

TIPS FOR PARENTS

“How to make going to Sunday Mass with small children a good experience.”

Bringing small children to Sunday Mass can be a harrowing experience. The following tips are from parents, like you, who see the importance of bringing their children with them to Sunday Mass and who have found ways to make the experience less stressful.

1. Get an early start! The worst thing is to be rushing off to church at the last minute. Get up early, have breakfast together, be ready at least 15 minutes before you leave the house.
2. Talk to your child about what is going to happen at Mass. Ask him or her to look for one specific thing that will happen at Mass that morning. For example, “This morning I would like you to let me know when the priest reads from the Missal (or the big red book).” Kids will watch and wait for that part. If the child is older you can talk more about what that part of the Mass is. Point out parts of the Mass as it progresses.
3. Buy a picture book about the Mass and bring it to church with you and have your child look at it during Mass. You can point out the parts of the Mass to him or her from the pictures in the book.
4. SOFT TOYS ONLY! Nothing is more distracting to you or others than to have Hot Wheels racing over the pew or having children jingle keys or other noisy toys. Hard toys also ruin the finish on the pews as well as scratch the wood. Have a special bag of “church toys” that are only brought out at Sunday Mass. And no electronic games!
5. Put yourself in your child’s place. Imagine yourself three feet tall and standing in a pew with many adults standing in front of you. Sit close to the front or on the aisle so that your child can see what is going on.
6. A word about food: by all means bring something for a small child to eat **if they need it**, but nothing in a wrapper or cellophane bag as it makes too much noise. And remember to clean up any food spills. That is a common courtesy. Older children can go an hour without food or something to drink.
7. If your child is upset or unhappy, by all means get up and walk around with him or her. If you were in a place where you could not see or understand what was going on you might get a bit antsy as well. Don’t be embarrassed to get up and think of your child. As they get older you can insist they sit still for 45 minutes to an hour. God will not be upset if you get up and walk around or even if you have to leave. The south vestibule has speakers so you can go there and still hear the Mass.

8. Teach your child the responses and the songs. They will say or sing them if they know them. Even the smallest child can say or sing most of the acclamations, responses or sing the easy songs.
9. Be patient! God is patient with us; we should do the same with our children. The liturgy was not designed for children. At best even some adults have a difficult time focusing.
10. Teach your child that the church is a special place where God is present in a special way. In recent years many people seem to have lost the reverence that was once shown in church. Start right now to model reverent behaviour. Do you bless yourself with holy water when you come into the church? Do you genuflect or bow to the Blessed Sacrament present in the tabernacle? Do you spend a few moments in silent prayer before Mass begins? Or, do you come into Mass and ignore the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle and in the others present in the assembly until the opening song begins? Children pick up on our actions much more quickly than by what we say to them.
11. How much do YOU know about what happens at Mass? Educate yourself so that you can educate your children.
12. After Mass, talk about what happened, what they saw and what they liked. If they are old enough, talk about something the priest said at the homily, or about a song or specific prayer.
13. Play "Mass" at home. Have the child prepare a prayer altar in their room. Teach them to pray and pray with them.
14. Most of all, let your children be children. Remember the words of Jesus, "Let the little children come..."