

At HOME with our FAITH

Practical wisdom
for busy parents
By Annemarie Scobey



March
2014

Rave Reviews:

Why Bother Praying? and
Bringing Lent Home with St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Living Faith:

Person to person
**The works of mercy
for real families**

“But Mom, I am too old enough!”

Your child can drive at 16, vote at 18, drink alcohol at 21. But other than these big milestones, parents receive little guidance on when the time is right for the many other rites of passage. There is no set age for when a child should start doing chores, when they're old enough to go to the mall, when they should receive a cell phone or Facebook account. Thoughtful parents can ask themselves the following three questions to help determine if the time is right for a child to take on a new responsibility.

What will my child learn from this?

Every new step carries with it learning potential. Children who are held accountable for completing a daily chore or two will be able to better handle independence later. “Clay needs to throw his dirty clothes down the laundry chute,” says Jenn, of her 3-year-old. “Some days he likes to do it, some days he doesn't, but regardless, it's his job.”

Starting kids with jobs young, supervising them well, and continuing responsibilities into the teen years is an important way parents can help their children look outside themselves.

“Our teenage son sometimes complains about walking the dog each day,” says his dad, Francis. “He always has too much homework, or has less time this week because of sports practices, but we make him do it anyway. We are instilling in him that responsibilities outside the home don't excuse us from helping the family.”

What are the risks? It's a

child's job to try to become independent from their parents—and a cell phone, Facebook account, and trips with friends to the mall will all serve that desire to separate. But it's the parent's responsibility to understand the threats to a child's safety, even as children insist everything will be fine.

Children will flourish when their steps toward independence are granted with caution and attention to both the benefits and risks. Children whose independence is limited in grade school will have a greater sense of self to draw on when

Don't let kids badger you into making decisions you will come to regret later.

TAME THE SLEEPOVER

Sleepovers can be great, but they can also pose risks, as children may have unsupervised access to the Internet, phones, TV, or movies while parents sleep. Here's what some parents say:

Enforce house rules. “I collect all phones and electronic devices early in the evening and power down our computers,” says one mom. “I do it in a lighthearted way, and I tell the girls, you're here to have fun with each other—not to text kids who are not here.”

Make sure they're old enough. “Parents in my children's school were having sleepovers in kindergarten,” says a mom of five. “I thought that was too young. My kids had to wait until fourth grade, when they were old enough to call me if something was wrong.”

Try a sleepunder instead. “I am not a fan of sleepovers,” says a dad of two. “The kids are exhausted and cranky the next day. The parents in our class have agreed to 'sleepunders.' Kids go to the host's house in their pajamas, then they have pizza, watch a movie, and parents pick them up at 10 p.m. or so.”



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rave reviews

Looking to deepen your faith this Lent? Two very different books can offer you wisdom for a meaningful 40-day journey:

Why Bother Praying?

Richard Leonard, S.J.
(Paulist, 2013)



Discover good reasons to pray as well as methods of prayer from many Catholic

traditions, offered with humor, great anecdotes, and an understanding of real life.

Bringing Lent Home with St. Thérèse of Lisieux Prayers, Reflections, and Activities for Families

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle
(Ave Maria, 2013)



A book for busy parents who may have just five minutes to read each day's story of

St. Thérèse's life and the accompanying reflection. Includes a daily prayer and suggestions for creative almsgiving and fasting.

SEEING THE SITES

charitynavigator.org

Lent is a time of almsgiving. Charity Navigator's ratings show givers how efficiently a charity will use their support today, how well it has sustained its programs and services over time, and its level of commitment to being accountable and transparent.

they're allowed to become more independent in high school.

Bart and Terri, parents of four boys in their teens and early 20s, did not allow cell phones until high school, and then required each boy to turn in the phone at 10 p.m. "It is rewarding to have our oldest son thank us for having restricted him when he was still living at home," Terri says. "He's now doing youth outreach work and is interested in studies showing the effects of limitless electronic use by teens."

