What is a Catholic family anyway? Busting common myths

When my family first converted to Catholicism almost seven years ago, I confided in a friend that I wanted my house to *look* Catholic. I wanted a visitor to our home to know just by walking in the door that a Catholic family lived here. I thought that I was talking about buying some crucifixes, pictures of Mary and maybe a holy water font. What I've learned is that it's a whole lot more complicated than that.

It turns out there isn't one look to a Catholic home, any more than there is one look to a Catholic family. Yet, how do we fight back against the idea that there is a singular ideal when it comes to living life as a Catholic family? I believe we start by busting past some of our stereotypical Catholic ideals and broadening our definition of what a faithful Catholic family might look like.

Myth: Faithful Catholic families must be large.

Truth: Catholic families come in a variety of sizes. I feel like at this point in the game this should be obvious, but it isn't so we have to start here. That couple without kids? They may be facing infertility, pregnancy loss, be unable to adopt, or any other number of circumstances and be acting perfectly within God's plan for their family. That couple with a small brood? I won't even get into all the serious, church-accepted reasons that they have chosen to keep their family small. And yes, people are able to faithfully avoid pregnancy for extended periods of time through church-approved methods. Faithful Catholic families prayerfully discern their family size and the ways in which they may (or may not) grow, knowing that ultimately God is in the driver's seat here.

Myth: Faithful Catholic families send their kids to (homeschool/Catholic schools).

Truth: Faithful Catholic families send their kids to public schools, charter schools, private school, parochial schools, and homeschools. In fact, we've had kids enrolled in four of the five! Just like our first myth, the real sign of a faithful Catholic family is that they are engaged and involved in the holistic education of the child.

Myth: Faithful Catholic families go to daily Mass (Latin Mass, pray the Liturgy of the Hours, etc).

Truth: Some faithful Catholic families have been gifted with a particular schedule and lifestyle (not to mention access) that calls them to participate in these devotions. These are all excellent practices, encouraged by our Church, but if your family doesn't or can't participate regularly you are not less of a faithful Catholic family. What all faithful Catholic families have in common is the sharing of a common faith through prayer, talk, service and celebration. That doesn't look the same for everyone though.

Myth: Faithful Catholic families are crunchy.

Truth: Many faithful Catholic families do choose to breastfeed, make natural childbirth decisions, delay vaccinations, grow their own food, etc. I would argue many of these families likely consider their faith in their reasons for the decisions they make. But they are still individual family choices, which means God can call you (or me) to something different. Mary breastfed Jesus is straight up a bad reason to exclude the family using bottles and formula. Faithful Catholic families are crunchy and salty and sweet. They are wild and wonderful, quiet and loud. They live in big and small houses, drive all sorts of vehicles. Really, there isn't a standard model!

Why bust the myths?

It's easier to live our mission. God has a special and unique purpose for each and every individual family. He has a mission and purpose for you, even if you haven't figured that out yet! Some families are still discovering their unique charisms, others are more clear. By worrying less about what God has called other families to (aka judging or comparing), we are better able to live the mission we are called to live.

It is easier to build community. When we aren't worried about someone else's adherence to artificial rules as to what it means to be a Catholic family, it makes us significantly more inclusive. Inclusive is a bit of a buzzword, but that doesn't make it a bad word!

Have you ever felt like you don't fit in because your family doesn't meet the Catholic ideal? Have you ever skipped out on inviting another family to an event because you felt like they might not be the best example of a Catholic family and worried it might get weird?

I'm guilty of both. Let's not let it stop us from forming relationships.