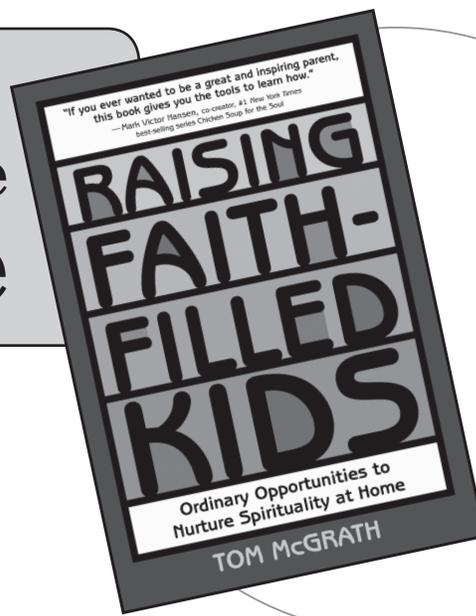


How Your Family Can Learn to Notice Sacred Time



Teach your children to start each day with prayers. A good prayer to teach them is a morning offering. I learned the following when growing up. A copy of this prayer was always on our bathroom mirror.

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day, for all the intentions of the Sacred Heart, in union with the holy Catholic Church throughout the world and the communion of saints.

Put a saint-of-the-day calendar on your breakfast table. You can buy a nice calendar with short entries about the saint whose feast is celebrated that day, or pick up a *Lives of the Saints* for families. Reading the passage of the day gives you the chance to teach your children important lessons about holy people whose example we can emulate, and it also conveys a sense that our days have meaning and worth.

Celebrate ethnic holidays and feasts—even if it's not your ethnic group. My German mother-in-law always made shamrock pancakes for her children on St. Patrick's Day. Everyone in my neighborhood goes to the St. Joseph's table—even if we're not Italian or Polish. The growing number of Hispanics in the U.S. is enriching our culture with traditional feasts for Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Charity, and Los Posadas. Light candles on the Feast of St. Lucy (December 13), patron of light and sight. Find out who the patron saint of your profession or nation of origin is and celebrate that feast day. There are countless ways to spice up the calendar year with special celebrations. They convey without words that all the days are special. The whole year is bathed in holiness.

Make birthdays special. Celebrating a person's birth is a central way to convey a sense of time's sacredness. Life can get hectic.

The point of celebrating is to convey how much you cherish this child, and straightforward and simple are usually better than elaborate, as expressed through "things." Find a time each birthday to sit together with your child and share a special message just from you. It might be about the day he or she was born, about how much you were looking forward to having this child. Or you can mention one or more traits of this child that bring you joy. If you do that early in the day, I'll bet the rest of the day goes well, no matter how many kids show up for the party.

Make more of your time in the car together. These days, parents may see more of their children in the car than in the home. Do yourself and your children a favor and abstain from asking questions in the car. Instead, sit and listen.

Your children may not talk to you—especially if they're with their friends. But you'll learn a lot anyway. Pretend you're the disinterested chauffeur, and you'll hear an earful.

But if you're alone with your children, let them take the initiative. You can ask something leading: "Have you got any questions about life that are on your mind?" Then sit back and listen. Your listening attitude can draw your children out. Children need and want to control the flow of information about themselves. We all do. The more listening you do, the more you'll find out, and the closer you'll become.

Create a quiet area or room in your house, a space where there is no TV noise or distraction. This area can be a place the kids do their homework, a spot where you can have a quiet and serious conversation or just daydream. With all the noise of modern life, times of relative quiet can indeed be sacred.

Celebrate the night before the first day of school. Whenever there are passages from one season to another or from one style of living to another, it's wise to mark these times with an appropriate celebration. The night before school begins can be an anxious time, and you can help your children get in the right frame of mind by accompanying them during this transition.

One idea is to set aside the night before school begins as story night. Each person has to tell at least one story from the previous year about him- or herself or about the family. Here is a chance to solidify connections and gather strength before beginning the adventure of a new school year. It gives everyone the chance to calm down and switch gears from summertime ways of living. Starting school is a big deal, and taking steps like this will help your children know that they are not alone.

Make Saturday night special. As the week segues from business-as-usual to the restful experience promised by observance of the Sabbath, mark this special time with your children by helping them switch gears. You can prepare your family to get more out of church by shaping what goes on in your home during the hours beforehand. There's no one set formula. Find a routine that works for you; then be faithful to it.