

I see Jesus



Most Catholic parents have had the experience of kneeling with a child in their arms during the Eucharistic prayer. Your attention is divided: Perhaps the child is squirming, or jabbering away, while you are trying hard to concentrate on words you've heard so often that they have become like background noise.

Your frustration rises, and you feel like both a bad Catholic and a bad parent, when suddenly, as the priest elevates the host, your son or daughter stops squirming, takes her finger out of her mouth or nose, points to the altar, and exclaims (somewhere between a stage whisper and an outright scream), "I see Jesus!"

Your immediate reaction, of course, is to quiet your child during this most sacred moment, and that's usually pretty easy to do, because his or her attention is now focused entirely on the action on the altar. But once that's done, you become aware, in the depths of your soul, of the stirrings of grace as you, too, see once again with the eyes of faith, and your heart and your mind grasp the reality hidden beneath the appearances of bread and of wine. "I see him, too," you may even reply, and in that moment once again you love the Lord your God with all of your heart and mind and soul and strength.

An unbelieving observer could offer a plausible explanation for your child's action: After all, he might say, on other Sundays, as the consecration approached, you have more than once shushed your son and told him that "Jesus is coming." What he cannot explain away is the reaction in your heart and mind and soul to your son's words, as they take you back to a time when your imagination was so alive and undivided that you, too, saw as clearly as your child that Christ himself is truly present here in this place, in this moment.



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You may walk out of Mass after such moments, as I did with every one of my eight children, resolving to hold on to that experience, to relive it at every Mass, to grasp always with your imagination and your will and not just your intellect that the Son of God, who offered himself up for you on Good Friday after establishing this sacrament at the Last Supper, is really and truly present not only at the moment of the elevation of the host but at every moment in every tabernacle of all the Catholic churches in your town and around the world.

And, sadly, you will also likely realize that, as we say, "life will get in the way," and your will and your imagination will fail you, and you will someday (most likely sooner rather than later) fall back into distraction and abstraction and find it hard to sustain the childlike wonder that feeds our faith. And as your children grow, you may face the pain as well of watching them lose the joy that they experienced in that moment as they struggle with their own faith, and perhaps even lay it aside, while all you can do is pray like St. Monica for her wayward son.

Yet Augustine himself, as he roamed far afield before finally realizing that his restless heart could only rest in Christ, recalled always that "by Your great mercy, O Lord, my tender heart imbibed with my mother's milk, the sweet name of Christ, Your Son, my Savior; and ever after nothing, be it ever so

learned, ever so polished, ever so true, could, if devoid of this name, entirely carry me away.”

Likewise, our memories of those moments of clarity, when we saw with the eyes of faith and knew not just with our mind but with our heart and soul that Christ is truly present before us, remain with us and (we pray) with our children. And as long as those memories remain, we know that we (and they) may one day look up to the altar again and, with a shock of recognition, utter those sweet words: “I see Jesus!”

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