's birth, we honor Jesus too. We remember that God has created each person with love and with a call to be something very special. While we cannot be certain what the future holds for our children, we do know that the life of each person has meaning and purpose. As parents we are tasked with the job of sharing God's love with our children and raising them with a foundation of faith so that they will be ready and able to say yes to God's plan for their own lives.

The Church celebrates Mary's birthday on September 8. Here are some ideas for you to celebrate Mary's birthday as a family.

- When you gather for dinner, say grace by praying the Hail Mary.
- Give your child a rosary, if he or she doesn't already have one. Pray a decade of the Rosary together.
- Gather as a family and tell stories of Mary found in Scripture: Joseph's dream about Mary being chosen as Jesus' mother (Matthew 1:18-25); the visitation of Mary with Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-55); Mary presenting Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22-38); Mary finding the boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52); and the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-12).
- Using colored paper, crayons, and markers, have the children make thank-you cards for their mothers, grandmothers, and godmothers.





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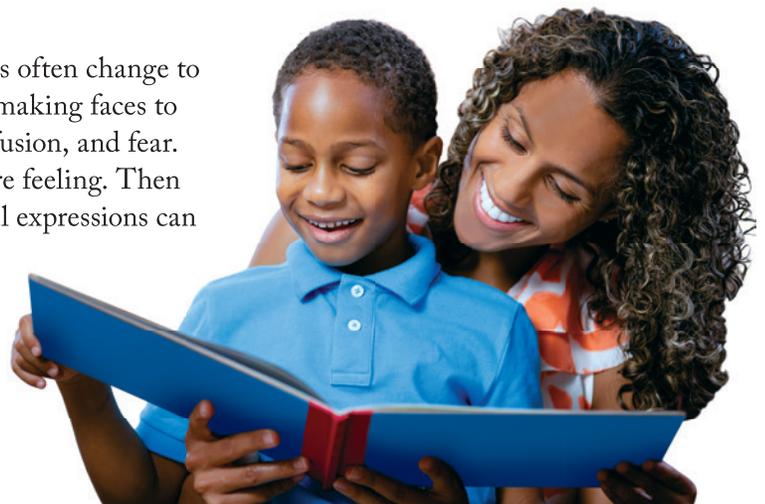
The Solemnity of Saint Joseph

We know very little about Saint Joseph. The Gospels only mention him in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. We are told that he was a distant descendant of King David, was from Bethlehem, and worked as a carpenter. We also know that Joseph had a deep and abiding faith in God. Like Mary, Joseph is visited by an angel and told of God's plan for Jesus' birth. The narratives reveal both his perplexity and his faith. He remains faithful and loyal in his betrothal to Mary, cares and protects her during their travel to Bethlehem, and demonstrates obedience in their flight into Egypt. Joseph was clearly attuned to God and dedicated to the care of his loved ones.

Joseph is also a good role model for parents; like him, we face complex decisions that affect our whole family. The virtues he demonstrates—honesty, faithfulness, and compassion—are virtues that will help us make good choices, both for our children and ourselves.

As parents we can imitate the virtues of Saint Joseph by helping our children develop a sense of empathy. Here are five ways to help your child “walk a mile in another’s shoes” and be aware of how others feel.

- Read a book with your child and ask him or her to imagine being one of the characters. Ask your child, “What would you do if you were there?”
- If you witness your child being cruel, stop him or her and review the situation together and imagine how the other person feels.
- Share situations from your life at work that called for empathy and compassion. Ask your child to do the same.
- Make it a clear expectation that sharing is an important part of life in your family.
- Teach your child how our expressions often change to reveal our feelings. Demonstrate by making faces to show sadness, happiness, anger, confusion, and fear. Invite your child to guess how you are feeling. Then explain that paying attention to facial expressions can help us better understand how our actions are affecting others.





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Feast of the Holy Family

The Feast of the Holy Family is celebrated each year usually on the Sunday after Christmas. It's good timing. With the birth of Jesus, a family was born too. But this day is not only for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. By entering creation as an infant, God made all families holy. And while it might be hard to visualize one's own family as holy amid all the comings and goings—the laundry and the dishes, the obligations of work and school, not to mention the inevitable power struggles, misunderstandings, and conflicts—it is true nevertheless. Families are indeed holy. The dictionary defines the word *holy* as “belonging to, derived from, or associated with a divine power.” That sounds like the definition of a family! Moreover, there is no better way to learn about ourselves, discover our weaknesses, and develop our strengths than in the sometimes calm and sometimes chaotic rhythms of family life. For this powerful spiritual workout, we can be truly grateful.



