

How to invite Christ into your family



In this week's Gospel, the disciples who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus return to Jerusalem to tell what happened (see Lk 24:35-48). In the middle of their story, Jesus appears again, terrifying everyone. The disciples think he is a ghost. They still can't quite understand that something amazing is occurring in their midst.

How like them we are. Too many Catholic families struggle to encounter the resurrected Christ in our homes. A 2015 study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found that only 17 percent of Catholic families pray together. A more recent study, also by CARA, found that 74 percent of Catholic youth stopped identifying themselves as Catholic between the age of 10 and 20. The reason for all of this is simple. We are not teaching Catholic families how to experience Jesus in family life. Instead we settle for households that are vaguely haunted by the ghost of Jesus. A cross on the wall here. A picture there. A dusty Bible on the shelf. And of course, a few more rules than the neighbors have. In such homes, Christ always is hiding on the margins, but never really present.

We can do better. Here are some ways your family can experience Christ on the road back home.

Sacramental view of family

Venerable Patrick Peyton, CSC, used to say "The family that prays together stays together." But it also is true that a family can't pray together unless it makes time to stay together. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can't

see Jesus when our minds are focused on all the places we have to go and things we have to do instead of being present in this moment.

We must prioritize family rituals such as meal times, game night, a family day, family worship, family service. We must treat all other activities (sports, clubs, hobbies, etc.) as fine things to do if we have the time for them after giving family life its due. We must reclaim a sacramental view of family life that celebrates family rituals – regular times to work, play, talk, pray and serve together – as sacred rites of the domestic church where we are given the opportunity to encounter and share Christ's love.

Family spirituality

Building on this, we need to cultivate a family spirituality. My wife and I offer many ideas for creating a dynamic family spirituality in our book, ["Discovering God Together: The Catholic Guide to Raising Faithful Kids"](#) (Sophia Institute Press, \$18.95), but you can start simply by praying together – especially at meals, at bedtime or in the morning before you all start getting ready – or all of the above. Before scattering to the four winds, gather together and pray. It doesn't have to be long. Just make sure it's personal and meaningful.

Of course, formal prayers, like the Rosary, are wonderful ways to meditate on the life of Christ, but don't just speed-mutter the words and check off the family prayer box. Take an extra minute before each decade and ask everyone to imagine what it must have been like for one of the people featured in the particular mystery (Jesus, Mary, a disciple, etc). Ask everyone to reflect on a time when they felt something similar. How did they experience God in that time? How might they do a better job experiencing him in the future? Then pray the decade.

Don't just say words at God. Bring God your heart and your lives.

Family on a mission

Consider how your family can make a difference in the lives of others. Start by asking what your family's passions are. Music? Sports? Baking? The outdoors? Find a way to use these gifts to benefit others. Your musical family might do a concert at the local nursing home once a month. Your sports-loving family might think about ways to inspire good sportsmanship and team spirit before each game. Your baking family might make cookies for the lonely people in your parish or neighborhood, or invite some people over for cake and a family Bible study. Your outdoorsy family might volunteer to do regular yard work for ailing or elderly neighbors. What is your mission? Let God use your family's gifts to make a difference.

Dr. Greg Popcak is the author of many books including ["The Corporal Works of Mommy \(and Daddy Too\)"](#) (OSV, \$7.95). Learn more at: CatholicCounselors.com