

# GENERATION *to* GENERATION

## Nurturing the Faith in Our Homes

by Kimberly Hahn



“If I become a Catholic, will my children be believers?” That may sound like a strange question, but it was the agony of my heart as I considered accompanying Scott on his faith journey into the Catholic Church. I knew how to communicate my faith as a Protestant, but could I learn to share my faith as a Catholic with my children and would I be supported by Catholics around me?

The answer is a resounding YES!

The two most important tasks a parent faces in sharing the faith with a child—loving God wholeheartedly and teaching our children

to love God wholeheartedly—are brought into sharp focus in Deuteronomy 6:4–7: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is One Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

First, as parents, do we love God wholeheartedly? Do both of us have a vital relationship with Him? We cannot inspire our child to love God without showing him our love for God. We cannot give to a child what we are not receiving. So, are we loving the faith enough that we are living it?

Second, are we diligently teaching our child about the Lord? The verses mention teachable moments throughout the day where instruction in the faith flows naturally. For us to be diligent, we have to know the faith and believe it. We need both knowledge—the facts of the faith, and understanding—wisdom to know how to apply the faith to life. We also need the desire to share the faith throughout the day with our child.

From the moment we hold our child for the first time, we care for his physical needs. We feed him, clothe him, and clean him. Yet he has deeper needs than physical care—he has a soul that needs to be fed, clothed, and cleansed.

So, we head to the baptismal font. We bring him as a helpless infant and ask the Lord, through the ministry of the Church, to make him a child of God. We celebrate that, in Christ, he has the grace of divine sonship and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is not the end of our responsibility; it’s the beginning of a new stage of growth. The seeds of faith have been planted; now we must nurture this new life in Christ. And, by the grace of God, we can—because God desires to produce the fruit of godly offspring from



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married couples who are committed to Him (cf. Mal. 2:15).

A child is spiritually sensitive. He will respond when we tell him Bible stories, sing him songs about God, hold him at Mass and gently whisper what the parts of the Mass mean, or pray a blessing over him before bed (sometimes with holy water). A child understands the love of God through our love for him—we mediate God's grace to him. Then, as our child matures, we witness the signs of God the Father directly touching his life.

### Tips for Nurturing the Faith

Here are some of the ways in which our family has nurtured the life of the faith in our home:

#### *Morning Prayer*

Our family has a time of reflection and prayer on school mornings that includes reciting a morning offering, reading the Gospel for the day, reading about the saint of the day, and choosing a country for a prayer intention. This usually takes 30-45 minutes.

During Lent we add an element of journaling about the Gospel. This is a step that has been very meaningful. I take our five-year-old to another room to discuss the Gospel while our two older sons and Scott write out some thoughts in their journals. After ten minutes, we share our thoughts, from youngest to oldest. We all gain from the insights and reflections of each other, drawing on related Scripture passages and giving applications for the day. We close our time with extemporaneous prayers, beginning with the smallest child. As soon as a child can imitate a simply worded prayer, he echoes a parent during family prayers.

#### *Daily Mass*

Our Gospel reflection prepares us for Mass, since we have already spent time thinking about the passage. Though it may be easier to go alone to Mass, we prefer to take our young children as often as possible so they get a sense of awe and wonder at the mystery of the Mass. (Shorter daily Masses help us train young ones to be still for longer Sunday Masses.) Frequent attendance at

Mass, though not obligatory, demonstrates to our children the priority we give to being with Jesus in the midst of our busy day. This provides a rhythm of receiving Our Lord and giving ourselves back to Him, and it deepens our children's desire to prepare for and to receive their First Holy Communion.

#### *Prayer Throughout the Day*

If we are attentive, opportunities to pray come throughout the day—before meals, in the car for safety, or when needs arise (for instance, in response to a phone call telling us someone is mis-carrying). Even a child under two can signal the family that a siren is sounding so that the family can pause to pray for whoever is in need. After dinner, we shift to more comfortable seats and pray a Rosary together, taking turns leading the decades.

#### *Studying Scripture*

We encourage memorizing God's Word. Psalm 119:9, 11 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Thy Word. . . . I have laid up Thy Word in my heart that I might not sin against Thee." When our children memorize Scripture, they strengthen their heart against temptation, and they increase the possibility of meditating on God's Word in a fruitful, life-giving way (cf. Ps. 1). Though this might be a more common practice among non-Catholics, there is no reason why Catholics can't or shouldn't memorize Scripture. We even offer our children extra time playing on the computer if they can recall a verse for three days in a row!

#### *Learning Generosity*

We foster generosity in our children. As soon as they have a ten-cent allowance, we tell them that a penny goes to God in the offering basket on Sunday. Once they work on a budget at age eight, we help them figure out ten percent for their tithe. We also encourage them to be active in altar service, a choir, or an apostolate so that they are offering their time and talents, as well as their money, to God. We know that none of us can out-give God; as our children are generous with

God, they will experience the generosity of God back to them in many ways.

### *Participating in the Life of the Church*

We observe the cycle of fasting and feasting according to the liturgical calendar in our home. We develop traditions for the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent in preparation for the feasts of Christmas and Easter. We celebrate Holy Days in special ways and the patron saint feast days and baptismal anniversaries for each person. Even our older children who attend college join us most Sundays for a special feast, using china and silver, to highlight the first-day-of-the-week observance of our Lord's Resurrection.

#### *Guarding Our Speech*

Since we want to plant the seeds of faith rather than the weeds of cynicism, we will not speak negatively about priests or bishops. If there are problems we as adults need to address, we do so privately. We do not want to encourage—within our children or ourselves—a judgmental spirit toward those in spiritual authority over us. As St. Paul said, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8).

The treasures Scott and I have received from the Catholic Church are the riches we now offer our children, including sacramental graces, the deposit of the faith, and so much more. All of our children know and love the Lord, and they challenge us to a deeper love for God as well. With the psalmist we proclaim, "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations." (Ps. 100:5)

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*Kimberly Hahn is a homeschooling mother as well as a renowned author and lecturer. She is coauthor of Catholic Education: Homeward Bound: A Useful Guide to Catholic Homeschooling. To order this title or other books by Kimberly Hahn, call Benedictus Books toll-free at (888) 316-2460.*