Look for opportunities within the daily routines and special times to strengthen the bonds of your family.

- In every argument see the opportunity for reconciliation. In every difficult family situation, see the opportunity to use your imagination and choose a new response. In every sickness see the opportunity to show compassion.
- Use birthdays as an opportunity to celebrate the unfathomably marvelous gift of life. See new experiences of your child as a chance to recall your own childhood with the awareness of God's grace.



- One of the ways families thrive is by having a clear identity. Have each family member choose a virtue or characteristic that describes your family as a whole. Create a symbol for each one and together design a crest that represents your highest ideals and aspirations as a family. Mount it where everyone can see.
- Be vigilant about keeping your family traditions. Through their elements of ritual and symbolism (however simple), traditions act as powerful ways to keep families working and striving together.



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Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels

Everyone has a guardian angel. Jesus refers to them when he says, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.” (Matthew 18:10) Angels are messengers from God. They are powerful spirits who guide us in the ways of God and intercede on our behalf. That every person has a guardian angel indicates how much God loves us all.

As parents we likely feel as if we assist our children’s guardian angels at times. We teach our children right from wrong, protect them from harm, and model mercy for them. There is certainly no denying that we constantly pray to God for their well-being and happiness. Knowing that God watches over our children through the intercession of his guardian angels gives us comfort. We can likewise rest assured that in our role as parents, our own guardian angels continue to work on our behalf as well.

- Guardian angels teach us the ways of God. They help us form our conscience so that we can tell right from wrong. Together, think of guidelines that will help your family live in harmony. Some guidelines might include “Every night after dinner we will help each other clean up,” or “Bedtime is 7:30 p.m. on school nights and 8:30 p.m. on weekends.”
- Invite each family member to draw a picture of his or her guardian angel. Under each picture write one of the guidelines your family developed in the previous activity. Post the guardian angels with their guidelines where everyone can see them.
- As a family, pray the Prayer to One’s Guardian Angel found on page 185. Consider making this part of your bedtime and/or morning routine. Remind family members that they can ask their guardian angel for protection and help whenever they feel worried or in need. Remind them that our guardian angels always see and hear God, so they can intercede for us.





Feast of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus

Perhaps no other saint offers a better example for families on how to live their Christian faith in the ordinary moments than that of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus. In her early life, Thérèse struggled to control her headstrong ways, but she never wavered in her desire and intention to give her whole self to Jesus. Thérèse aspired to travel the world as a missionary. However, her poor health set her upon another path, as a cloistered nun. Still, Thérèse struggled to find her place. Through much prayer she came to understand her mission as one of making the mundane acts of daily life into holy offerings. Saint Thérèse's simplicity attracts us because she puts holiness within our reach. "Everything is grace," she believed.

The "little way" of Saint Thérèse shows us that we can find God in every person and situation if we have an attitude of love. Try some of these ideas to help your family explore Saint Thérèse's Little Way.

- Saint Thérèse inspires us to forget ourselves in the service of others. We serve others by performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Gather as a family and think of ways you can perform a corporal work of mercy (feed the hungry, clothe the naked, bury the dead, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and the imprisoned, give alms to the poor).
- In the course of your day, make a point to offer up prayer for what might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, as you and your child run errands, point out a beautiful tree or bird and have your child pray with you, "Thank you, God, for the gift of that beautiful tree." Likewise model asking God's help when you are in need. If you and your child are stuck in traffic, you might offer a prayer aloud such as, "Please God, help me be patient and enjoy this moment as we wait."
- Tell your child that Saint Thérèse carried a string of beads in her pocket to count her sacrifices and good deeds throughout the day. Encourage your child to be aware of times when he or she could make such sacrifices and do good deeds, offering a prayer of thanks as they do.





