



Someone recently asked me, as a catechist, what do I think parents should keep in mind as they guide their children toward First Holy Communion? Well, here's my response—five things I'd advise any parent to do to help their child prepare to receive the Eucharist for the first time.

1. Go to Sunday Mass.

Every week I tell the children it is important to go to Sunday Mass, and to please ask their parents to take them. I teach the children how beautiful, important and special it is to receive Jesus' body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. If receiving Jesus in holy Communion is wonderful and special, then we would want to at least receive the Eucharist every Sunday. I implore families, don't let "being too busy," sports or anything keep you from going to Mass. I compare trying to live a Catholic life without Mass like trying to grow a plant without water. It will wither and die.

2. Talk about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist with your child.

The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is our belief that the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Jesus. The Eucharist is not a symbol or a sign, but Jesus truly present.

Near the start of our year of religious education, I tell my classes they are about to learn the most important thing all year: It is that the Eucharist is "really, really, really Jesus." I come back to this over and over through the year.

Talk with your child and make sure they understand the real presence. Try not to say "getting bread and wine." Instead talk about "receiving the precious body and precious blood."

A survey by Pew Research Forum and the Center for Applied Research in Apostolate, known as CARA, of self-identified adult Catholics showed that 45 to 50 percent of Catholics did not know the Catholic Church teaches belief in the real presence. If Catholics truly believed they were receiving Jesus Christ — body, blood, soul and divinity — wouldn't they all be at Mass every Sunday and receiving the Eucharist reverently?

3. Model reverence and focus on the sacrament when celebrating First Holy Communion.

First Holy Communion is an exciting time. There are special outfits, relatives and friends gathering and making a fuss, parties being planned, presents and the pageantry of the day. But please be careful about your child to be too caught up in the clothes, the party and the presents. It would be normal and natural for any child to focus on these happy things. Remind your child why all these wonderful and fun things are happening because they will be receiving Jesus in holy Communion for the first time.

4. Receive Communion with reverence and practice receiving Holy Communion at home with your child.

The more they practice, the more comfortable they will be, and less nervous on the day of First Communion. Also, kids think it is fun to practice!

Here is an easy-to-follow guide to use at home:

- You can use any sort of small cracker (I use oyster crackers) to help them become comfortable with the sequence of how to receive.
- Process with hands folded in prayer, singing the Communion hymn.
- Everyone has the personal choice to receive on the tongue or in the hand. When teaching about how to receive in the hand, children should make a throne with their hands as if they are receiving a king. The hands should be one underneath the other, usually the dominant hand on the bottom.
- When the priest says, “The body of Christ,” look at the host and respond “Amen” firmly like you believe it! Use the underneath hand to pick up the host and consume it immediately.
- Fold hands in prayer and process back to your seat to make a prayer of thanksgiving.
- If receiving on the tongue, gently extend your tongue after saying “Amen.”

I tell the children if they watch carefully every week during the Communion procession, they will see some adults who are good examples and some not very good examples, so the children need to be the extra good examples for the grown-ups.

5. Praise and thank God for the great gift of Communion.

St. Pius X called Holy Communion “the shortest and surest way to heaven.” So not only on the day of first holy Communion, but after every Communion, we all should praise and thank God the great gift of our Lord received in the Eucharist.

Prayer after Communion:

Lord Jesus, I love and adore you. You’re a special friend to me. Welcome, Lord Jesus, O welcome. Thank you for coming to me.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, O thank you for giving yourself to me. Make me strong to show your love wherever I may be. Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay, close by me forever and love me, I pray. AMEN

By: Cindy Colman
Teaching Catholic Kids.com