How is God guiding me? Mary and Joseph didn't think their 12-year-old was old enough to be separated from their family, teaching in the Temple, but God had other plans. Conversely, 30-something Jesus wasn't convinced it was time to turn water into wine until his mom nudged him into that job.

A deep faith can help parents keep their eyes on a bigger purpose than the question of the moment. "I am constantly praying that God guides me as a father," says Mike, dad of two girls. "I find that having a consistent prayer life helps me in decision-making with my daughters because I am tuned in to the bigger picture of who God wants my children to become."

catholic 101

Why do I need to go to Mass? I can pray anywhere.

Prayer at home (or on a run or in the woods) is an important practice and is crucial for deepening your relationship with God. But even if you're spending a half hour in prayer every day, going to Mass offers you grace beyond what you will be able to experience alone. Catholics believe that Christ is present in four ways in every Mass—in the community of believers; in the person of the priest; in the Word of God; and in the Eucharist. Each person is made in the image of God, so when we worship with a community, we can see Christ in both the strengths and needs of those around us and in the priest, who leads us. The readings offer us opportunities to understand God's movement through the ages and today. When we receive the body and blood of Christ, we experience God's always-available transforming grace. The church places such a high value on Christ's unique presence within the Mass that participation at Sunday Mass is obligatory.



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Traveling far to stay close

The destination itself is only part of the goal of a family spring break trip. The other part is to bring a sense of unity and closeness to the family.

The goal is family fun. In regular life, children's requests for Frisbee tossing or a game of catch may need to be put off in deference to home maintenance. Successful family vacations should include enough downtime to say yes to more of these requests.

Spend time outside in nature. A theme park is fun, but studies repeatedly show that all of us benefit most from time outside in nature. Look for state and national parks for outdoor swimming, hiking, and relaxing.

Pray before you go. As the car rolls out of the driveway, make the sign of the cross and pray the Our Father or Hail Mary together. Add personal intentions about your hopes for the trip or words of thanks that you have this opportunity.

Remember Holy Week. Catholic churches are everywhere and are relatively predictable in terms of Holy Week schedules. Before you leave, google Catholic churches in the area where you'll be staying. Attending a Holy Thursday evening Mass, a Good Friday afternoon service, and the Saturday night Easter vigil or Sunday morning Easter Mass will enrich your recognition of God's presence in your family.

Fast, yes, but not from candy

Giving up chocolate for Lent is one way to fast, but in *Bringing Lent Home with St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Prayers, Reflections, and Activities for Families* (Ave Maria), author Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle offers different ways to fast for each day of Lent. Try some yourself and with your spouse and children—each is just for one day.

- Today, fast from speaking ill of anyone, even if it is justified. Pray for them instead.
- Today, fast from procrastination. If there's something you need to do, do it in a way pleasing to God.
- Today, fast from making excuses. Do what is asked of you.
- Today, fast from being prideful. In everything today, give praise or credit to someone else.
- Fast from technology today. Avoid TV, surfing the Internet, playing video games.
- Fast from whining. If something disappoints you, offer it to God and trust him with it.

“How could you miss that free throw?”

“How we, as parents, react to our children’s competitions can influence their perspective on winning and losing. If we care too deeply about whether or not our children win, the weight of our feelings can make it harder for them to take competition in stride. If we try too hard to protect our children from disappointment by avoiding all situations involving winning and losing, we communicate that competition is dangerous. We need to strike a middle ground between accepting our children’s distress about losing while also helping them learn to cope with that distress.”

—From *Smart Parenting for Smart Kids* (Jossey-Bass) by Eileen Kennedy-Moore and Mark Lowenthal

Feeling doubtful? Fear not

In *Why Bother Praying?* (Paulist Press), Jesuit Father Richard Leonard notes that doubt is a central and recognized part of our Christian faith. He points to the apostle Thomas, who had trouble believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. “Thomas doubts the early church, and not just in regard to a minor issue of discipline or procedure. He doubts the central Christian message: that God raised Jesus from the dead,” Leonard writes. He says that we should not shy away from questions, as they are necessary for a mature, adult faith. “What we need to ensure is that we sincerely want answers to the questions we ask and don’t just use them to justify our wandering away from our faith.”