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Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi

Most people focus on Saint Francis of Assisi through the lens of nature lover. He is portrayed in art surrounded by animals, whom he considered his brothers and sisters. This romantic image of Saint Francis, however, is incomplete. Francis loved creation because he loved God, and everything in creation reminded him of God in one way or another. When Francis looked at the sun, he thought of

God's radiance. When he saw the moon and stars, he thought of God's beauty. When he saw water, he thought of God's purity and simplicity. Seeing how the earth brought forth trees, flowers, and herbs, Francis thought of God's generosity.

Saint Francis was filled with wonder and awe. His example reminds us to live a life filled with the same. Francis loved nature because he saw in it God's handiwork: "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good." (Genesis 1:31)

Fortunately children come to awe naturally—the simplest things can fill them with excitement, wonder, and joy. Perhaps in the lessons of Saint Francis, it is the parents who can learn from the children.

You can help your child—and yourself—develop a sense of wonder and awe by literally living the lesson to "stop and smell the roses." Look for creative ways to nurture your child's natural sense of wonder.

- Take frequent walks together. Try visiting local parks or nature preserves. Foster a sense of imagination and encourage your child's creativity by inviting him or her to stop with you and investigate nature.
- Allow time for unstructured play. Encourage your child to be outdoors whenever possible.
- Expose your child to a variety of kinds of art and music. Visit a local museum and explore opportunities within your community to experience the arts. Check with the library for other offerings. Discuss with your child how our expressions of the arts represent the gifts God has given to each of us that we share with the world.





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Feast of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Elizabeth Ann Seton was born in 1774 to a life of comfort and wealth. Her path changed dramatically when her husband died of yellow fever. Elizabeth found herself a widow at age 29. While this alone would have been devastating, Elizabeth felt even more alone because her family and friends had abandoned her years earlier when she chose to convert to Catholicism. Elizabeth held tightly to her new faith and found within it the strength to carry on. She used her time and talents to open a Catholic boarding school for girls in Maryland. Women came to help in her mission, and the new school grew. Soon Elizabeth felt called to dedicate her life completely to God. Along with the other women, they began a community of religious sisters, who later became known as the Daughters of Charity.

Elizabeth's life reminds us that no matter what may happen to us, God will never leave us. Like Elizabeth, we are called to find good in difficult situations and to use our gifts to help those in need. We can begin to share these lessons early with our children.

- Have family members share one or two talents with which they feel God has blessed them. You may also wish to take turns naming a talent you see in one another. Then discuss ways each member can use his or her gifts to be of service to others.
- Share a story about a time when you felt alone and relied on God for strength. Pray together this prayer as a reminder that God is always with us: "Thank you, God, for always watching over me."
- Take turns teaching one another something new. Perhaps a family member has recently learned a new song or is particularly good at playing a game. Make a habit of sharing such special talents on a regular basis. Enjoy learning from each other.





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Feast of Saint Nicholas

The story of Saint Nicholas is full of suspense, intrigue, and mystery. Legend has it that a man with three daughters fell on hard times. With each passing day, the young women's prospects for marriage looked more and more bleak. Upon hearing of their plight, Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop of Myra, in what is now Turkey, secretly tossed a bag of gold into the girls' home on three consecutive nights. On the third night, the grateful father waited in hopes of learning the identity of this generous benefactor. But Nicholas outsmarted him by dropping the bag down the chimney. (We can see how the spirit of this generous man was adapted over time into the story of Santa Claus.)



History is full of stories of people who have been rescued from difficult circumstances. What makes this story so compelling is that the gifts were delivered in secret, under the cover of darkness. Nicholas's only desire was to be helpful, not to be recognized or thanked. And though his act of secret generosity eventually became known, people were inspired by his example to engage in secret acts of generosity and gift giving, even after his death. Saint Nicholas exemplified Jesus' advice, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret." (Matthew 6:3-4)

- In many cultures children celebrate the Feast of Saint Nicholas by putting their shoes near the front door on the evening of December 5 (the eve of his feast day). They wait in hope that the shoes will be secretly filled with treats during the night. Consider trying this tradition with your family.



- After sharing the story of Saint Nicholas, have each family member put his or her name on a slip of paper. Invite each person to secretly pick a name and do at least one secret good deed a day for that person during the following week.
- Think of someone your family knows who could use encouragement. Send a note saying that you are thinking of and praying for that person and sign it, "Your secret friends." Remember that person in your family prayers.



