Caring for your family's spiritual needs during the COVID-19 outbreak

One of the sad consequences of the coronavirus outbreak is the separation many of us feel from our parish communities. Public Masses are suspended and parish gatherings, including religious education classes, are canceled. But families can still stay connected to God and his Church during the COVID-19 crisis, and they can form their children in the faith as well. It begins with seeing the family through the eyes of our faith.

Since ancient times, the Catholic Church has called the family the *domestic church*, or the church of the home (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* no. 2204). It is considered the smallest until of the Christian community. Within the domestic church, parents are considered the first and most important teachers of the faith for their children (no. 2225). Through the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony and your vocation as a parent, God is ready to give you what you need to hold your family together in faith and to form your children as disciples, even in difficult times such as these. And now is a critical time to stay grounded in faith, especially when there is so much uncertainty around us. Here are a few ways to get started:

Create a sacred space or "family altar" in your home.

This was a common practice in many Catholic homes in past generations. Choose a space in your home that can become a focal point for family prayer and a concrete reminder that God is present with your family. This is especially important for young children, who are very concrete thinkers – they

experience the world with their senses and sometimes have difficulty understanding that God is present if they do not see visible signs that point to the sacred. Your home altar can be as simple as a mantle or end table decorated with a few sacred objects – perhaps a crucifix, a rosary, an icon or statue, the Bible and a battery-operated candle. You might wish to make decorating the home altar a family project. Perhaps the kids would like to draw or paint their favorite saints, creating "icons" for this space. Teach your children to pause here to say a quick prayer at the home altar as you pass through the house, and use this as a gathering place for family prayer.

Pray regularly as a family.

It doesn't have to be long or complicated – perhaps just an Our Father and a Hail Mary for all those who are ill with the virus and everyone caring for them. Or you might wish to pick one form of prayer to pray spontaneously each day. For example, you might decide to pray prayers of thanksgiving, asking each family member to name one thing they are thankful for, after which the whole family responds, "Thank you, God." On another day, you might ask each family member to name one thing they would like to ask of God, and after each intention, the whole family could respond, "Lord, hear our prayer."

Stay connected with your parish on social media.

Be sure to follow your parish on Facebook, Twitter or the parish website to stay in touch regarding news and information, prayer requests and perhaps an online message from your pastor. Keep in touch with families you know form the parish as well. Even if we can't be physically in the same place, we can continue to maintain some sense of community.

Participate in the liturgy of the Church – even though you can't be in the parish.

On Sundays especially, stream the Mass together online, or

watch a televised Mass, and participate as if you were present in person. Many parishes are now streaming Sunday Masses (and even daily Mass) as public Masses are suspended. Find out if your parish is doing this. If no, consider joining in with another parish online. Links to various parishes that stream the Mass can be found at mass-online.org. Make an act of spiritual communion, asking Jesus to come and dwell in your heart even though you cannot receive him sacramentally.

Use resources to keep children learning about their faith.

Contact your parish religious education director or find out if the publisher of the religious education curriculum used at your parish has resources you can use during this time. OSV is offering free online home session plans for every lesson in the *Allelu* preschool and kindergarten program and the *Alive in Christ* religious education series for grades 1 through 8. In addition, OSV's new print magazine, OSV Kids can provide fun, family time centered around the faith.

During this difficult time, it's important to stay connected with one another, with God and with our parish family. May God guide you and bring you peace through these challenging days until we can again be together with one another, and with the Eucharist.

Tips for helping kids cope with the anxiety around COVID-19.