

WHAT MAKES FOR A GREAT DAD

It is indeed a very great privilege and a huge responsibility to be a Catholic dad. Dads, along with their wives, have been called by God to raise their children to know and love God and prepare them for lives as Catholic women and men. All dads, as well as moms, deserve a pat on the back for all the good work they do in raising their children in the Faith. In the following few points for consideration you, dads, will see some things you are already doing and others will serve as reminders of how to be an even better and more effective Catholic dad. Pick at least a few of them that will help make a big difference for your family.

Keeping priorities straight



It primarily rests on dads to keep priorities straight. In too many families, mom is the “Keeper of the Faith”. She gets the family organized, etc. for Sunday morning Mass. But this cannot be good enough for dads. The children are watching and they will eventually do what you, dads, do. They are watching if dad is putting “Mass” in a secondary position. They are watching if dad is restless or not paying attention to the homily. The good news is they are also watching when dad is doing the right thing. Our kids notice when we have our priorities straight -- when we sing, when we pray and when we actively participate with our faith community.

Solid rock-like example



If we want our children to have their own personal faith life, then dads will be very involved in teaching them:

- the beauty and goodness of God in all of creation
- the presence of God in the most ordinary daily events
- God always at work in and through His faithful followers

Dads, of course, need to nurture their own faith in order to be able to teach it. That would mean regular personal prayer themselves, some Scripture study, some good spiritual reading and possibly some active involvement in the Church community. Faith is learned best by example. It requires surrendering to God. The best way to raise children to have an unshakable faith in God is to show them they can trust and believe unconditionally – like their dads do.

Forgiveness



The Catholic faith is unique in many ways. One particular unique aspect about the Catholic faith is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Few, if any, other traditions require that sinners confess sins aloud. Our Catholic faith teaches us to be accountable as well as reminding us of God’s bottomless well of forgiveness. These are great lessons to teach our children. Catholic dads have the responsibility not only of receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation but also dads are required to admit to their children when

they are wrong and to ask forgiveness when they mess up. They need to show their children that their dad and mom forgive and ask forgiveness of each other on a regular basis. This reminds all – children and parents – that mistakes are allowed. All, including dads, are fully human and mistakes are fully expected as part of the faith journey.

The generosity factor



Generosity is a big value in all religions and this is certainly true for the Catholic faith. We ought never have to negotiate generosity. It has to be the norm for our family life – no matter what the circumstances. This is a behavior dads can especially model if they are to expect their children to learn compassion. When family, or friends, or neighbors or Church ask for help, identify what you enjoy, or what you are best at, or what you can do and pitch in. Let your children see you giving and talk with them about why you give and why giving is so important and an essential quality for good family living.

Have fun



Too many of us make the mistake of expecting our children to have an adult's maturity and sophisticated approach to our faith. It would be much better to allow our children to experience the beauty of the Catholic faith on their terms or level. Try to use play, story and song in allowing Scripture and tradition to break open for the youngest of our community. That's why we have Vacation Bible School, Children's Masses, Religious Education classes and other children's Liturgy of the Word. You can even use character voices when reading Bible stories to your children. You might even re-sing at least the upbeat songs you sang at Mass when driving home. If we all truly believe we are created in God's image, then surely laughter and light-heartedness can enrich our faith as well.

Be seen praying



† Many children do not know if dad prays or not! If he does they do not see it. Get "caught" praying. The child should see you have a personal ongoing relationship with God. Then pray with your children – at mealtime, with the family, at bed time or on any and all special occasions such as birthdays. Praying with someone is a very intimate act. With your wife, try to develop a little outline to follow for daily family prayer. Keep it simple. It is usually not the time for family discussions. Include prayers the children know (should know), also prayers of thanks and a prayer of sorrow for sin, special prayers of petition for family needs or friends' needs. When you have family prayer it teaches the children that we are all in an ongoing relationship with God. And our prayer with God requires us not only to talk to Him but also to listen to Him.

Integrity

We need to be able to show our children how poor choices made by popular public figures go against our values as Catholics. Some of these public figures – such as actors/actresses, singers, athletes, etc. – may have a big following among our youth. And so Catholic parents may appear to be very “uncool” when they try to use a major gaffe by a popular “star” as a teachable moment to demonstrate to our children our Catholic values. Parents can teach their children, using popular stars’ poor choices, that actions have consequences. These are the moments that separate real dads from the boys in the whole area of fatherhood. It shows dad as a real parent rather than just a playmate. These are the times that we not only teach what the word “integrity” means but we show our children that we have integrity.

Celebrate our gifts



Most of us are very familiar with great athletes who, after scoring a touchdown, or winning an Olympic medal, or scoring a goal in the World Cup, praise Jesus for their success. It is good to thank God for outstanding talent. We need to be careful lest that allows us to feel that our gifts fall somewhat short. It is so important to remind our children that – whatever their gifts are – they are created in God’s image and so they have gifts. Their gifts need to be recognized, developed, celebrated and used for their own good, the good of the family and the good of the community. A gift for spelling, or singing, or math, or art is no less worthy of praise and recognition than the gift of a 95 MPH fast ball. Put achievements on the fridge door. Encourage the children to use their gift, such as play the piano or guitar, when friends are over or at parties. Invite their grandparents to the school play. Find ways for your children to use their gifts in the ways they are most comfortable.

Tradition



We Catholics hold on to much “tradition” that other religions just don’t understand. Ashes on our foreheads; the Hail Mary and a statue or picture of Our Lady in most of our homes; Rosaries; the Communion of Saints; Novenas; Holy Water; Scapulars, etc. These “Sacramentals” are also what makes us uniquely Catholic. They give us comfort. They grow our personal faith journeys. They are very much worth preserving. Passing on the full meaning of these rituals to our children – not just by rote, but by practice – teaches them that being Catholic means that they are a living part of deep and long-held traditions. And it teaches them that, as Catholics, they will never be alone.