

This solemnity, *the Ascension of the Lord*, can be understood as a transition in the way that Jesus would be present to his followers. No longer in his regular bodily form, he became present in other ways. Remember his words: "*My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him(her)*" (6:55-56). When he ascended to heaven, one of the new and most important ways that he remained with his followers—and remains with us today—is in the Eucharist. Today he becomes present to these children in this new way. *Are you boys and girls ready?*

After a year's worth of classes for both children and their parents, today might feel like a sacramental graduation. But it's not a conclusion; similar to Jesus' Ascension, what these children receive today is a doorway through which they'll pass. And as Jesus changed when he ascended, they change today too. Parents, thank you for bringing them to this doorway into the next phase of their life with Jesus. It's our privilege to move them to and through this doorway.

But if this new life they receive through this doorway is to have real and enduring meaning, there must be more than this. I'll suggest three things that need to be part of your lives with your children.

First, cultivate the domestic church. Make your home a place where the family prays—every day—more than just the standard meal blessing. Make it clear that your home is a place where Jesus is not only welcome but present: in how you treat each other, but also in the outward signs—a crucifix in the main part of the house. *It's said that the family that prays together, stays together.* Statistics reveal that in America, one in two marriages end in divorce. However, in America, marriages in which the husband and wife pray together, one in two-thousand end in divorce (Matthew Kelly, *Building Better Families*). Strengthen your family. If you need help learning how to pray together, I can offer some simple ways to get you started.

Second, come to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days. Most of us have a rather fragile faith, and there are times when it may feel dry. But parents, just like other parts of your life, it's no longer just about you. You have your spouse's and children's souls to consider. *So what would your children say are weekend priorities in your family? Would they say that God is important in your family?* Understand, in whatever way it seems like Sunday Mass is a mere interruption to what might otherwise be a productive, fun and relaxing weekend, do the work of prayerfully learning what it's really about, and why it's crucial.

Third, help them to learn about their faith—and learn with them. They aren't graduating from faith formation today and neither have you—it's a lifelong endeavor. In whatever way your faith is lukewarm, it's likely because you don't really know your faith, and aren't working at trying to know it. Ask yourself if that's true. If you struggle to understand it or to reconcile with hard teachings, then come do the work to understand, and let us help you.

At the end of our lives, if we're able to look back and evaluate how we took care of the most important things, I suspect we won't wish we had put in more hours at work, or even provided more of the structured activities that fill up our children's lives. I imagine it will be more about families and bringing them to God. But who knows?

We heard it a moment ago: your children are ready to move forward in faith. They will if you do. But if you don't, it will probably be like dropping seeds on rocky soil. I ask you to commit, that this may be something more than just a pageant, just some rite of passage from your childhood that's part of your family tradition. God wants to be alive in all this, and will be to the extent that you make it so.

I remind you, they were God's children first before they were yours. And how beautiful that He has entrusted them to you. We thank God for the gift that they are, and we thank you for loving them, for desiring what is good for them, and for bringing them to this day. Today we celebrate the love He still gives these children—His children and your children—in the gift of Jesus' Body and Blood. Let us take a moment and in silence offer a prayer of how we want these, our sons and daughters, to receive this new life.