

Getting Something Out of Mass while Caring for a Little One

It is common for Mass-going parents, exhausted and distracted by keeping their children quiet, to leave feeling completely uninspired or un-fed themselves! Don't worry, it's a phase. Here are some tips for being sure you meet your own spiritual needs:

Remember that just your being at Mass and caring for your little one is itself a prayer and a witness to others. Offer each Mass for a particular person/situation in need. Regardless of how you may feel, each time you receive Communion, you receive JESUS!

Read the Mass readings ahead of time, and reflect on them as you're driving—or folding laundry or mowing the grass. (Find them at www.usccb.org)

Try to claim one word or phrase from any part of the Mass as your own "food for thought" for the week. Talk about it with your spouse or a close friend.

If possible, take turns caring for the baby with your spouse or family member through the Mass. Try to really focus during your "breaks," so you each get a little quiet time.

During the week, follow a spiritual blog or join a moms' group for further enrichment in a more relaxed setting for you and baby.

One tough Sunday Mass with a little one doesn't mean you stop trying! We all have our days — adults and babies/toddlers alike! Next week will be a new start!

Some resources:

Online Articles:

"How to Take Young Children to Mass"
www.foryourmarriage.org

"Have Small Kids? 5 Tips to Helping You Make It Through Mass"
www.osv.com

"Taking Your Children to Mass: Why Bother?"
www.catholicmom.com

Sunday Readings:

www.usccb.org
Select "Daily Readings." Read or listen to the readings.
Watch a 3 minute video reflection.

"Church Books" for Infants/Toddlers:

A Missal for Toddlers (Magnificat/Ignatius Press)

I Know Jesus (By Matthew Kelly, Beacon Publishing)

Baby, Come to Church (By Virginia Esquinaldo, Pauline Kids)

Let There Be Light (By Archbishop Tutu, Zonderkidz)

Bringing Infants & Toddlers to Mass



Is it Worth the Bother?

There's a chance going to church with your little one seems a stress you'd just as soon not add to your list. Whether or not weekly Sunday Mass has been part of your life before, it may be something you want to consider as you start (or expand) your family. . . for these reasons:

- Giving your child the gift of a connection to God is something that will anchor and support him/her for life! And believe it or not, it's never too early to start building this solid foundation.
- Being a parent requires all the inner strength you can muster. Deepening your own connection with God will ensure you get the supernatural help you'll need.
- Plugging into a parish community can provide a network of support and like-minded friends.



A Few Basic Pointers

Make the conscious decision to make Mass part of your Sunday (no weekly debate) and then plan accordingly.

If you're not already registered at a parish, find a Catholic community and Mass time that feels right for you and register! (You can switch up the Mass time to fit your weekend's scheduling needs. Keep in mind the Saturday night option or even a different parish schedule when necessary.)



Most people love seeing little ones at church. If there are those who don't, consider it their problem, not yours! Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." (Mt. 19:14)

Remember that the end goal of bringing your child to Mass is to teach them to actively participate in it, not simply be quiet. This training begins even in infancy!

Little One How-To

Each child is different, and you will need to adapt as each grows and changes. But children learn repeated routines surprisingly early, so don't be afraid to bring your baby to Mass. You'll find a church routine that works for your family. Here are some ideas from other parents who have "been there and tried that":

- As a general rule, be sure your child is well-rested before Mass. However, you may find (if your child is able) a nap during Mass is convenient!
- Be sure your child is well-fed before Mass. However, again, you may find a bottle for an infant or a few Cheerios for a toddler help keep them busy. You can phase out the snack as your pre-schooler's attention expands.

"How-To's" Continued

- Sitting near the back may make you more comfortable with a baby. Give the front a try with your toddler. It may seem risky, but there will be lots for them to see. Don't feel compelled to sit in the "cry-room." They are often not conducive to teaching children how to participate at Mass.
- Dress your little one in their "Sunday best." Those around you can't stay mad at an irresistibly cute, if fussy, baby.
- Bring quiet toys (think soft and no squeaks/rattles etc.) and church books (why not make it an opportunity to learn Bible stories or the objects found in a church, etc.) You may find it helpful to designate a "church bag" that is always packed and ready with special books/toys.
- Especially for toddlers, be consistent with your expectations each week and communicate these with your spouse (or Grandma, whoever is helping) so there are clear rules.
- Some families adopt the "you must sit on my lap" rule until the child graduates to sitting on their own in a well-behaved manner. Shrieking toddlers may need to be taken to the back for correcting behavior, but always try to bring them back to the pew so they don't misbehave to *achieve* the greater "freedom" of the back or cry-room.
- Involve your little one as their abilities develop —sway with the music, make the sign of cross on them, bring them forward at Communion for a blessing, hold their hand at the Our Father, give them a sign of peace and encourage them to do the same to others, let them put the money in the collection basket, etc. Teach by your example of praying/singing/sitting/standing at the appropriate times.
- After Mass, allow accompanied, respectful exploration: climb to the altar, kneel by the Tabernacle, pray at a statue of Mary, dip into the Holy Water Font, etc. Help them feel at home and let them participate in the environment which itself teaches!
- Talk about church stuff at home too: make the sign of the cross at meals, read Bible books at story-time, etc.
- Make a point of attending social events at the parish so both you and your child will look forward to seeing befriended members of the community at Sunday Mass as well.

