

*Introducing
Children*
TO THE
Sacraments

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A
PARENT'S
GUIDE

A REDEMPTORIST
PASTORAL PUBLICATION

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First edition

Introducing Children to the Sacraments

A Parent's Guide

A REDEMPTORIST PASTORAL PUBLICATION

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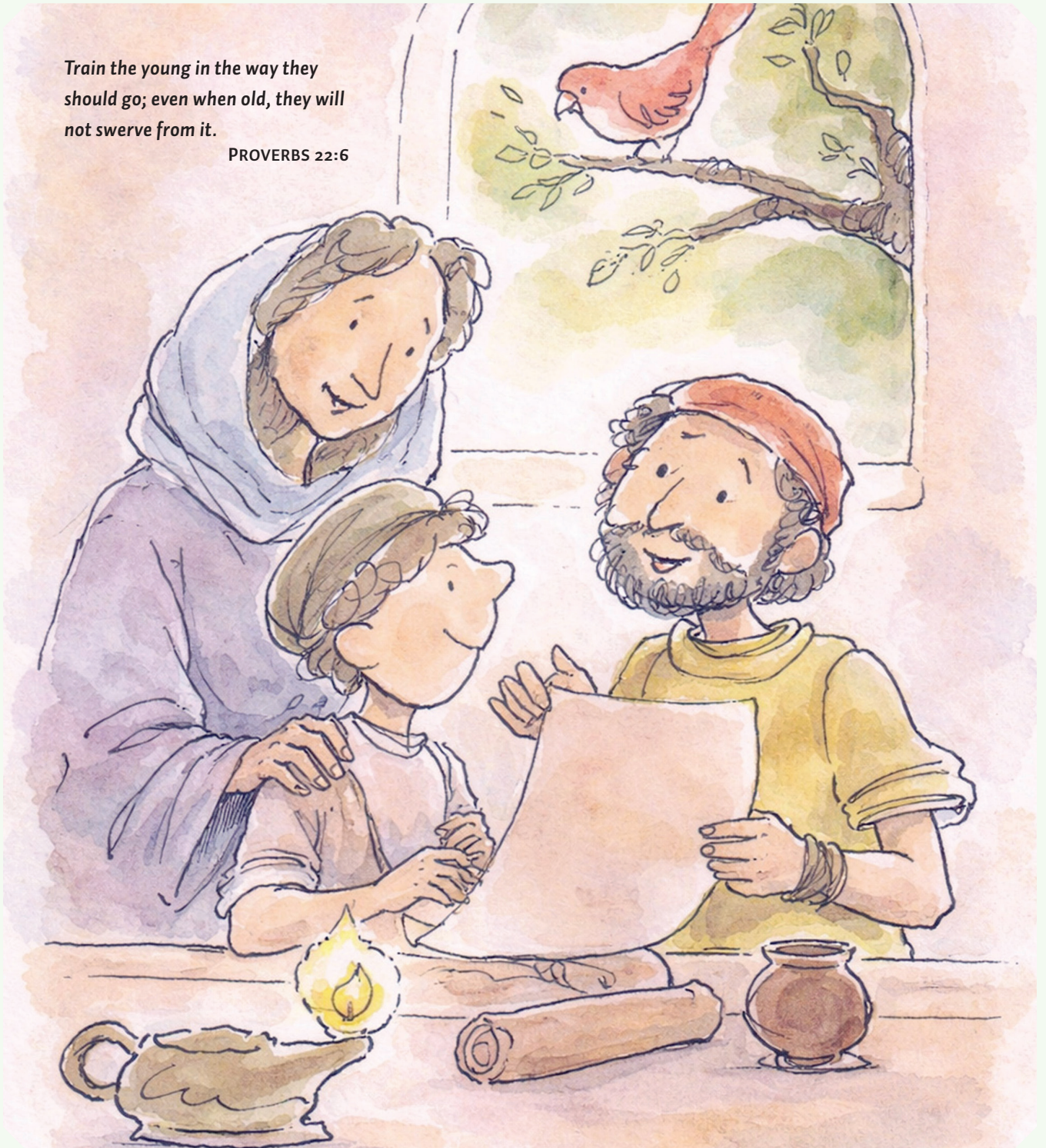
1

Faith Begins at Home

PARENTS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT CATECHISTS
OF THEIR CHILD

*Train the young in the way they
should go; even when old, they will
not swerve from it.*

PROVERBS 22:6



What Are Sacraments?

The word **sacrament** derives from Latin and indicates the visible though mysterious signs of grace that the Christian liturgy celebrates and that form the signposts on our journey of faith: baptism, reconciliation, Eucharist, confirmation, holy orders, marriage, and anointing of the sick. Christians, and especially Catholics, believe that God is known to us through these sacraments of our faith.

Catholics also believe that the seven sacraments are the most important signs of God in our world, but not the only ones. Signs of God's presence are everywhere, if we have eyes to see them. For example, we bless ourselves with holy water as we enter a church, recalling our baptism, and we make the sign of the cross as the celebration of Mass begins, remembering in whose name we gather. These are sacramental signs to remind us of God's presence. But Catholics also see the world outside as filled with signs of God's presence: the vastness of the ocean, the majesty of mountains, the joy of children at play. Each can speak to us of the character of God.

This understanding of the world as filled with signs of God is rooted in the Incarnation of Christ. **Incarnation** means “enfleshment,” the embodiment or personification of something. Jesus Christ is the original sacrament of God, from whom all the other sacraments and sacramentals flow. In the person of Jesus, God took on human flesh and nature. Just as Christ was both human and divine,

signs of God are earthly—simple things like bread, wine, or water—yet they hold real power. Thus, we do not treat holy (or blessed) water in the same way we treat the water that flows from our garden hose.

