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A CATHOLIC READER
HOPE, TIPS, PRAYERS & MORE
IN AN ERA OF
SOCIAL-DISTANCING



Catholic Answers

Living the Faith Without the Sacraments: Some Ideas for Living out Our Faith in an Era of Social Distancing

By Michelle Arnold

Churches are closing, Masses are being canceled, bishops are dispensing the faithful from the Sunday obligation, priests are becoming increasingly unavailable for confession and anointing of the sick. This year, the Holy Week liturgies will be celebrated in Rome without the faithful in attendance. During this outbreak of Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), Catholics are beginning to grapple with a new reality: a loss of access to the sacraments while the world struggles to contain the disease to manageable levels through quarantines and social distancing.

Non-Catholic Christian communities and non-Christians are also facing a loss of public worship in their churches and houses of worship. For many of them however, they're able to worship on their own from home. The Catholic eucharistic liturgy, though, is very much centered around gathering in a church and is dependent upon a priest confecting the Eucharist. Life without Mass and the sacraments for an indefinite period is frightening.

We may not be able to remember a time when Catholics were entirely cut off from access to the sacraments, but the Church remembers such times in its history.

When foreign missionaries were kicked out of the country in the sixteenth century, Catholics in Japan survived for over 250 years without access to priests. They had baptism and matrimony, which can be celebrated by laity in the absence of clergy, but no other sacraments. Japanese Catholics survived so well under these conditions that a thriving underground Catholic community was there to greet the missionaries when they were allowed back in Japan in the nineteenth century—a country in which the rest of the world assumed that Christianity had died.

Life as a Catholic without access to the sacraments certainly isn't an ideal situation. The sacraments are the ordinary means by which God dispenses to us his grace. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions (1131).

Especially wrenching is loss of access to the Mass and the Eucharist. The Mass is “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows” (1074) and the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (1324).

Nonetheless, the Church allows for precautions to be taken in the celebration of the sacraments in times of plague. In earlier centuries, during epidemics of contagious diseases, priests could use a small spatula to apply the sacred oil during the anointing of the sick rather than risk touching victims. Distancing priests from the faithful to prevent the spread of disease may seem to be a drastic measure, but it is one that bishops may choose to take in the hopes of preserving life.

If lay Catholics have proven themselves capable, under extraordinary conditions, of surviving and thriving as the mystical body of Christ when deprived of the sacraments for hundreds of years, it's possible for us to make it through the next few months with our faith lives intact. Let's look at some ideas for living out our Faith in an era of social distancing.

Watch the Mass on your computer or television. Dioceses have been ramping up to provide the eucharistic liturgy through livestreaming. In some areas, the Masses will be available in multiple languages. Catholic television networks, such as EWTN, also offer daily televised Masses. Remote attendance doesn't fulfill an obligation to attend Mass, which is why many bishops have been dispensing the Sunday and holy day obligation for their dioceses, but viewing the Mass can provide spiritual comfort and an opportunity for making a spiritual communion.

Learn the Liturgy of the Hours. The Liturgy of the Hours, also called the Divine Office, is the daily prayer of the Church and is itself a liturgy. Clergy and religious communities pray these prayers every day; laity aren't required to do so but may join in if they wish. Praying the office from your home puts you in spiritual communion with everyone around the world who prays these prayers every day. Universalis provides the prayers of the Divine Office online. Apps are available for your phone or tablet that will make praying the office available to you wherever you are.

Read Scripture. Give Us This Day and Magnificat, monthly periodicals that are used by many Catholics as missalettes for Mass, are offering digital versions for free during the crisis that you can read online or on your phone or tablet. Both

magazines also include abridged versions of Morning and Evening Prayer if you don't want to commit to learning the full Liturgy of the Hours just yet. The US Catholic bishops offer the daily Mass readings each day on their web site.

Keep tabs on the state of your soul by using an examination of conscience on a regular basis. When sacramental confession is not available, the faithful may make an act of contrition to God, with the intention of going to confession when it's available again. The Catechism states that sacramental confession is necessary for Catholics "unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession" (1484). Ask your parish to keep the community informed of opportunities for the sacrament of penance—including general confession and general absolution, if those are permitted by the local ordinary (1483).