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Feast of Saint Bernadette

Bernadette Soubirous lived in Lourdes, France. When Bernadette was a child, Mary appeared to her in a cave where she was resting from work with her sisters. Mary asked her to return to the cave again. Though Bernadette's parents did not believe the story, they allowed her to go back. Mary told Bernadette to dig in the ground; she did, and a spring of healing water came forth. Today millions visit Lourdes every year. They go to the grotto where Mary told Bernadette to dig. They wash in the healing waters of the spring, hoping to be cured of their physical and spiritual sicknesses.



Bernadette obeyed Mary's request with a child's innocence. She went in faith even though the people closest to her doubted. Bernadette continued to show up again and again, willing and ready to do as Mary asked. As parents one of the most important things we can do is continue to show up and be a constant in the lives of our children. This means being present both with our bodies and our minds. In today's busy world, here are a few ideas to encourage all family members to show up for one another.

- Make an effort to share at least one meal a day together as a family. If dinner is not a possibility, try to schedule time together at breakfast.
- Set "no device" rules for your time together. Make sure you follow the rule as well. Ensure that everyone sets aside all phones and other technology so each family member is able to give his or her full attention to the others.
- Suggest questions to engage family members in discussion. For example, "If you knew that you could become the best in the world at any one skill, what would it be? Where would you most like to visit? What is one thing that makes you really happy?"





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Feast of Saint Valentine



A priest named Valentine lived in Rome in the third century. He was put in prison because he helped a group of Christians who were going to be executed by a cruel emperor named Claudius. While Valentine was in prison, he healed the chief warden's daughter, who was blind, and the warden and all his family became Christians. Tradition has it that while he was in prison, Valentine wrote letters to all his friends, telling them how much he loved them. From this story of sacrifice has evolved the holiday we celebrate by sharing our feelings of love and friendship to those closest to us.

As parents we show our love to our children in many ways each day. We shuttle them here and there, make sure they are fed and clothed, help with homework, and provide guidance and support as they navigate the trials and joys of growing up. It may not always be glorified work, but it carries the most wonderful return. God entrusts us with the care of our children. The love we give to them is an expression of God's love. Making sure they feel that love is our most important responsibility. Make a point of sharing expressions of love with your children and encourage them to show love to others.

- Invite family members to join hands when praying to show love for one another.
- Tell your child each morning and evening that you love him or her and that he or she is a gift from God.
- Remind your child to include others in games and activities when at school or playing with friends at home. Point out that making others feel welcome and included is a special way of showing love.
- Make a point of having your child call or visit grandparents and other close relatives regularly. Explain that staying in touch helps family members feel loved and remembered.





CELEBRATING FAITH

K
AGES 5-6

Feast of Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick is almost always associated with Ireland. However, he was actually born in either England or Scotland. It was only after being captured by pirates that Patrick was taken to Ireland as a slave. He was put to work watching sheep and cattle. Patrick had just enough food on which to live. When he wasn't working, he found rest in tiny huts that were damp and cold. During those years, Patrick began to pray. He knew that no matter how much he was suffering, God loved him. He began to practice patience. Eventually, Patrick escaped from slavery and returned to his family. But he heard a calling to return to the people of Ireland. While Patrick desired to do God's will, he again needed patience to see him through. It took 21 years to prepare for his mission, and 29 years of work in Ireland for the Church to take root. Patrick never gave up. He was a model of patience.

Patience is a virtue for anyone, but it is a necessary tool for parenting. Following the example of Saint Patrick can help us put some perspective on our task. Here are a few ways to practice and teach patience in our families.

- Ground your family in a strong relationship with God. Pray together regularly—at mealtimes, before bedtime, and at weekly Mass. Pray about real situations in your life. Say, “Let’s be quiet a moment and see if we can hear what God is telling us right now.”
- At times we become impatient because our attention is divided. When interacting with your child, focus your attention completely on him or her. Look your child in the eyes, listen to his or her thoughts and concerns, and do your best to be empathetic to his or her feelings.
- When your patience is wearing thin, take a moment to pray for patience. Then consider your situation and ask yourself how important this particular issue will be to you in one week, one month, one year, five years, or ten years. Sometimes a combination of prayer and perspective is a saving grace.