For those among us who are not in a doubting moment right now, but are filled with certainty about God, Leonard has this to say: “We could take the earliest church as our model and stay open to our doubters for as long as we possibly can, and so help them to come see the transforming truth that has transformed our lives.”

Person to person

LIVING FAITH
WITH CATHERINE
O’CONNELL-CAHILL

Some weeks back I went to hear Dr. Paul Farmer speak in Chicago along with his mentor, liberation theologian and champion of the poor Father Gustavo Gutiérrez of Peru. Farmer, if you’ve never heard of him, is a Harvard physician, and a Catholic, who has almost single-handedly revolutionized health care for the poor in developing countries over the past three decades. I expected an audience of 100 or so, mostly of older folks. Instead I beheld a hotel ballroom packed to the rafters with nearly 2,000 people, almost all of them under the age of 25, many of them Catholic high school students.

What message did Farmer and Gutiérrez have for the throngs of eager young people who came out on this chilly evening? I could best sum it up in five words: “We must accompany the poor.” Not coincidentally, it’s the same message being advocated by Pope Francis, another favorite of young people—because they observe that he practices what he preaches.

They love that he invited four homeless men to join him for breakfast on his birthday. They love the story told by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, who visited him in Buenos Aires several years ago: Then Cardinal Bergoglio made the airport pickup himself, in a borrowed car. “We passed all the great sights, but did I hear about them? No,” said McCarrick in a talk at Georgetown University recently. “The only thing I heard was, ‘Under this bridge is the worst slum in the city. I try to visit often.’” McCarrick stressed, “He doesn’t just reach out to the poor, but to the individuals who are poor.”

You saw the key word there: *individuals*. What if, this Lent, we found a way for our family to get to know some poor individuals in person, by name? “They have much to teach us,” says the pope to encourage us. Perhaps our local parish could help: The March *U.S. Catholic* magazine reports that during the weeks when Lumen Christi Parish in St. Paul, Minnesota hosts a shelter for people experiencing



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homelessness, parish families—children included—come in to host and have supper with them. What a great idea.

Our family’s monthly visits to a homeless shelter in Chicago, kicked off by one of my kids having to answer, “What is your family doing for Lent?” for a homework assignment, have been eye-opening. As “clothing ministers” on certain Thursday nights, we accompany folks as they choose from donated pants, shirts, socks, coats, hats, gloves, and (when we’re lucky) long johns. It’s been great to see my son and daughter bemoaning the lack of blankets or size 32 pants on a given night. My husband, to my great amusement, always seems to get the guys who shop just like I do, taking their sweet time browsing, patching together a decent outfit from odds and ends.

We all wear name tags—so we can learn one another’s names. Some of the guests at the shelter are nice; some not as much—just like the rest of us. And I learned that nope, not even homeless folks in Marquette Park want those old clothes with holes or giant ink stains. And why should they? I wouldn’t.

It’s wonderful to write checks for the poor; to donate clothes, toys, food. Bravo. But Paul Farmer, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Pope Francis suggest that we summon our courage and take the next step. Our children will thank us.

The role of reconciliation

Families who participate in the sacrament of reconciliation a couple times a year give their children a precious gift. Children love the feeling of starting once again with a clean slate. While they might be reticent to participate in the sacrament if they have never done so before or if it's been a long time, once they do, they feel relief and grace. "I feel so much lighter," said 10-year-old Liam after receiving the sacrament. Most parishes offer an evening reconciliation service during Lent.

Corporal works of mercy

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Visit the imprisoned
5. Shelter the homeless
6. Visit the sick
7. Bury the dead

Spiritual works of mercy

1. Admonish the sinner
2. Instruct the ignorant
3. Counsel the doubtful
4. Comfort the sorrowful
5. Bear wrongs patiently
6. Forgive all injuries
7. Pray for the living and the dead

Featured this month

Your kid messes up—now what?

When children are small, we call their misdeeds "naughty." As they get older, we may say they've broken the rules or are acting disobediently. Few parents use the word "sin" when describing something their child has done wrong, but when children turn away of God's grace and instead hurt someone, they have sinned, and one of the privileges (although a difficult one) of parenting is to help our children turn back to the always-present love of God.