Pray the rosary and other prayers of the Church, such as the Divine Mercy chaplet. If you don't already have a family ritual of prayer together, now is a great time to start. Common prayer with others during a quarantine should be limited to your immediate family—not to all your extended relatives, friends, and neighbors. This may seem to be a "no brainer," but suggestions have been floated in social media to invite over others to watch Sunday Mass together. Please, don't do that.

A Bible study or a spiritual book reading group can be launched through video conferencing platforms. Or, if you're not that ambitious, you can start a private Facebook group for families in your parish (with your pastor's permission). A good spiritual book to start with might be *Silence*, Shūsaku Endō's novel (not to be confused with Martin Scorsese's film adaptation) about the persecution of Japanese Catholics and their struggle to keep their faith alive. Connecting with the larger world through modern technology will also allow you to check in on your social circle, providing necessary support to those suffering from depression, loneliness, or boredom.

Wear your sacramentals. The crucifix, brown scapular, and religious medals the Church offers are "occasions of grace" and reminders of the faith. Display holy cards of your favorite saints on their feast days and tell their stories to your children. Gather up your Catholic devotional items and create a home altar if you don't have one already.

Create a do-it-yourself retreat. You don't have to leave home to go on retreat. You don't have to pay money or take time away from your daily responsibilities. Heading off to a remote location for a few days may make going on retreat easier,

but a lack of resources doesn't make going on retreat impossible. You can go on retreat at home, whenever you wish. It requires nothing more than a concerted effort to lift your heart and mind to God while going about your ordinary life.

Support the Church by continuing to give as generously as you can to your parish, diocese, local religious communities, and to your favorite Catholic charities. These groups will be working hard to provide services to the needy and to pray for our world in the days ahead. Your support will make their work possible. It's not easy to think of almsgiving when our own future is uncertain, but as Catholics we are called to help others through difficult times—even when it hurts.

Coronavirus, Mass, and Catholic Life: Eight Things for Catholics to Know and Share

By Jimmy Akin

The coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic has produced many questions and controversies, including how it is impacting people's ability to attend Mass and receive the sacraments.

How dangerous is the virus? What should be our response as Catholics?

Here are eight things to know and share.

1) How dangerous is the coronavirus?

Nobody knows for sure. The virus only emerged a few months ago, so doctors are only now getting experience with it.

Some have compared Covid-19 to the flu, which is a well-understood and predictable disease.

It appears that Covid-19 is much more infectious than the flu. A person with the flu will infect an average of 1.3 other people, but a person with Covid-19 will infect an average of between two and 3.11 additional people. Covid-19 thus has the chance to spread much more rapidly.

Covid-19 is also much deadlier than the flu. In the United States, the death rate for the flu is usually around 0.1%. The death rate for Covid-19 is not yet well understood, but it appears to be between 1.4% and 2.3%—making it between fourteen and twenty-three times more deadly than the flu.

While it is true that—at present—more people are killed by the flu than by Covid-19, governments and health authorities are working to keep the latter from becoming as common as the flu.

There are around 27,000,000 cases of flu each year in the U.S., resulting in around 36,000 deaths. If Covid-19 became as common as the flu (and, remember, it's actually more infectious than the flu), there would be around 500,000 deaths.

This is what authorities are trying to prevent.

Current Center for Disease Control guidelines for how to protect yourself are online [here](#).

2) Is everyone equally at risk?

No. Covid-19 hits certain people much harder than others. People younger than sixty are much less likely to die because of the disease, though they can still catch and spread it.

They may even have it but not feel sick and yet spread it to others. In fact, a recent study suggests that more than eighty percent of current cases were spread by people who did not know they had the virus.

People older than sixty are much more likely to die, and the risk increases with each decade of age.

People with other underlying conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease also have increased risk of dying.

Current Center for Disease Control guidelines for how to protect yourself are online [here](#).

3) Why are bishops cancelling Masses and dispensing people from their Sunday obligations? Aren't Christians called to be martyrs?

Christians are called to be martyrs when we are forced into the situation. If we are directly asked if we are followers of Christ, we cannot disown our faith. "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12).

However, this doesn't mean we are called to rush into martyrdom. In fact, Jesus said that we can flee persecution for our faith: "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next" (Matt. 10:23).

The requirement to witness to our faith thus does not mean Christians can't take reasonable steps to protect themselves from physical danger.

If it is morally permissible to leave town to avoid one physical danger (being killed by people who hate our faith), so is staying home from Mass for a few weeks to avoid another physical danger (being killed by a plague).