CELEBRATING FAITH

K
AGES 5-6

Feast of Saint Julie Billiard

Julie Billiard was born on July 12, 1751, in Cuvilly, France. When she was a child, God singled her out for the special work of spreading the Good News to his people. Teaching small children was dearest to Julie's heart. One day in 1774 someone fired a shot at her father. The bullet missed, but the traumatic event plunged Julie into a mysterious illness and she was immobilized by a debilitating paralysis. From her bed she continued to teach the village children, offering to prepare them for receiving First Holy Communion.

Julie attracted both children and adults, and soon some young women joined her to help continue her work. Julie founded the Institute of Notre Dame, a community of women dedicated mainly to the care and instruction of girls who were poor. Her spirit lives on in the sisters and in their work.



Saint Julie discovered her vocation—educating young children—early in life. When young children begin to realize that they are individuals apart from their mothers and fathers, they look for clues as to who they are. We as parents can help our children discover and recognize their true talents and gifts. Here are a few things you can do to help your children explore their interests. These interests may lead them to discover their vocation some day.

- When you see your child demonstrating a particular gift or talent, take time to talk one-on-one, eye-to-eye, and tell your child what you see; for example, “God has given you a real knack for numbers. You will have lots of opportunities to use that talent in your life to do good work and help others.”
- Encourage your child to explore a wide array of interests and experiences, including experiences that nurture his or her spiritual life.
- Welcome your child's interests, even though you might not understand or even appreciate them. Receive and celebrate the gift of who your child is rather than forcing your plans and expectations of who you would like your child to be.





CELEBRATING FAITH

K
AGES 5-6

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Mary appeared to Juan Diego, a 57-year-old Aztec man, in 1531. She was dressed as an Aztec woman to show her love and compassion to an oppressed group of people. Mary had heard the prayers and pain of these people, and she came to give them hope. Mary's visit to Guadalupe is a reminder that God will remember his mercy for all people. In Mary's song of joy, the *Magnificat*, she praised God because he has put down the mighty, exalted the lowly, filled the hungry, and sent the rich away empty. People honor Our Lady of Guadalupe because they recognize her motherly concern for them.



Our Lady of Guadalupe reminds us of Jesus' overriding desire "that all may be one." She helps us overcome the temptation to separate people into "us" and "them." Our Lady of Guadalupe inspires in us a desire and willingness to recognize our common humanity. In our role as parents, we are indispensable in sharing this message with our children. Below are some ways you can prepare your child to meet the challenges of the world with care, cooperation, unity, and friendship.



- Encourage your child to treat others with compassion, particularly those who are "on the outs" with the accepted crowd.
- When encountering people outside your normal circle of friends and family, make it a habit of focusing on similarities you share even as you appreciate the differences.
- Don't allow derogatory language in your home when talking about others. Speak of others with the respect due to them as beloved children of God.
- Open your home and your world to a wide variety of people. Associate with people of other cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Build honest relationships based on mutual interests and trust.



Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Mary is called the Mother of God because her Son, Jesus, was God. The importance of Mary as Mother of God lies not only in that Mary was the woman who gave birth to Jesus, but in that she was the one who had faith in God and freely said yes to participating in God's wonderful plan of salvation. In Mary was conceived the Savior of the world—God's Word became human in her and through her. Mary spent her whole life saying yes to God, never losing faith, even when her Son suffered and died. As Mother of God, Mary is also our Mother. She is the Mother of the Church because she leads believers to Jesus just as she did during her life on earth.

Mary is an example for Christians in how to follow Jesus. Through our actions, we set an example to show our children how to follow Jesus. God has already planted the seed of faith in our children. Below are some suggestions to help you nurture that faith.

- To honor Mary pray the Hail Mary together as a family. Young children learn through movement. Consider taking turns making up gestures for the prayer. Have each family member come up with a gesture for one line of the prayer. Teach each other the movements and then pray the prayer your family's own special way.
- After Mass spend some time together as a family looking for images and statues of Mary in your church. If your parish has a special prayer space devoted to the Blessed Mother, offer a prayer there together.
- Give your child a statue or picture of Mary to place in his or her room. Remind your child that Mary is also our Mother. She watches over us and takes our prayers to God.

