



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

A Parent Guide for Table Etiquette – from the First Meal to the Last Supper EUCCHARISTIC TABLE

Etiquette – protocol, customs, and life-connecting skills – can be taught through multiple settings. Each issue of the 2013-14 *Parent Partnership Handbook* emphasized the etiquette associated with a particular kind of table: (1) the family dinner table, (2) the homework table, (3) the classroom table, (4) the school cafeteria table, (5) the party/social-guest table, and (6) the Eucharistic table. This newsletter focuses on **MASS ETIQUETTE**.

On Holy Thursday – the night before he died – Jesus invited his closest friends to share the Passover meal. It was during this Last Supper that Jesus gave us the gift of Eucharist; his body and blood to remain with us long after his death and resurrection. Jesus offers himself again and again whenever we gather at the altar table to celebrate Mass. Every Sunday (and at every Mass) we are guests at a Banquet. God is our Host. Jesus is the honoree, the victim and the priest. We come to worship God the Father, to receive Jesus into our bodies and souls, and with the power of his Spirit to take Jesus within us to a world in need of him.

Participation is key. Prepare the readings and responsorial psalm. What theme, question or words “pop out”? What in your life connects with them? Recall the events of the past week that need healing or evoke gratitude. Look to the week ahead. What joys, anxieties, needs exist? Prepare for the Eucharistic Prayer. When the celebrant refers to people who have died, name loved ones. When he prays for the living, name people and concerns. When he offers the bread and wine, imagine placing the events of the past week on the Paten and the unknowns of the week ahead in the Chalice. Offer your life with Jesus to the Father.

The proper etiquette for full participation at this sacred meal table involves participation with attention, reverence, and devotion. Consider the following suggestions as you teach your child the appropriate etiquette for Mass.

Prior to taking pre-school children to Mass the first time, introduce them to the Church via brief, ten-minute visits. Present church as a sacred space that is a privilege to visit.

1. Introduce youngsters to the custom of blessing themselves with holy water as a sign-reminder that they are about to enter a sacred space. Explain the sign of the cross.
2. Teach how to genuflect as a sign-reminder that they are in the court of the King. Pray: “Jesus, in the Blessed Sacrament, I adore you” or “O Sacrament most holy. O Sacrament divine. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.”
3. Let them examine the Stations of the Cross. Explain that they form a picture story of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on Good Friday. Pray: “We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.”
4. Visit the statues and the stain glass windows. Discuss the topics portrayed.

5. Let them touch the altar. Explain that at every Mass Jesus offers his life to God the Father just as he did on the cross of Good Friday. And so this altar of sacrifice is very sacred because Jesus repeats his sacrifice at every Mass.

6. On another visit explain that at the Last Supper on Holy Thursday Jesus told us that he would give us – and leave with us – his body and blood. Jesus does that when the priest says the sacred words of consecration. Jesus arranged to remain with us always through the miracle of the Eucharist. And so this altar is also a banquet table where Jesus invites us to eat his body and drink his blood.

7. Show them the tabernacle. Let them touch the door. Explain that the tabernacle is a sacred house where Jesus (in the form of a host) remains to welcome us anytime that we want to visit. Tell them that Jesus is always there

waiting for them and willing to listen and to guide them.

8. Let them explore the confessional. Explain that Jesus lets the priest help him to forgive us when we do wrong and are sorry and want to do better.

9. Visit the sacristy and explain that this is the room that stores the sacred objects and special clothing that are used for worshipping God.

10. Visit the baptismal font. Explain that it was in the Sacrament of Baptism that he/she became a child of God and a member of this Church. Connect that when we make the sign of the cross with holy water upon entering and leaving the church, we are reminding ourselves about our Baptism and the privileges of church membership.

Set the mood for Mass by remote preparation: Sufficient sleep/rest (“Prayer in the morning begins with the sleep of the night before”), nourishment, appropriate dress for the banquet of the King, prayer materials packed (offertory envelope, a missal or a resource booklet like *Magnifikid* or *Pflaum Gospel Weekly*. For pre-school children keep a “Mass totebag” that includes quiet items that are used *only* on Sunday in Church. For example, picture books of Bible history and Gospel stories, saints, religious accessories like scripture finger puppets, touch and feel books, lift the flap books ... “Families have a responsibility to participate in ways that do not disrupt those around them.” (Joel Schorn, USCatholic.org)

Establish a Pre-Mass Routine:

- Begin a one-hour fast from food, chewing gum or candy.
- Establish a routine that includes a non-agitated schedule, quiet atmosphere, activity restricted to reading while waiting for car departure and bathroom use.
- Arrive at least five minutes before the Mass time. Before going into Church review Church

etiquette and expectations. Give clear and concise directions about what behavior Jesus deserves. Assign seating positions and, perhaps, one-on-one responsibility for pre-school children.

- Mentally prepare to give Jesus a gift from the week, like a hurt that you will forgive, or a worry about a sick friend, or the joy from a success you experienced...

Foster participation at Mass that is characterized by attention, reverence and devotion. Make time to teach your children the following ten parts of the Mass. Then, before entering the Church for Sunday Mass, agree to pay close attention to one individual aspect. (1) It will give a focus for that day and (2) eventually the entire Mass will have personal meaning to each member of the family. (Suggestion: At the end of a liturgical season, collect the discarded missalettes from church. Use them for teaching purposes.)

1. **Introductory Rites** – Pray the responses aloud. From the first moment of the Mass be a participant; not an observer.

2. **Penitential Act** – Teach the need for sorrow and a firm purpose of change. Recite the words thoughtfully. Explain the gesture of striking the breast.

3. **Gloria** – Set the scene that we are in the palace of God before the throne of Jesus the King and these are the words we are using to give glory to him.

4. **Liturgy of the Word** – Pre-read before Mass but listen during Mass while the readings are proclaimed. Say the responses. Prior to the Gospel we pray and gesture: “May the Word of God be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart.” Listen carefully. Pay attention to the homily. From the Liturgy of the Word take a message for the week.

5. **Profession of Faith, the Creed** – The creed contains the basic teaching of the Catholic Church. Review the beliefs.

6. **Offertory/Presentation of Gifts** – While the altar servers “set the table” accustom children to contribute something to the collection for the poor. Explain that the gifts of water and wine and bread are gifts that we bring to the feast. When the words of Consecration are said, by a miracle of God, they will be changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus.

7. **Liturgy of the Eucharist** – Though there are several versions, in a missalette we find four Eucharistic Prayers. Help the children to familiarize themselves with the ideas expressed. Perhaps they can underline their favorite words/phrases. Pay attention to the words that the priest recites. Respond where appropriate. Be especially attentive during the consecration when the priest offers the paten of bread and the chalice of wine. Join Jesus in his sacrifice. Offer yourself with Jesus to do the will of God the Father. Proclaim “The Great Amen.”

8. **Communion Rite** – Reverently pray the Our Father, the responses, and the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei). Become familiar with the prayers so that they take on personal meaning. Approach the altar with deliberate respect and prayerful body language. With attention receive Jesus in Holy Communion in your cupped hand or on your tongue. Concentrate on Jesus as you return to your seat.

9. **Thanksgiving after Holy Communion** – Use the words of the hymn and silence time to speak with Jesus whose physical presence is within your body. Express your love, loyalty, needs and desires. Ask Jesus to shape your heart and actions. Witness to your love for him in the week that follows.

10. **The Concluding Rites** – Become familiar with the brief concluding prayers – all sending us to take the Mass with us wherever we go. Sing the recessional hymn. Let it’s message influence your day and week.

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