4) Are bishops being too quick to cancel Mass?

The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (Lumen Gentium 11), so no bishop will take the decision to suspend Masses lightly.

As my colleague, Trent Horn, discussed yesterday, the decision involves a prudential judgment call, so there is no single answer that obviously applies in all situations. This means the faithful should pray for the bishops as they wrestle with this issue and show respect for the difficult decisions they are having to make.

They also should bear in mind that:

- The conditions in some areas are much worse than others.
- In some places, bishops may not have much of a choice, as public authorities have prohibited public gatherings over a certain size.
- Epidemics grow exponentially, so the only way to stop them is to take early action—before the situation becomes severe. If you wait until an epidemic has gotten really bad in an area, it is too late.

5) When are people allowed to stay home from Mass?

People are allowed to stay home from Mass in three situations:

- When one has a legitimate excuse (e.g., because a person is at elevated risk of acquiring Covid-19)
- When one is dispensed by the competent authority (e.g., the pastor or bishop)
- When it is impossible to go (e.g., because Masses have been cancelled)

6) On what basis can pastors and bishops dispense a person?

The Code of Canon Law provides that the pastor of a parish can give a dispensation in individual cases, as can the superiors of religious institutes (can. 1245).

The bishop's authority is greater. He can "dispense the faithful from universal and particular disciplinary laws issued for his territory" by the Vatican (can. 87 §1). This is the category of laws that the Sunday obligation belongs to.

7) What should we do if staying home from Mass?

One is not legally obligated to do anything on these days. However, the Church strongly recommends that the faithful undertake another form of spiritual activity:

If participation in the eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful take part in a liturgy of the word if such a liturgy is celebrated in a parish church or other sacred place according to the prescripts of the diocesan bishop or that they devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families (can. 1248 §2).

Watching a Mass on television or the Internet also is a possibility, and some parishes and dioceses stream Masses on their web sites.

Participating in the Liturgy of the Hours is another possibility (can. 1174 §2), as are reading the Bible and spiritual works.

8) What should I do if I'm not sure whether I'm getting sick?

Err on the side of caution. With many diseases, people are most infectious just before they start feeling sick and just after they start having symptoms. Therefore,

if you think you might be getting sick, you may be at the point where you have the greatest chance of infecting another person.

Even if you do not feel sick, you may be able to spread the virus to others, so it is important to follow safety practices even if you currently feel fine.

This applies especially if you have contact with older people or those with health conditions that put them at greater risk of dying from Covid-19.

Remember: We are not just protecting ourselves; we are protecting those around us.

If we don't have the virus, we can't give it to others. Even if we're young and healthy, we're protecting the more vulnerable. That is a physical work of mercy, and it's an act of love for others. As Jesus taught us, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

The Blessed Joy of Shared Sorrows

By Fr. Hugh Barbour, O. Praem

*When the days were completed for their purification
according to the law of Moses,
They took him up to Jerusalem
to present him to the Lord,
just as it is written in the law of the Lord,
Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,
and to offer the sacrifice of
a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,
in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.*

*The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him;
and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,
"Behold, this child is destined
for the fall and rise of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be contradicted
—and you yourself a sword will pierce—
so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." — Luke 2:22-40*

"Mal commune, mezzo gaudio!" I heard this charming Italian proverb for the first time while waiting with an ever-growing crowd at a Roman bus stop. It means "a shared evil is half a joy."

We had waited and waited, and as the bus became later and later people began to talk, first complaining about the delay, but then talking about everything else they had to put up with in the City. An aged henna-haired lady, who worked as a registrar, turned to me and repeated the proverb while rolling her eyes. There were at least twenty people there, obviously enjoying their interactions occasioned by the inconvenience of city transport.

The proverb was true; in fact, the people probably had a more memorable and enjoyable afternoon than if the bus had arrived on time and they had boarded in their usual silent back-to-work-after-lunch resignation. As it was, the bus arrived packed to the ceiling, with another bus following, practically empty, but now on time. So there were plenty of seats, to boot. *Mal commune, mezzo gaudio*, indeed!

Now this is a fairly homely way to introduce the solemn, prophetic words of today's Gospel, words that are more than proverbs, words that cut to the heart, as it were, of the drama of our day to day earthly existence: "And you yourself a sword shall pierce, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

The patient Job said it well: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." Human life is tried by sorrows from its beginning until its end. And yet we all want to be happy, we all want to have joy. There must be some provisional method for dealing with daily trials and sorrows, whether great or small, acute or chronic.

