
LIFE TEEN PARENT LETTER

Check out our Parent Life website at lparentlife.com for resources on how to guide your teen in a faith-filled way through modern day culture!

LIFE NIGHT: SAME WAVELENGTH

CONTENT OVERVIEW

There are many kinds of relationships in our lives. We have people who are good friends, close friends, and even best friends. There are people whom we would call our work friends, business partners, or acquaintances. Going even deeper, we have relationships with spouses, children, and parents. We may even have relationships with siblings, relatives, and in-laws. The depth of these relationships is contingent on how well we actually know the person. When we know a person, we begin to understand their motivations and develop trust and loyalty. We know their dreams, desires, goals, qualities, and personality traits. Knowing them more helps us love them more and when we love people, we want to continue to deepen our relationship with them.

This is how it is with our relationship with Jesus. As with many of our relationships, we are either growing in our relationship with Jesus or we are drifting apart from Him. But, growing in our relationship with Jesus is very different than any other relationship. First, Jesus is the Son of God and constantly reveals God's love to us in a variety of ways. That being said, Jesus is more than just another person. Jesus came so we may know God better, be reconciled to God, and live in the light of the love of God (1 John 4:16). Just as we spend time growing in our relationships with others, we must also spend time growing in our relationship with Jesus.

Growing in our relationship with Jesus, however, may look and feel different than it does when we grow in our other relationships. We can't exactly send Jesus a text or sit down and have coffee with Him. Jesus did, however, promise to be with us always (Matthew 29:20), so how is this promise fulfilled? Through the sacraments. A sacrament is a perceptible sign, either in word or action, that is accessible to our human nature. In other words, invisible realities that become visible. We encounter Christ, and build our relationship with Him, through the sacraments.

If we would like to grow in our relationship with Jesus, we need to seek specific ways we can encounter Him. One way we do that very concretely is through the Mass. Every Sunday (and daily if we are able to) we can encounter the full presence — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity — of Jesus in the Eucharist. Jesus is also present in the Scriptures proclaimed during the Liturgy of the Word, through the priest celebrating Mass, and through the community gathered for Mass. Encountering Jesus through the Mass — especially in the Eucharist — can truly transform us.

This series is all about encountering Jesus in the Mass and allowing that encounter to not only help us grow in our relationship with Jesus, but also transform us. Even though we all approach Mass from different places, we are challenged to allow the full presence of Christ at the Mass to transform our hearts. As we walk through the doors of the church each week, may we be open to encountering the great love Jesus has for us.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. How often are we, as a family, attending Mass? Is there more we can do to make this a priority in our family life?
2. How do you experience Jesus through the Mass? How does this change you and your relationship with Jesus?
3. Do you view Mass more as an obligation or as something we are blessed to do each week?

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LIFE NIGHT: PARALLEL UNIVERSE

CONTENT OVERVIEW

In Disney's animated classic, *The Lion King*, Simba, a young lion, is faced with the reality of losing his father. In his best attempt to run from the situation, avoiding it altogether, he eventually meets up with a baboon named Rafiki, who serves somewhat as a spiritual director. In one of the most impactful scenes in the movie, Rafiki leads Simba to a place where he tells Simba that his deceased father, Mufasa, is present. This location, however, is just a pool of water in which the frustrated Simba only sees his reflection. Rafiki challenges Simba to "look harder" into the water, to which Simba does, now seeing the reflection of his father as opposed to his own. Rafiki explains to the young Simba that "he [Mufasa] lives in you." Because of this realization and moment of transformation, Simba decides to stop running from his past, take responsibility for his actions, and live fully, knowing that he bears the image of his father.

This scene in *The Lion King* is a great example of grace, but what is grace? Do we fully understand God's grace? During the Mass, we hear the word "grace" quite frequently. We may talk about needing God's grace. We may even know, or remember hearing, that the sacraments are outward expressions of God's grace. Simply put, grace is God's life within us... so, yes, like Simba seeing his father in the pool of water, we know God lives in us! Grace is God's favor and help toward us and is given to us because of God's love for us. When we receive grace, we not only participate in God's life, but are also transformed (CCC 1996-1997).

Grace allows us to become adoptive sons and daughters of God so that when we look at our reflections in the mirror, we, like Simba, can see our Father and realize that we are a son or daughter of God. This makes a difference in our lives because the gift of God's life within us helps heal our soul from sin, make us holy, and prepare our soul to enter God's presence in heaven (CCC 1999).

While grace is open to everyone, we need to choose to receive it. God freely gives grace, but we must freely respond to it. There are three specific kinds of grace we can be open to receiving: sanctifying grace, actual grace, and sacramental grace. Sanctifying grace is given to us when we receive the Sacrament of Baptism. Sanctifying grace is the grace that gets us into heaven. Actual graces are God's interventions in our lives, or simply God at work in our lives. Sacramental grace is encountered through the sacraments. When we receive the Eucharist, there is a particular grace we receive. Mass is a profound place to encounter God's grace. It is a place in which we are challenged to "look harder," realizing that God draws near to us and gives us His very life within us every moment of every day. That is grace!

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. In what specific ways is God currently present in our family life?
2. How can God's presence — God's grace — transform our hearts?
3. Did we go to Mass this past week? Why or why not? What else can we do to make Mass a priority in our lives?