The Church of Home

In what is referred to as the “domestic Church,” “parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children” (**Lumen Gentium** [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], 11). Do you think of your home as a church? Christianity first took root not in grand basilicas, but in people's homes. The Holy Spirit seeks to dwell with us everywhere we are—most especially in our homes and families. It doesn't matter if your family doesn't look like other people's families. It doesn't matter if your family has financial trouble or is affected by tragedy or imperfect relationships. It doesn't matter if you don't have all the answers about your faith. God still wants to dwell with you—every day, in every way.

But how do we let God in? We let God in when we talk to God, when we pray alone and together, and when we turn to God in need and remind others to do the same. We let God in when we read and reflect on the Scriptures and study Church teaching (reading this book counts!), and when we enjoy and discuss the sort of media, art, and literature

that embraces Christian ideals and helps us conform our lives to Christ's. We let God in when we live the Church's preference for those in need through charity, service, and advocacy.





Most especially, we let God in when, as a family, we celebrate the Eucharist and live its grace every day. Studies have shown a correlation between the Mass attendance habits of parents and those of their teenage children, finding that the parents' model tends to set the kids' habits by age fourteen. But it's the parents' leadership in living the Eucharist all week—with a constant attitude of friendship for all and thanksgiving for God's gifts—that can solidify faith and its expression for their children as the young ones move into adulthood.

This lifelong continual celebration of the Eucharist, sustained by regular Mass attendance, is our pilgrimage home to God, which begins in the waters

of baptism for your child, just as it began for us all. That journey continues in the parish, where you participate in the Eucharist and the other sacraments. But it also continues in your home, where, by your example and teaching, your child will grow to love God as you do and keep God's word. For as Jesus told his disciples, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (John 14:23).

The importance of parents preparing their children for the sacraments is deeply rooted in both the theological and pastoral understanding of the Catholic Church. Here's a structured explanation of why this role is so vital.

Parents as Primary Educators of Faith

The Church teaches that **parents are the first and foremost educators of their children in the faith.** The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children” (CCC 2223). In preparing their children for the sacraments, parents:

- Model a living faith.
- Introduce their children to prayer, the Bible, and the life of the Church.
- Lay the foundation for lifelong discipleship.

Communal and familial: Sacraments are not isolated rituals but celebrations within the family of the Church. A child’s preparation is enriched when it is lived out within the family.

- **Baptism** calls parents to raise their child in the faith.
- **First reconciliation** and **first Eucharist** rely on a child’s understanding of forgiveness and Communion through family life.
- **Confirmation** is a strengthening of baptismal grace, ideally nurtured in a family context.

Authentic witness: Children learn best by example. Parents who actively participate in the sacraments, attend Mass, and live morally upright lives offer a credible witness, and:

- Faith becomes something lived, not just taught.
- The sacraments are seen as life-giving, not merely as requirements.

Spiritual bond and formation: Preparation for the sacraments offers a chance for spiritual bonding between parent and child, such as:

- Shared moments of prayer and reflection.
- Conversations about God, grace, forgiveness, and love.
- Growth in mutual faith and trust.

Sustained faith beyond the sacrament: Without parental involvement, there’s a risk that sacraments are viewed as “graduation” events. But, when parents are involved:

- Each sacrament becomes a beginning, not an end.
- Children are more likely to continue in their faith practice.

Support for the Church’s mission: The Church relies on families to build up the body of Christ. By preparing their children, parents:

- Strengthen the local parish community.
- Contribute to the evangelization and renewal of the Church.



Parental involvement in sacramental preparation is not just recommended—it is essential. It ensures that children receive the sacraments not only with understanding but also with faith, love, and a desire for continued growth in Christ. In preparing their children for the sacraments, parents fulfill their sacred vocation and help their children become mature members of the Church.

What the Popes Teach About Parents as Primary Faith Educators

Popes throughout modern Church history have consistently encouraged parents to be the primary educators and formators of their children in the faith, especially regarding preparation for the sacraments. Following are several key examples.

Pope St. John Paul II



Familiaris Consortio, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (November 1981): “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation

and realization of ecclesial communion...and should be called ‘the domestic Church’” (§21). He emphasizes that parents are the “first and foremost educators of their children” (§36), particularly in the spiritual life. He consistently taught that sacramental preparation should begin in the home.

Pope Benedict XVI



Address to the Participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family (December 2011): “The family is a source of...irreplaceable good for children...and a

vital community for the journey of the Church.” As such, “family is the privileged place of human and Christian education.” Benedict urged parishes to support families in their irreplaceable role of educating children for first Communion, first reconciliation, and confirmation.

Pope Francis



Amoris Laetitia, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family (March 2016): “The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic

churches.... ‘The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church’” (§87).

Francis spoke often of parents as the “first catechists” and called on them to actively participate in preparing children for the sacraments, especially through example and family prayer. In his general audiences and homilies, Pope Francis frequently encouraged parents not to “outsource” religious formation to parishes or schools, but to actively accompany their children in faith.

Pope Leo XIV



Message to Participants in the Evangelizing with the Families of Today and Tomorrow Seminar (June 2025): “The profound thirst for the infinite present in the heart

of every human being means that parents have the duty to make their children aware of the fatherhood of God.”

Key Themes Taught by the Popes

- Parents are the first and most important catechists.
- Home is the primary setting for faith formation.
- Parishes should support, not replace, parents in sacramental preparation.
- Family prayer and participation in the sacraments themselves (e.g., Sunday Mass) are essential.

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