"And you yourself a sword shall pierce, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us that these words do not mean Our Lady's sorrows will reveal the sorrows of others, but rather that Our Lady's and Our Lord's suffering will provide the universal occasion for our understanding of human suffering. When we look upon their pains, we begin to see the sense of our own. Shared suffering, literally "*com*-passion," does not take away our woes, but it surely lessens them, and even can give them their meaning. Suffering with another is a supreme occasion to express a genuine love, a love that seeks the good of the one loved rather than one's own pleasure or advantage.

This kind of sympathetic love prepares us for true joys. In fact, we could scarcely appreciate the joys of our life together unless we saw them also in with the shadows of our misfortunes.

It is safe to say that the Holy Family was the happiest of families, even though it was a family that was tried beyond any other. The sufferings that accompanied their years together were the source of an ever-deepening love among them.

Sadly, many families let sorrows become a source of division, of dissatisfaction, of peevish disputes and touchy feelings. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph look upon us and move us by their prayers and example to use our sorrows well, as a source of the shared joy of mutual love. What can give more joy to a human heart, after all, than the security that no sorrow, no evil can leave us without the support of those around us? Just as we must not suffer alone, so too will our joys be shared in the inexhaustible happiness of heaven wherein lies waiting for us, not half, but the whole of our joy.

What Your Family Can Learn from the Holy Family

By Mike Sullivan

Our society seems intent on destroying the family. Marriage is threatened by the plagues of divorce, relativism, and secularization. Same-sex and “de facto” unions have undermined the meaning of marriage, calling into question its very purpose. In fact, divorce is not only common, but it is expected in almost half of today’s marriages. Many children are raised without discipline, and their potential is dashed by abuse or neglect.

But there are examples throughout history of how strong families have formed the true foundation of society. These families have provided correction to society by bringing up new generations of leaders and saints. Think of St. Thomas More, the martyr who lived a life of heroic virtue and who, even after the death of his first wife, taught his children to know and love their faith. Think of the Martins, St. Therese of Lisieux’s family, who also suffered the loss of their mother but went on to lead lives of sanctity.

There are hundreds of other examples. Marriage and family can work. They can provide an opportunity to grow in holiness, strengthen the culture in which we live, overcome the greatest obstacles, and succeed. But the example of the Holy Family

best teaches us how to build our own little “Nazareth” and raise saints to serve God and the world.

It is difficult to make a direct comparison between the Holy Family and families today, but reflecting on the roles of Mary as mother, Joseph as father, and Jesus as child gives us a spiritual perspective that can shape our understanding of our own roles in our families.

School of Nazareth

On pilgrimage to Nazareth, Pope Paul VI reflected, “Nazareth is a kind of school. . . . How I would like to return to my childhood and attend the simple yet profound school that is Nazareth!” He explained that there are three key lessons to learn from Christ’s childhood:

- It offered silence. “We need this wonderful state of mind,” the Pope said, to combat the pressures and noise of the world.
- It was “a community of love and sharing.” Nazareth serves as “a model of what the family should be . . . beautiful for the problems it poses and the rewards it brings, in sum, the perfect setting for rearing children—and for this there is no substitute.”
- It taught discipline. “In Nazareth, the home of a craftsman’s son, we learn about work and the discipline it entails” (Office of Readings, Dec. 26).

As Christian parents, we are called to model our own family life after the Holy Family in Nazareth. By shaping our homes in the example of silence, community love, and discipline, we ensure that we are doing our part in creating a nurturing environment in which saints are made.

Cherish Silence

Pope Paul VI mentions silence first, for it is in silence that we are trained in prayer. A silent interior life is free of struggles and distraction; it is a life of constancy, whereas the noise of the world is disruptive and distracting. It is in interior silence that we contemplate and have communion with God.

We don’t know much from Scripture about Jesus’ life as a child, but we do know that the Holy Family’s home in Nazareth was a sanctuary from the distractions and influence of the world. Christ’s childhood was a hidden time of formation and

preparation for his mission. Preparation in the quiet of Nazareth was so important for Jesus that it represents thirty of his thirty-three years on earth.

Our homes should be sanctuaries from the world. The more negative influences we allow into our homes, the less control we have over what forms the characters of our children. A home marked by silence is a home where the priorities are in order and where there is a focus on the spiritual good of the children.

