

What I really want my kids to know about being Catholic

There's a basic, really fundamental point to all this. The Church is about a relationship with its Founder. Twenty years ago, when our two eldest children were babies, my husband and I were received into the Catholic Church. I was overjoyed at the time, and my joy has never diminished. I love being Catholic. I love the beauty and unity of our faith. The authoritative teaching of the Magisterium has been a source of tremendous comfort for me, setting my feet on solid doctrinal ground after years of bouncing from church to church. And most important, in the Catholic Church, my relationship with Jesus has deepened, and my trust in His love and mercy has been strengthened.

Because my Catholic faith has been such a tremendous blessing and because I believe all the Church teaches to be true, I naturally want my children to love our faith and to remain Catholic. To that end, I have tried to be sure they know our history and that they become acquainted with the saints and heroes of our faith. I want them to know and understand our doctrines and dogmas, our traditions and our liturgy. **I want them to develop a relationship with our Blessed Mother and to love her and honour her as Jesus loves and honours her.** I want them to delve deep into Sacred Scripture and to develop a love and devotion for God's inspired word, being in constant contact with it. And of course, I want them to understand and receive the sacraments as sources of God's grace.

There is so much to teach and so much for them to understand. All of it matters, and all of it is important for their salvation and their life in Christ. Yet, when I stop and think about my ultimate goal for my children, I know, of course, that it is a relationship with Jesus, or, as the Baltimore Catechism teaches, to know Him and Love Him and Serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him in the next. That's it. That is the whole purpose of our Catholic faith. It is the whole purpose of our existence.

If our children can list every pope from Peter to Francis, if they can name all the Church counsels and explain every dogma, if they can recite the Angelus and the Rosary and the Litany of the Saints, but they do not know Him and love Him and serve Him, we have wasted our time.

This isn't to say that religious education is a waste of time or that we shouldn't teach our children the richness and fullness of our Catholic faith. We certainly don't want to sideline church teaching. We don't want to give our kids the impression that warm feelings for Jesus are a substitute for the intimacy we share with Him in the sacraments or that personal preferences trump the beauty and richness of the liturgy.

On the other hand, as precious and powerful as our Catholic faith is, parents and religious educators must never lose sight of the fact that all of it — the doctrines, the dogmas, the sacraments, the saints, the prayers and the Scriptures — has been given to us to help us know Him and love Him and serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him in the next. Everything we teach and every practice we instill must lead our children more deeply into that relationship with Christ.

As a convert, it has always been important for me to instill in my children a solid understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church. Now that they are older, I pray that I have not spent so much time teaching them about Jesus' Church that I failed to stress to them that its whole purpose is to help us to know, love, and serve the One who founded it.

Of course, I know my parenting and my attempts to lead my children to Christ through His Church have been imperfect. My kids will have doubts and unanswered questions.

They might even wander away for a time. But no matter how imperfect my efforts may have been, I have entrusted them to the One who is perfect, and I trust that no matter what happens He will eventually lead them, as he did me, back to the beauty and fullness of truth found in the Catholic Church.