

Mass is a time to share our story

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One of the 2014 Archdiocesan Synod priorities is understanding the Mass. Catholic Herald Family, working with the synod implementation evangelization and Sunday Mass pastoral priority team, is publishing a six-part series designed to help parents teach their children about the Mass. This second part focuses upon the Liturgy of the Word. Part one is available at www.catholic herald.org.



Whispers in The Pew

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When my son Paul was a toddler, his favorite book was “The Pig in the Pond.” It’s one of those books where each page complicates the plot by adding a farm animal and, of course, the sound it makes. The first time I read the book aloud; I mimicked the animal sounds with gusto and enhanced the experience by shouting and jumping at the appropriate times.

Paul was hooked, and I was doomed: from then on – no matter how exhausted I was or how many times I had read the book that evening – that story required hugely energetic noises and movements.

The way we share stories matters.

At every Mass, we share our story. The Liturgy of the Word invites us into Jewish Scripture, the Psalms, the letters of the apostles, and the Gospel.

Every Sunday reminds us of our universal human story: we are created tenderly by God, but we are not God.

Because we tend to sin, God lovingly sent his Son into the world to accompany us, teach us, suffer for us and save us.

This is our story. And the way we share it matters.

Like an organization with a powerful mission statement, our families thrive when we remember who we are and why we’re here. We need to hear our story again and again, infants, toddlers, children, adolescents, teens and all adults, from young to old. We need to share our story at home, at work, at play, and, in a special way, at Mass.

The Mass follows ancient traditions for sharing the Word of God. Recall, for example, the moment Jesus himself reads in the synagogue:

[Jesus] went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor....”

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him (Lk 4:16-18, 20).

Jesus reads from the Book of Isaiah. Right this minute, we can turn to Isaiah 61 in our modern Bibles and follow along with Jesus. When we bring our families to Mass each Sunday, we imitate Jesus, who practiced the regular habit of sharing our very same scriptures with his faith community.

When we join our voices in singing the Responsorial Psalm, we imitate Jesus again. The Gospel tells us Jesus sang Psalms with his disciples (Mk 14:26, Mt 26:30). Jesus sang! Can you imagine what his singing voice sounded like? Especially if you’re shy or not fond of singing, take a few moments to imagine Jesus singing with his disciples. Pay attention to how it feels when Jesus includes you in the ancient Hebrew song he sings with his friends.

Even though our families differ greatly, we share a common story. We are treasured, nourished, and saved by God.

Thanks be to God, we are free to read about our story in Scripture anywhere. But when we share our sacred story together at Mass, we imitate Jesus. We also encourage one another to keep living the story!

Just as "the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently" at Jesus, we become stronger as the family of God when we direct our gaze together at Jesus. We know he is always looking at us, with a heart full of love.

(Grace is director of children's ministry for the Apostleship of Prayer and author of "Pray with Me: Seven Simple Ways to Pray with Your Children" (Ave Maria Press). She and her husband, David, parents of five children, are members of St. Mary's Visitation Parish, Elm Grove. She can be contacted at gurbanski@apostleshipofprayer.org)

ACTION STEPS

- **Prepare!** Read some or all of the Sunday readings together as a family before Mass. Consider choosing favorite words or phrases to listen for during the Liturgy of the Word. Maybe even offer a fun prize to family members who choose a word the preacher highlights in the homily.
- **Practice!** Take a weekday field trip to church with your young children. In the empty pews, practice how to whisper and be still. Even a few minutes of practice will help Sundays feel calmer.
- **Reflect!** Set aside time to recall the readings later and to discuss the homily. You might be surprised at how many details family members can remember when they know a discussion will follow Mass.