By fostering silence in the home, we teach our children to avoid distraction. They learn to concentrate better and thus are better able to develop their faith. Bl. Teresa of Calcutta explained the way she and her sisters were aware of God's will for them. She said, "Before you speak, it is necessary for you to listen, for God speaks in the silence of the heart." In silence, our children will learn to pray and develop a loving relationship with God, with each other, and with us. But this ideal is very difficult to realize.

In Luke's Gospel, we see several instances of Mary's "pondering heart." She wasn't sure what to make of the events unfolding in her life, so she trusted in God's Providence and considered these things in the silence of her heart (Luke 1:28; 2:19, 51). As parents, we don't understand many things as we strive to raise our children in accord with God's will. But if we ponder these questions and lift them up to God in prayer, we will soon understand what he is calling us to do.

In my home, there is very little "silence." Imagine seven children under the age of eleven praying, playing, learning, working, and, occasionally, fighting. But my wife and I try our best to limit outside influences. We don't watch television, but we do occasionally watch wholesome movies. The children are allowed to listen to music only if it is edifying. Playtime with friends is also limited. We do our best to form a family culture that is focused on the character formation and education of our children.

The time we have to build virtue in our children is short. We must make the best of it. They will leave the home and go about the will of the Father, and they need our nurturing and protection to grow into the saints they are called to be.

Build a Community of Love

Pope Paul VI said that building a "community of love and sharing" is crucial to teaching children the virtues. This community is also necessary to form within

children the raw material for selfless, loving relationships with God and their future spouses and children.

Building a community of love and sharing begins with each family member's willingness to offer himself for the sake of another. Parents are called to be the first examples of self-giving. Our lives are to be ordered to the service of others. Mary understood this. Consider how she dropped everything and traveled to visit her relative Elizabeth. Even though she was pregnant herself, Mary willingly went and served the needs of her elder kinswoman (Luke 1:39–56).

Consider also her suffering as her divine Son was tortured and died on the cross. She always knew that she and her Son would have great sufferings to endure, and she humbly and lovingly embraced her call and remained at his side until his death.

St. Joseph, too, offered an example of total self-surrender when he humbly accepted God's will in leading his family out of danger into Egypt. They fled as refugees, in poverty, but it was what they had to do to protect the divine Child.

As parents, we must be prepared to drop everything and flee to protect our families. This applies not only to bodily protection but, most importantly, to the protection of their souls. When we perceive a threat to the moral life of our family, we must flee from that threat or root it out of our homes. In a community of love and sharing, we first look after those in our charge and provide a protective environment in which they can develop.

Dare to Discipline

Mary and Joseph educated Jesus, and Joseph taught him to work as a carpenter. We live in a very different time, one in which it is rare for both parents to teach their children by working with them throughout each day. But lessons about hard work and discipline can be learned when parents make the effort to allow their children to help them in their daily tasks at home. By helping their parents, children learn the virtues of diligence, self-discipline, and responsibility, as well as the value of work.

Children will also learn obedience to their parents' will, a training exercise in obedience to the will of the Father. As St. Luke tells us, even Jesus "was obedient to them," and "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:51–52). Obedience fosters the virtue of humility, which is the foundation of

all virtues and, with love, forms the core of holiness. We know that our children are not perfect. Their souls, like our own, have been stained by original sin. This is why discipline is critical in fostering holiness in the family.

The word discipline comes from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means “instruction or knowledge,” from *discipulus* or “disciple.” God gave parents the duty to discipline their children, and parents are accountable to God for the souls and the formation of their children. Children cannot learn virtue without the guidance and example of self-giving parents. At times, it is good to offer children choices so that they can learn not only how to think for themselves but about personal accountability. But children should never be permitted to choose something that will put their souls in peril.

Commit to Prayer

Prayer brings together silence, the family as a community of love and sharing, and discipline—the distinctive features of the Holy Family. It is rooted in interior silence, it is the core of a community of love and sharing, and it gives rise to discipline. If we have a relationship with God, we pray. It’s that simple. In modeling our families after the Holy Family, prayer must be the center of our lives and our greatest priority. If we wish to be holy families, we must pray. A holy family is our greatest weapon against the influences of the world and our most effective way of influencing the world. The Second Vatican Council called the family “the first and vital cell of society” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 11).

