

“Let the Children Come to Me”

By Julian & Carolyn Robinson

Mass with little children is just about the least spiritually enriching thing I can think of. Between sibling squabbles, pew-bumped heads, misbehavior due to your children knowing you can't yell at them IN a church, and missing every other word of the homily through distraction, it hardly seems worth the Herculean effort. So, why not just avoid the added stress and give up? Well, as we have learned through trial and error, bringing our 3 kids to Mass has turned into being the main source of grace in our week.



Sure, it's not easy. Good things rarely are. But try to remind yourself that kids are only going to learn how to behave in Mass...by going to Mass and practicing! They need to see how others, and you, take Mass seriously. The first tip we have is to *just go*. You may not have it all figured out yet, but you know your children best. If it seems like they need a break, take them in the back to look at the statues or stained glass windows. Noticing the beauty around you in the church will also help you to appreciate all the little details that are there to point our attention back to God.

Sit up front. Sitting and staring at the back of someone's head can get boring pretty quickly. But when a little one can actually see what is happening in front of them, they notice so much more and start wondering about what is happening and why. Our toddler loves to point to the crucifix, and then Mary, and then Joseph over and over again as I whisper their names in her ear. It also is a short jog out the door in case anyone is becoming inconsolable!

Try to *read the readings before Mass*. This has been one of the most helpful things for us. We no longer feel as if we missed half the Mass if we are distracted during the readings. If a kid needs to go to the bathroom, you've already heard the readings once. And if by some miracle, you do end up hearing them again, sometimes something different stands out to you that you missed before! While you're in the habit of preparing yourself for Mass, why not have your children pick an intention for which they will pray at that Mass. This practice helps them realize there is a purpose to Mass and they have the ability to be involved in it. You can gently remind them of their intention before or after communion and they can join you in prayer. As an added bonus, they usually have some pretty adorable intentions which tend to remind you what's truly important in life.

This next tip is totally up to you, but we have found it to be helpful. It may sound counterintuitive, but our rule is *no snacks in church*. We have tried it both ways. Every time we have brought a snack, there ends up being fights over who got more, some dramatic spills, and crushed up goldfish on the floor that have to be cleaned up. Your children can survive one hour without food or drink. I promise. Plus, there is the added bonus that you can promise a special treat like a donut after Mass in exchange for good behavior. Or, even better, go have a family breakfast together after Mass!

Lastly, remember why you are there: to *worship God and encounter Jesus in the Eucharist*. The music is pretty. The community is great. The homily may or may not speak to you on a personal level. But all of that pales in comparison to the gift you are there to receive. So, if you end up being unable to hear the homily, or someone glares at you because your kid is crying, remember that those things are ancillary. You have received the grace that enables you to go forth and live a life of virtue and handle the ups and downs that will inevitably come that week.