

Five ways for parents to prepare children for First Holy Communion

The focus of many of my hours every week from September to May is being a catechist in parish religious education for my four classes of second graders. In both parishes, second grade is when the children celebrate first reconciliation and first holy Communion. I have been preparing children to receive first holy Communion now for 14 years.

Someone recently asked me, as a catechist, what do I think parents should keep in mind as they guide their children toward first holy Communion? Well, here's my response—five things I'd advise any parent to do to help their child prepare to receive the Eucharist for the first time.

1. Go to Sunday Mass.

Every week I tell the children it is important to go to Sunday Mass, and to please ask their parents to take them. I teach the children how beautiful, important and special it is to receive Jesus' body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. If receiving Jesus in holy Communion is wonderful and special, then we would want to at least receive the Eucharist every Sunday. I implore families, don't let "being too busy," sports or anything keep you from going to Mass. I compare trying to live a Catholic life without Mass like trying to grow a plant without water. It will wither and die.

2. Talk about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist with your child.

The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is our belief that the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Jesus. The Eucharist is not a symbol or a sign, but Jesus truly

present.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops reminds Catholics [Jesus' "presence is not momentary nor simply signified, but wholly and permanently real under each of the consecrated species of bread and wine."](#) The Council of Trent affirmed that "the true body and blood of our Lord, together with his soul and divinity, exist under the species of bread and wine. His body exists under the species of bread and his blood under the species of wine, according to the import of his words."

Near the start of our year of religious education, I tell my classes they are about to learn the most important thing all year: It is that the Eucharist is "really, really, really Jesus." I come back to this over and over through the year.

I can't remember how I reacted to the idea that through the prayers of the priest and the power of the Holy Spirit that God could become what appears to be bread and wine. When I stop to think about it, it really is amazing.

Talk with your child and make sure they understand the real presence. Try not to say "getting bread and wine." Instead talk about "receiving the precious body and precious blood."

A survey by Pew Research Forum and the Center for Applied Research in Apostolate, known as CARA, of self-identified adult Catholics [showed that 45 to 50 percent of Catholics did not know the Catholic Church teaches belief in the real presence.](#) If Catholics truly believed they were receiving Jesus Christ – body, blood, soul and divinity – wouldn't they all be at Mass every Sunday and receiving the Eucharist reverently?

3. Model reverence and focus on the sacrament when celebrating first holy Communion.

First holy communion is an exciting time. There are special outfits, relatives and friends gathering and making a fuss,

parties being planned, presents and the pageantry of the day. But please be careful for your child to be too caught up in the clothes, the party and the presents. It would be normal and natural for any child to focus on these happy things. Remind your child why all these wonderful and fun things are happening because they will be receiving Jesus in holy Communion for the first time.

4. Receive Communion with reverence and practice receiving Holy Communion at home with your child.

The more they practice, the more comfortable they will be, and less nervous on the day of first Communion. Also, kids think it is fun to practice!

Here is an easy-to-follow guide to use at home:

- You can use any sort of small cracker (I use oyster crackers) to help them become comfortable with the sequence of how to receive.
- Process with hands folded in prayer, singing the Communion hymn.
- When it is his or her turn, he or she should make a slight bow of the head – this is our sign of reverence. No need to bow from the waist. I tell them if their hair is flipping, it's too big a bow.
- [Everyone has the personal choice to receive on the tongue or in the hand. When teaching about how to receive in the hand, children should make a throne with their hands as if they are receiving a king.](#) The hands should be one underneath the other, usually the dominant hand on the bottom.
- When the priest says "The body of Christ," look at the host and respond "Amen" firmly like you believe it!
- Use the underneath hand to pick up the host and consume it immediately.
- Fold hands in prayer and process back to your seat to make a prayer of thanksgiving.

- If receiving on the tongue, gently extend your tongue after saying "Amen."
- There is no need to make the sign of the cross after receiving. The bow before receiving is the sign of reverence.

I tell the children if they watch carefully every week during the Communion procession, they will see some adults who are good examples and some not very good examples, so *the children* need to be the extra good examples for the grown-ups.

5. Praise and thank God for the great gift of Communion.

St. Pius X called holy Communion "the shortest and surest way to heaven." So not only on the day of first holy Communion, but after every Communion, we all should praise and thank God the great gift of our Lord received in the Eucharist.

Prayer after Communion

Lord Jesus, I love and adore you. You're a special friend to me. Welcome, Lord Jesus, O welcome. Thank you for coming to me.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, O thank you for giving yourself to me. Make me strong to show your love wherever I may be.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay, close by me forever and love me, I pray.

Bless all of us children in your loving care and bring us to heaven to live with you there.

Cindy Coleman

[My First Communion Journal](#)

This beautiful First Communion journal is full of fun ways for Catholic kids to prepare for, remember, and live out their First Holy Communion. With its colorful design, prayers, devotions, special activities, and quotes from the saints and

Scriptures, the *My First Communion Journal* can be used both before and after the child's First Communion day.