Many popes, bishops, and vocations directors have said that a prayerful family is the fertile soil in which vocations to the priesthood and religious life are nurtured. We participate in the building up of the Church in raising holy men and women to go out and labor in the world, bringing Christ’s light to all they touch, and in encouraging our children to explore and be open to a possible religious vocation.

The Holy Family’s life was steeped in Scripture. Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), for instance, shows a thorough knowledge of Scripture. It draws from many books of the Bible and was spontaneously strung together in such a beautiful way that it is clear that Mary had a profound knowledge of the meaning of the words she spoke. Christ, too, quoted Scripture constantly throughout the New Testament.

Daily readings of Scripture and participation in the Church's Liturgy of the Hours should have a place in Catholic homes. In fact, the Holy See has taught that praying the Liturgy of the Hours helps families to live the life of the Church fully:

It is fitting . . . that the family, as a domestic sanctuary of the Church, should not only offer prayers to God in common but also, according to circumstances, should recite parts of the Liturgy of the Hours in order to be more intimately linked with the Church. (Institutio Generalis de Liturgia Horarum 118)

Embrace the Challenge

In our family, Scripture grounds our children in the faith. The stories from Scripture are imbedded deeply in their minds. As we live through the liturgical year, we make major feast days and holy days special. We try to embrace St. Paul's words to the Colossians:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:16)

With so many small children, we find it a challenge to retain their attention when reading Scripture, but we do our best to make up for this by singing songs and praying the rosary. We've found that prayerfully reflecting on the mysteries of the rosary teaches our kids to pray and opens their minds to the stories in Scripture.

According to Pope Paul VI, "there is no doubt that . . . the rosary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers in common that the Christian family is invited to recite" (Marialis Cultus 54). It can't be overestimated as a tool for catechesis.

We often invite door-to-door missionaries or Jehovah's Witnesses to come into our home for discussion. Once we had a couple of young Mormon missionaries to dinner. We prayed together and talked, and after our meal, they sat with the children and talked about Jesus. One of the missionaries asked our four-year-old daughter, Molly, if she loved Jesus. "Oh, yes," she replied, and went on to talk about the life of Jesus. She told how "Jesus' mommy talked to an angel" and then became "the Mommy of God." She excitedly told how Mary visited Elizabeth, "because she had a baby in her tummy, too, and Mary helped her. Her baby was John the Baptist." Molly went on to tell how Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem, how

Simeon told Mary she was going to be sad about Jesus' death and that "her heart would be pierced by a sword," and how Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple "teaching the teachers."

The Mormon missionaries were amazed. We were amazed. Our four-year-old had just explained the major points of Jesus' early life with profound clarity and understanding! We realized that the rosary is much more than a prayer: It is a way to drink in the beauty of Scripture that even a four-year-old can understand.

Children learn best from stories and personal experiences. If parents expose their children to stories about the lives of the saints and give them opportunities to experience the beauty of their faith, these formational moments will be deeply etched on their memories. From the stories of the Child Jesus they will learn how to act and how to obey, how to love and how to pray. By creating your own little Nazareth, your family can imbibe the lessons of the Holy Family and become solidly rooted in the virtues that build up both the family and the world.

It is difficult to stay the course in living the Christian life in a world that is so divorced from the simplicity of the Holy Family, but it is not impossible. We are called to be in the world, not of the world. If we hold up the Holy Family as the example for our families, not only will we learn how to live holy lives, but we will begin to change the culture in which we live. Our little Nazareth can be the refreshing and silent sanctuary we seek to enter each day as we work toward our common goal.

Want Catholic Children? Teach Them the Natural Law!

By Leila Miller

Ask a child the following questions:

What would happen if your mom tried to sew buttons onto your shirt using a fork instead of a needle? What if you tried to write a letter with a spaghetti noodle? How far would your dad's car get if he filled the gas tank with water? Would eating sand keep your body healthy and well-nourished?

You and the child can have a lot of fun with those types of questions. Even a young kid can understand the silliness, the futility—and even the harm—of using something against its nature or purpose. And just as we humans create and design

things with a certain purpose and end in mind, God did the same thing when he created and designed mankind.

“What is the nature of a thing?” and “What is the nature of a human being?”—these questions are the basis for understanding the natural law.

Natural law (not to be confused with the laws of nature) is simply another term for the universal moral law, which is inscribed on the heart of every human. Natural law applies to all people and in all eras without exception. In other words, the natural law is not merely “morality for Catholics” or a “religious thing”—it is universal. The Catechism puts it like this: “The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie” (1954).

