

How to Get Kids Excited about the Mass

by Matt Charbonneau

It's the end of the week and you've survived another long and perhaps stressful trek through meetings, errands, activities, and other commitments. All you want to do is sit back, kick your feet up and relax.

But just as you start getting energized about weekend plans, you remember that commandment about honoring the Sabbath and are reminded of those dear children (or grandchildren) of yours.

You start feeling anything from curiosity to anxiety, trying to figure out how to excite the kids about going to Mass as you begin wondering, *How are we going to pull this off again?*

Motivating children to enjoy the Mass experience has served as a challenge for parents and grandparents for generations, it seems. Thankfully, there are effective ways we can help kids today feel a bit more jazzed about heading to church.

Here are nine easy tips that can give your children or grandchildren a little boost in going to Mass.

1. Put on your Sunday best: It's not every day you get to wear fancy clothes, so going to Mass affords the opportunity to wear that special dress or button up your new shirt and sport those cool shoes. It's been said, "If you look good, you'll feel good," so pulling out a nice outfit for Mass just might spark some positive vibes for heading to church. Reminding your young ones just how lucky (and blessed) they are to be valued guests in the Lord's house could also give them added encouragement.

2. Time together: With the hustle-and-bustle pace of life these days, it can be rare that families spend quality time all together. Attending Mass as a family can show children the importance of taking a break from busy living, while helping strengthen the family bond. Plus, introducing a tradition like a post-Mass meal at a restaurant can certainly give reason for kids to be excited.

3. Showing your true colors: Kids who love to get creative and show their artistic talents have many opportunities during a Mass to draw and color, while remaining peacefully quiet so their families and others can enjoy the liturgical celebration. Whether it be a page in the kids' bulletin or their own coloring books from home, parents and grandparents need only pull out a crayon set to let their young one loose. While they're diving into their coloring page, you'll be able to better focus on the Gospel and homily, and possibly get a few extra minutes of quiet prayer after Holy Communion.

4. Calling all bookworms: As children grow to develop a full grasp of the vocabulary included in the Bible, many love to explore their own age-appropriate Bible version to follow along during the Mass. Such an opportunity for reading allows them to learn about various figures and events, such as Noah and the ark, Moses' encounter with the burning bush, Joshua and the walls of Jericho, and—of course—Jesus Christ and his many parables and miracles.

5. Get involved: If you have a child or grandchild who loves volunteer work or craves the stage, helping with part of the celebration could offer a reason to look forward to Mass. Assisting a parent or grandparent in leading Sunday School activities or bringing up offertory gifts, for instance, can provide kids with an added sense of purpose and fulfillment.

6. Snack attack: While bribery may not usually be considered a healthy way to convince children into accepting a decision, offering them tasty treats could certainly help persuade them to attend (and pay attention during) church service. Having that promise of a delicious snack afterwards could serve as incentive for little ones leading up to weekly Mass.

7. An extra play date: Who better to eat snacks with than a group of friends? Following the celebration, kids of all ages can look forward to getting out of the pews and meeting up with their peers. Reminding youngsters of their friends who will be at Mass can also help parents and grandparents plant a seed of excitement. Whether it's going outside to chase each other around during a game of tag or heading to the food table for some cookies and juice, children can benefit tremendously from opportunities to grow or create social ties with others.

8. Building community: As all churches strive to do, fostering a sense of belonging and support can be so nourishing for families. Children can profit greatly from the strong model of wholesome values shown by adults, while parish initiatives like post-Mass picnics or carnivals can pique kids' interest and desire to attend celebrations, as well.

9. Walking the walk: Children can easily get excited for Mass if their parents and grandparents show the same excitement. While it's fine to say celebrating faith is important, parents and grandparents must show this by their actions and demeanor. Singing hymns, joining in prayers aloud and having a smile are all easy ways to convey excitement and investment that your children and grandchildren will want to emulate at church. Additionally, saying grace at mealtime, reading Bible stories, watching kid-friendly programs about saints and having bedtime prayers together are also perfect activities that can encourage young ones in their appreciation for God and our faith.

Jesus welcomes children into his loving arms and secures a place for them in heaven (Matthew 19:14). With such a special invitation and promise from the Lord, there is great reason for kids to be excited about celebrating Mass.

With this in mind, however, the challenge to engage our children and grandchildren may seem daunting sometimes.

But through our own modelling and enthusiasm and by presenting our youth with positive opportunities and ideas, they are sure to feel more inclined to seek relationship with God by celebrating with Him at church.