How to talk to kids about God

It’s a daunting subject, but an important one – how to help children understand an invisible God, creator of the universe and best friend of humankind. The Catholic Church teaches that parents are the first and most important teachers of their children (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2225). As parents, we need to cultivate our own relationship with God to ensure that we are also the best of teachers for our children as we introduce them to their creator. Here are some tips for how to help your child get to know God.

PRAY REGULARLY, AND ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL READING. Not just as a family, but also individually. When we have a close relationship with God, we can’t help but share him with those we love. Allow your child to “catch you” praying or reading Scripture from time to time. Our actions are far more powerful than our words. Children believe in God when they see their parents acknowledging and talking to God.

DECORATE YOUR HOME WITH CONCRETE SYMBOLS OF YOUR FAITH. Young children especially are very concrete thinkers, and they need visible signs of God’s presence in your home. Statues or pictures of Jesus are especially important, because Christ is the most visible and most complete revelation of God to humankind. Consider an icon or statue of Jesus and the children for your child’s room, as this image will present the idea that God loves children and wants to be their friend.

WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN, REFER TO GOD AS AN ADDITIONAL FAMILY MEMBER IN YOUR HOME. When your child learns to do something new, express your pride and add: “And you know who else is proud of you? God is! We can’t see God, but he can see us, and he is so happy with how you are growing – just the way he planned!”

AS CHILDREN GET OLDER, DON’T BE AFRAID TO TACKLE THE DIFFICULT

SUBJECTS. On a televised press conference during Holy Week, Pope Benedict XVI was asked by a child from Japan how God could allow the type of suffering seen there in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami. Rather than giving a pat (and unsatisfying) answer, the pope said that this was difficult for him to understand as well, but that one thing about which he is sure is that God makes himself very close to those who are suffering. When children and teens struggle with difficult times, be sure to emphasize that God is sad with them and will help them through their troubles.

REMEMBER THAT, AS A PARENT, YOU ARE AN ICON OF GOD TO YOUR CHILD. God reveals himself to us as a parent, and this makes the parent-child relationship a privileged place to learn about God. Be sure to ask for (and be open to) the grace to be a faithful sign of God’s ever-present, unconditional love. In every choice you make as a parent, ask yourself, “What does this teach my child about God, who we also call Father?”