Unlike truths we know through divine revelation (such as the nature of the Trinity or the sacraments), natural law can be accessed by the light of human reason alone. That is why atheists and believers alike can understand that things like murder, rape, stealing, lying, disrespecting one’s parents, and even cutting someone in line are unjust or immoral acts.

Now, that doesn’t ensure that individual humans will actually obey the moral law, nor that sin or bad formation will not obscure it, but natural law is knowable nonetheless. Pope Leo XIII describes the natural law:

The natural law is written and engraved in the soul of each and every man, because it is human reason ordaining him to do good and forbidding him to sin. . . . But this command of human reason would not have the force of law if it were not the voice and interpreter of a higher reason to which our spirit and our freedom must be submitted (Libertas Praestantissimum).

As anyone can see from the silly questions at the beginning of this article, if we use a thing against its nature or design, things don’t go so well. But if we use a thing according to its nature or design, there is flourishing. The same goes for human beings: when we act according to our nature and design, we see human flourishing, which means we see virtue, strong families, and thriving societies. When we act against our nature and design, we get confusion, disorder, and sin.

All around us today, we see that people are adrift and disoriented. “Progressivism,” specifically sexual progressivism, is redefining morality so rapidly that we can’t be

sure that what is acceptable today will still be acceptable tomorrow. When we institute relativism as the norm for morality, nothing is fixed, everything is shifting beneath our feet. Because of that, we must bring back a way of teaching that will give people, especially our children, a sure footing.

To accomplish this as Catholics, we should look to our patrimony. St. Paul talks about the natural law explicitly (it's not a new idea):

When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them (Rom. 2:14-15).

As Americans, we can look to our founding fathers, who based our nation's laws on the natural law (the Declaration of Independence references the "Laws of Nature's God"), and to the writings of Abraham Lincoln. And in 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. said in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail:

How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.

In just a few decades, we have lost our immemorial acceptance of the natural law and replaced it with the idea that whatever feels right to the individual is morally correct. And because we now live in a culture that eschews reality and actual facts—denying even biology and basic science—the teaching of natural law will be more, not less, effective than in previous generations, in the same way that a light shines brighter in the darkness.

So let's look at some other "silly" questions but with a focus on our human nature:

Is it good to purposely cause a healthy bodily system to malfunction? Can a man become a woman simply by having his private parts mutilated or destroyed? Is it the nature of the reproductive system to be used within another person's digestive tract? Are we ever permitted to target and kill a defenseless and innocent human being?

These questions, like the silly questions at the beginning, are fundamentally understandable. We are hardwired to “get it,” since the soul was created to recognize truth.

Unfortunately, even some Catholics now argue that modern souls cannot possibly understand or accept natural law arguments and that they “won’t work” with this generation. I say baloney. If anything, this era of moral relativism and even complete detachment from material reality makes natural law more attractive than ever. The only thing keeping it from forming and enlightening our children is the fact that we no longer teach it. It’s up to all of us to change that.



Common Catholic Prayers

Prayer, the lifting of the mind and heart to God, plays an essential role in the life of a devout Catholic. Without a life of Catholic prayer, we risk losing the life of grace in our souls, grace that comes to us first in baptism and later chiefly through the other sacraments and through prayer itself (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2565). Catholic prayers allow us to adore God, by acknowledging his almighty power; prayers allow us to bring our thanks, our petitions, and our sorrow for sin before our Lord and God.

While prayer is not a practice unique to Catholics, Catholic prayers are generally formulaic in nature. That is, the teaching Church sets before us how we ought to pray. Drawing from the words of Christ, the writings of Scripture and the saints, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she supplies us with prayers grounded in Christian tradition. Further, our informal, spontaneous prayers, both vocal and meditative, are informed by and shaped by those Catholic prayers taught by the Church. Without the Holy Spirit speaking through the Church and through her saints, we would not know how to pray as we ought (CCC, 2650).

As the Catholic prayers themselves witness, the Church teaches us that we should pray not only directly to God, but also to those who have the power to intercede upon our behalf. Indeed, we pray to the angels to help and watch over us; we pray to the saints in heaven to ask their intercession and assistance; we pray to the Blessed Mother to ask her to beg her Son to hear our prayers. Further, we pray not

only on our own behalf, but also on the behalf of those souls in purgatory and of those brothers on earth who are in need. Prayer unites us to God; in doing so, we are united to the other members of the Mystical Body.

