

Why you should take little kids to Mass

If you're like me, going to Mass with your kids isn't always the easiest thing to do. Prying the children away from their Sunday morning play is often a 30-minute affair, one where the race to put shoes on children's feet functions as a replacement for any planned weekend cardio.

Once one walks through the doors of the church, the work is not over. The youngest children will want to take regular pilgrimages around the church building instead of remaining trapped in a pew. There will be violence among the children, since kids intuitively know that any quiet space is improved through piercing cries of toddler tantrums.

Even devout parents occasionally wonder to themselves, "What am I doing? Why do I endure this circus from week to week?" In the midst of the current scandals of the Church, I'm sure many parents have thought to themselves at least once or twice, "Will I really be missed?"

The answer is yes. At each Catholic Mass, the priest prays a Eucharistic Prayer. Many of us know that during this prayer, the bread and wine become Christ's body and blood. Jesus Christ becomes sacramentally present among us, feeding us with the fullness of love.

But the Eucharistic Prayer does more than this. During the prayer, the Church and all her members are offered to God. The priest, and thus the entire People of God, pray, "Look, O Lord, upon the Sacrifice which you yourself have provided for your Church, and grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory" (Eucharistic

Prayer IV).

In our celebration of the Mass, men and women in the parish become one body in Christ. We become the communion of love that is made present in the Eucharist, the love of Christ uniting us together. And having become this communion of love, having become the Church, we offer ourselves back to the Father.

Skipping Mass therefore is not just about breaking an obligation. Instead, the Church suffers when her absent members, the sons and daughters of the living God, are not present to offer the sacrifice of their lives for the redemption of the world.

Going to Mass is thus not reducible to an experience of being alone with Jesus. It's not a time for our private spiritual needs to be met. Instead, it is the time when the Church, in all of her messiness, remembers her deepest identity – she is made for love unto the end.

For all those families who have a hard time getting out the door, who have to endure screaming and kicking from tired kids, the Church needs you. The sacrifice of praise, of your very lives that you offer by bringing your kids and yourself to Mass, has a sanctifying effect in the world.

After you leave Mass, having offered yourself in love to the triune God, you go home. You go home to live out in your family, in your neighbor, and in your job the vocation you receive weekly at Mass – to become a sacrifice of love.