

Five tips for celebrating First Communion without stress

This April, my third child received first Communion. That, however, does not make me an expert. In fact, I'd say, three kids in, that I keep learning even more; it didn't stop with my first child's first Communion.

Here are a few pointers that have helped me let go of the stress and embrace the beauty of the sacrament.

1. Remember why

The instruction your child receives from your parish is NOT the instruction that's most important. What matters most is what the kids learn at home, with their family.

In the midst of event-planning activities, don't forget to pause to remember: It's about Jesus. It's about receiving Jesus – really receiving him.

It's about the Eucharist. Period. Don't lose sight of that.

2. Plan ahead

Procrastination and denial seem to go hand in hand, and something else always seems more important than the thing I hate to do.

Think of all the little details and make a list, if that makes you happy. You could even make columns and give yourself a timeline. Cue the joyful music and open a spreadsheet if it makes you smile.

But really, none of that matters if you don't really plan ahead, as in making phone calls, sending emails and mailing

invitations (if you're the invitation-sending kind of parent). Godparents and grandparents can't attend if they don't know about it. Want to make sure your favorite deacon is in attendance? One little correspondence is all it takes to ask.

3. Enlist help

I'm a big fan of celebrating our babies' baptisms with a party. I don't usually do birthday parties beyond our immediate family, but I will chuck my "I hate party planning" hesitations out the window in order to live it up for a baptism. It happens once in your life, after all. Shouldn't it be the sort of thing we celebrate big?

The same is true for first Communion, at least in my world. And, given the aversion I have to party planning, this step is critical for my mental well-being.

In my experience, it's far more difficult to accept help than to give it. That doesn't mean you need it any less. That doesn't mean you should suck it up and do it all yourself. Don't be taken by this fallacy! Ask for help. Enlist the people whose talents match your needs.

4. Be early

I may or may not be preaching to the choir here, but I need this reminder with my crew. There is something about wrangling everyone out of the door in enough time to be early-without-being-too-early that is simply beyond me.

To accomplish this, then, we have driven two cars to first Communion Masses. I take our first communicant to church (along with any of the extras that he or she may need) and my husband comes later with the rest of our gang.

5. Smile

Don't forget to smile, because you're going to have moments that you look back on a decade later and have completely

forgotten about. Someone will catch a picture and you'll look back and realize that first Communion was beautiful on so many levels.

And those are the moments you want to remember.

The most important meal has already happened, and you get to relive it at every single Mass. You'll be able to look back later and see these moments and remember.

And so will your first communicant.

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