This communal aspect of prayer is reflected not only in the nature of Catholic prayers, but also in the very words of the prayers themselves. In reading many of the basic formulaic prayers, it will become apparent that, for the Catholic, prayer is often meant to be prayed in the company of others. Christ himself encouraged us to pray together: "For wherever two or more are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

Keeping in mind the aforementioned characteristics of Catholic prayer will enable you to appreciate and to understand the prayers listed below. While this list is certainly not an exhaustive one, it will illustrate the different kinds of Catholic prayers that help to form the treasury of prayers in the Church.

Fundamental Catholic Prayers List

Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He

descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers to Our Lady

The Rosary

The six fundamental Catholic prayers listed above are also part of the Catholic rosary, a devotion dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God. (CCC 971) The rosary consists of fifteen decades. Each decade focuses upon a particular mystery in the life of Christ and his Blessed Mother. It is customary to say five decades at a time, while meditating upon one set of mysteries.

Joyful Mysteries

- The Annunciation
- The Visitation
- The Birth of our Lord
- The Presentation of our Lord
- The Finding of our Lord in the Temple

Sorrowful Mysteries

- The Agony in the Garden
- The Scourging at the Pillar
- The Crowning with Thorns
- The Carrying of the Cross
- The Crucifixion and Death of our Lord

Glorious Mysteries

- The Resurrection
- The Ascension
- The Descent of the Holy Spirit
- The Assumption of our Blessed Mother into Heaven
- The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth

Hail Holy Queen

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary. V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God. R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, we turn to thee, O Virgin of virgins, our Mother. To thee we come, before thee we stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, do not despise our petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer us. Amen.

The Angelus

The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary. R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit. (Hail Mary . . .) Behold the handmaid of the Lord. R. Be it done unto me according to thy word. (Hail Mary ...) And the Word was made flesh. R. And dwelt among us. (Hail Mary ...) Pray for us, O holy Mother of God. R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Let us pray: Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy grace into our hearts; that, we to whom the incarnation of Christ, thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross, be brought to the glory of his resurrection, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Daily Catholic Prayers

Prayer Before Meals

Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from thy bounty, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer to Our Guardian Angel

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day be at my side to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

Morning Offering

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day in union with the holy sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world. I offer them for all the intentions of your sacred heart: the salvation of

souls, reparation for sin, the reunion of all Christians. I offer them for the intentions of our bishops and of all the apostles of prayer, and in particular for those recommended by our Holy Father this month.

Evening prayer

O my God, at the end of this day I thank you most heartily for all the graces I have received from you. I am sorry that I have not made a better use of them. I am sorry for all the sins I have committed against you. Forgive me, O my God, and graciously protect me this night. Blessed Virgin Mary, my dear heavenly mother, take me under your protection. St. Joseph, my dear guardian angel, and all you saints of God, pray for me. Sweet Jesus, have pity on all poor sinners, and save them from hell. Have mercy on the suffering souls in purgatory.

Generally, this evening prayer is followed by an act of contrition, which is usually said in conjunction with an examination of conscience. A daily examination of conscience consists of a brief recounting of our actions during the day. What sins did we commit? Where did we fail? In what areas of our lives can we strive to make virtuous progress? Having determined our failures and sins, we make an act of contrition.

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend thee, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life.

Prayer after Mass

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, make me holy. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, fill me with love. Water from Christ's side, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. Good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds, hide me. Never let me be parted from you. From the evil enemy, protect me. At the hour of my death, call me, and tell me to come to you that with your saints I may praise you through all eternity. Amen.

Prayers to the Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit

Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray

O God, who has taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the gift of the same Spirit we may be always truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers to the Angels and Saints

Prayer to Saint Joseph

O glorious Saint Joseph, you were chosen by God to be the foster father of Jesus, the most pure spouse of Mary, ever virgin, and the head of the Holy Family. You have been chosen by Christ's vicar as the heavenly patron and protector of the Church founded by Christ.

Protect the Holy Father, our sovereign pontiff, and all bishops and priests united with him. Be the protector of all who labor for souls amid the trials and tribulations of this life, and grant that all peoples of the world may follow Christ and the Church he founded.

Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle; be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all the other evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

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