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LIFE NIGHT: ANOTHER DIMENSION

CONTENT OVERVIEW

Imagine for a moment that your favorite NFL team is going to the Super Bowl. Now imagine that someone approaches you and hands you four tickets to the game. In preparation, you might buy a new jersey, look up your seats to see where you'll be sitting, and arrive early to make sure that you don't miss any of the action. During the game, you will stand and cheer loudly when your team scores or has a good play. You will constantly be up and down in your seat, while at the same time lifting your hands at each touchdown. You may yell your teams' cheers, boo at the other team, and high-five the people sitting around you. You would most likely stay to the end of the game to make sure you see every minute of the game, especially if it's a close game.

Now let's turn our thoughts to the Mass. How do we approach Mass each Sunday? Do we prepare our hearts by reading the readings beforehand? Do we intentionally pick out our clothes? Are we on time for Mass? Are we actively engaged in reciting the prayers and singing the songs, or do we just let the ever-familiar words mindlessly run out of our mouths? Do we simply go through the motions of standing, sitting, and kneeling, or are we attentive to the intentionality behind why we stand, sit, and kneel during Mass? Do we reverently and humbly receive the Eucharist with open hands and hearts allowing God's presence to transform us, or do we simply go through the motions in the Communion line? Do we stay to the very end of Mass where we receive a blessing and are challenged to go into the world with the heart of Christ, or are we out the door and in the line for donuts and coffee before the priest is off the altar?

When we walk through the doors of the Church to attend Mass each week, we enter into something bigger than we can comprehend. We come together as a community in the throne room of God, hear the Word of God, receive the Eucharist, and leave having encountered God in a powerful and real way. In each Mass, we are called into full, active, and conscious participation, yet we sometimes miss this mark. We may run into Mass late. We become significantly distracted by the women in the pew in front of us who is wearing too much perfume while singing in her best operatic voice. We are embarrassed by the guy at the end of the pew who is looking down at our kids at every little sound they make. We may struggle to sing the overly-choir-rized, overused songs we have been singing as a Church since Moses was a young child. Our minds think about where we're going for breakfast as the priest shuffles through three full pages of notes for his homily. And, in all of this, we are called to actively participate.

The challenge for all of us is — in the combination of humanity and divinity — to open ourselves up to the presence of Christ and allow ourselves to be transformed through the beauty of the Mass each week. Through the Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, and Concluding Rites, we are called to partake in the wonderful and perfect prayer that we call Mass. As families, let us learn more and better prepare our hearts to embrace the reality of spending time with our incredible God!

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. What is our experience of Mass each week?
2. What is one thing our parish could do better that would help engage the community into full, active, and conscious participation? Is there anything we could do to help with this?
3. Did we go to Mass this past week? Why or why not?

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LIFE NIGHT: DETECTING A SIGNAL

CONTENT OVERVIEW

For most of us, our homes are very comfortable places. We are familiar with where everything is located. We know where everything goes in the kitchen and in other cabinets and closets throughout the house. We have our favorite places in the house, rooms we like to spend time in and our spot on the couch where we like to watch TV. We have areas where we like to have our morning coffee, check our emails, and read the paper (for those of us who still get the morning paper). We may sit at the same place around the dinner table, avoid the places we need to clean (like the garage and laundry room), and relax in our favorite chair at the end of the day. While we are very comfortable in our homes, there comes a time each day when we must leave the comfort of our home. We must go to work, drop the kids off at school, run errands, or head to the gym. Basically, we cannot primarily live within the walls of our house.

For Catholics, the Church is very much the same as our homes. We get comfortable in the church when we attend Mass each week. We are comfortable with the setting of the church, as most of us sit in the same pew each week and have been sitting there for years. We know where different elements of the church are located — the restrooms, classrooms, breakout rooms, offices, extra donuts, etc. We are familiar and comfortable with the smells, feelings, and lighting where we sit in the church each week. We may even have our favorite places in the church. However, just like our homes, we are challenged each week to go beyond the walls of the church.

We gather at Mass with the purpose of being sent. During the Concluding Rites, the priest or deacon sends the community out to “proclaim the Gospel.” Even the term “Mass” comes from the Latin word “*missa*,” which means “to send.” We cannot simply live our faith inside the church building, we must live our faith outside of the walls of our church. We can experience a profound encounter with Jesus during Mass, but we can also encounter Jesus — and have opportunities to share His love — outside the walls of the church.

If we receive Jesus in the Eucharist at Mass, our heart must be conformed to His heart. If our hearts are conformed to Jesus’ heart, we must be committed to living our faith outside the walls of the church. We recognize the areas where we are being called to serve. We recognize that we are being called to reach out and spread God’s love and life.

This adventure is only possible if we have a relationship with Jesus. We cannot be Christ in the world if we do not receive Him. If we do not receive Him, we do not know Him. Only by knowing Him, can we have and maintain a relationship with Him. When we attend Mass and receive the Eucharist, we make our hearts ready for whatever God wants to do in our lives and wherever He wants to take us.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. What is the most difficult thing about living “outside” the walls of the Church?
2. What specific effects does receiving the Eucharist have on you?
3. Did we go to Mass this past week? If so, did we stay the whole time or leave early?