



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

EXPLORING ORDINARY TIME

As parent, you wear so many hats—chef, sports coach, Scout leader, homework mentor, taxi driver, calendar secretary, referee, party planner, and many others—every day. Though each is an important service of love, your primary role as a Christian parent is to be an evangelizer to your family. You are the one to transmit a sense of the sacred, knowledge of God, and formation in faith and morals that go beyond current societal trends. Each of your hats provides a context to witness to Jesus in the midst of ordinariness. Additionally, your role as primary evangelizer challenges you to create family spiritual heritage formally and informally through sacred space, sacred time, and sacred practices. Soul formation has always been the responsibility of parents but especially so in a society marked by materialism; moral relativism; isolationism; destructiveness; rugged individualism; and a culture of sex, drugs, and violence. This newsletter suggests that a way to combat the negativism present in society is to explore possibilities for family spiritual formation within the context of the liturgical season of the Church year called ORDINARY TIME.

ORDINARY TIME

In the course of a year the Church celebrates the whole mystery of Christ: birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, promised return, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The liturgical cycle suggests a rhythm of Christian prayer that leads to Easter and flows from it. Easter is the central and most solemn feast of the year.

Beginning with the first Sunday of Advent, the liturgical year is broken into seasons: Advent, Christmastime, Lent, and Eastertime. Weeks numbered 1 through 34 occur between the sacred seasons: (1) from Epiphany and the Baptism of Jesus to Ash Wednesday, and (2) between Pentecost and the first Sunday of Advent. The numbered weeks are named *ordinary* since the root of the word means “ordered” or “numbered.”

Most of the liturgical year (65%) is **Ordinary Time**. Doesn't that seem just like life? Peaks and valleys occur and grab our attention because they are unique but also because they emerge from a background that is routine, normal, usual, or average. Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter receive the focus of our energy in brief periods, while Ordinary Time calls us to faithfulness in the commonplace, to pay attention to how we live God's Word every day. Though the 34 weeks of Ordinary Time do include some solemnities and major feast days, the season for the most part is one of quiet faithfulness. I like to think of it as the “back to the basics” season, a time marked by consistency and constancy in love of God, family, and neighbor, as well

as fidelity to spiritual practices that keep the eyes of the soul focused on God. The remainder of this newsletter suggests practices that contribute to spiritual formation by raising awareness of God.

ENVIRONMENT – Use the surroundings or conditions of daily living to influence a sense of the sacred. For example:

- Establish a prayer center where it will most likely be a focus, e.g. window sill, tiered corner shelving, coffee table, top of family TV. Include a Bible, an image of Mary, a rosary, and inspirational reading material. Perhaps subscribe to Magnificat (www.magnificat.net), which provides the liturgical calendar; morning, evening, and night prayers; Mass readings; saints' biographies; inspirational articles; and seasonal litanies). Include a prayer dish, i.e., container with a lid where family members can place names and intentions for prayer. At family prayer, perhaps at a meal or at bedtime, pray “for those for whom we have promised to pray and whose needs are in our prayer dish.” Regularly review the contents and do spiritual housecleaning.

- Make permanent sacred space on the meal table with a centerpiece of the liturgical color green. Arrange symbols of Ordinary Time, e.g. a thought-a-day calendar, a miniature easel to hold a focus picture/quotation/symbol, and representations of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost time (the second season of Ordinary Time). Change symbols for solemnities, e.g. a picture of

the Sacred Heart, a crown for Christ the King, or a crucifix for the Triumph of the Cross.

- Hang a crucifix in every bedroom and major rooms.
- Hang a banner of your family motto above the entrance a common room, i.e., “Do whatever he tells you,” “That Christ may reign!” or “Love one another as I have loved you.”

FAMILY CUSTOMS – Establish habitual practices to influence a sense of the sacred. For example:

- The Jewish custom of touching a mezuzah on the doorpost and praying the Shema (Deut. 6: 4-5) can be adapted with a small crucifix or sacred image on the door frame. Teach your children to touch it and pray a one-sentence aspiration/mantra every time they pass it.
- Start family meals with the question, “What is one way that you experienced God today or one way that you needed God’s help?”
- Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. Plan an annual celebration of baptismal anniversaries. Choose a gift of the Holy Spirit that you will pray for throughout Ordinary Time, i.e., wisdom, reverence, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, understanding, and fear of the Lord. At each family meal pick a fruit of the Holy Spirit that you will each practice until the next family meal when you share reports and pick a new fruit to practice, i.e., charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, long suffering, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and self-restraint.

RITUALS – Develop spiritual practices or behaviors that are repeated so regularly that they become second nature and expected. For example:

- First greeting of the day: “Good morning, Dominic. You are a gift from God.” Dominic responds, “And everything God makes is good.”
- Bedtime blessing: “Goodnight and God bless you, Breanna. May God watch over you and keep you. And may you grow up to be a good and healthy girl.”
- Leaving the house: Mark your child’s forehead with a sign of the cross and say, “May God bless and keep you and bring you home safely to me.”
- Family formula for grace before and after meals.

FAMILY EUCHARIST AND SACRAMENTS – Create family spiritual practices and special occasions for worship that become family events. For example:

- Make it a habit to discuss the Sunday Gospel.
- Teach the spiritual practice of placing onto the paten the hopes, fears, prayer concerns, and intentions of each family member. Like grains of wheat they become the bread/host which, after Consecration, becomes the Body of Christ. We can be confident that Christ will feed our needs and help us to feed each other.
- Teach the spiritual practice of placing into the chalice hurts, sorrows, sins, and regrets. Like grapes they become the wine which, after Consecration, becomes the Blood of Christ. We will be strengthened to forgive, seek pardon, make reparation, and begin a new week.
- Honor the Triumph of the Cross (Sept. 14) with Mass in the morning. At home remove the family crucifix from the wall. Pray, “We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you; because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.” Each take a turn to give a physical expression of reverence and then re-enthroned the crucifix.
- Make a family celebration of Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday in Ordinary Time. Receive the sacrament of Reconciliation; celebrate Mass; enjoy a special King’s breakfast, brunch or dinner; re-consecrate your family to the service of Jesus, the Servant King; and do a family service project, e.g volunteering at a food kitchen, nursing home, or woman’s shelter.

PERSONAL EXAMPLE – Be conscious that your children learn more from what you do than from what you say.

- Let your spirituality show through verbal aspirations or mantras like “Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in you,” “All will be well,” “This, too, shall pass,” “God knows; God cares,” “Leave it in the hands of the Lord,” and “All things work together for good.”
- Be comfortable in turning toward the crucifix or lifting a crucifix on your neck chain and speaking aloud, i.e., “Lord, increase my patience now,” “Bless Julian, Lord, with persistence in this project,” “Oh, show me the way, Lord.”
- Similarly, speak to Mary, “Mary, you’re looking at a mother who needs help!” and to St. Joseph, “Joseph, tell me how you would handle this.”

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