Acknowledge what the child has done wrong. Some parents struggle to see the good in their children and find fault too easily, while other parents only see the good their children do and are uncomfortable admitting their children make poor choices. The healthiest parents see their children as God does—as essentially good people who occasionally sin and need to be redirected into God's love.

Bart, father of four boys, has this to say: "My wife and I have tried to respond as we think Jesus would have. To let the child know that God has already forgiven them, to assure them that we all make bad choices and that ultimately what matters is how we respond to the bad choice we've made. What can they do to repair any damage that has been done? How can they use the situation to help them make a better choice the next time? How can they grow in compassion for others who may have sinned against them in a similar way? In other words, we're all on a journey of becoming who we're meant to be and, through Christ, we can allow even our sins to become blessings to help us become those people."

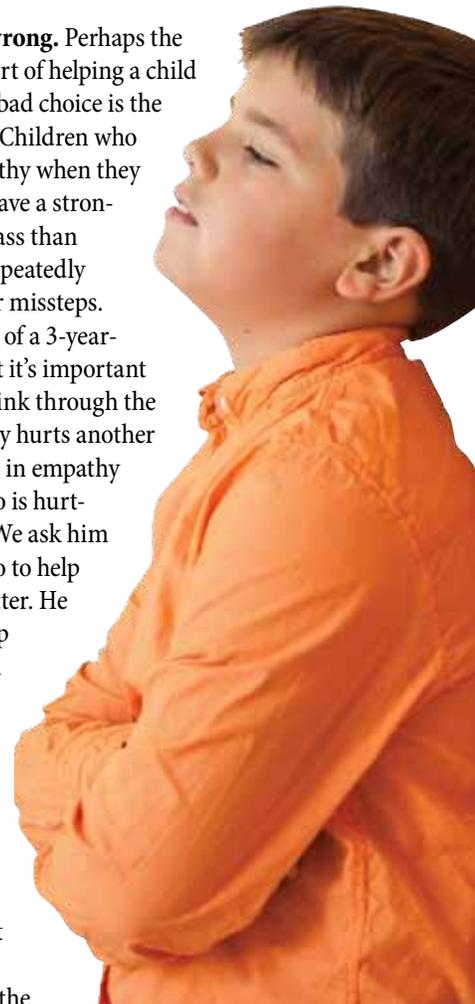
Good can come even out of serious sin. When Judy's son Andy was arrested for drunk driving, he didn't want his mother to come near him, he was so ashamed. But Judy prayed that she could continue to love her son as God did. "As parents we need to teach and discipline our children, but it must always be wrapped in love. We still have to face the consequences of our choices, but God's love for us never changes," Judy says. "It took a while for all of us to work through all the emotion." After her son's arrest, Judy gave her son the book *Don't Waste Your Life* by John Piper (Crossway). "Andy has told me that reading that book right after being arrested changed his life for the good."

Repair the wrong. Perhaps the most difficult part of helping a child work through a bad choice is the follow-through. Children who are taught empathy when they are young will have a stronger moral compass than those who are repeatedly excused for their missteps.

Jenn, mother of a 3-year-old, believes that it's important for her son to think through the situation. "If Clay hurts another child, we engage in empathy for the child who is hurting," she says. "We ask him what he could do to help the child feel better. He usually comes up with a great idea all by himself. When he can't, we guide him to some kind of action to show the child that he sees how he hurt him or her even if he doesn't say the words 'I'm sorry.' If he flat out refuses, we model empathy and apologizing and trying to make amends."

As children get older, situations become more complex. When Jack and Becky discovered their teen son had skipped school by calling in sick, pretending to be his father, they were shocked and heartsick. "Though we were concerned a school suspension would permanently mark his academic records, we knew what we had to do. We marched him to the school office and insisted he confess and apologize," Becky says. "This led to Adam not being a repeat offender, but we ultimately hope he learned a solid lesson in owning up to one's mistakes."

—Annemarie Scobey



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