



Teaching the Way of Love

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

November, 2013

Prayer of the Month

May God, the source of all patience and encouragement, enable us to live in perfect harmony with one another, in the spirit of Christ Jesus. Amen.



Parenting Tip of the Month

The holidays are a great time to engage in meaningful conversations with our children. To learn more about conversation basics go to: <http://goo.gl/zgmnrU>



Celebrating the Holidays with Rituals

Ready or not, the holiday season is just about here. Informally, it begins for many of our families with the deer hunting season. Other families start the celebration of the holidays with Thanksgiving. And, most of us are well into the holidays by the time Advent begins and its anticipation of Christmas. Obviously the celebration of the Incarnation of our Lord is the primary reason for the great value we put on this time of the year. But in addition to their significance for our relationship with God, the holidays also mark important family time.

What is it about this season that makes it so special for us? Without exception, the holidays provide us the opportunity to build relationships and strengthen family ties through rituals. Rituals are powerful experiences for families that build up our community of persons and sends joy into our hearts.

Like routines, rituals are activities or experiences that we do over and over again until they become part of the fabric of family life. But rituals differ from routines in some very important ways. To begin with, rituals are emotionally significant. Members of the family find them enjoyable, fulfilling and engaging. There is an anticipation that arises in the collective spirit of the group. Everyone can't wait for the celebration to begin. And, conversely, if a ritual is absent, it is missed.

There is a purpose to ritual, one that can be verbalized and remembered. In the case of the aforementioned holidays, the most common purpose of the upcoming holiday rituals is to increase the family's love and affection.

And, rituals invite active engagement by every member of the family. In fact, in most rituals there are defined roles and behaviors that are performed before, during and after the event. (Think about the care that goes into setting the table or buffet, the choice of food that will be served, who will make it, where it is prepared, what time of day the meal is served, who carves the turkey/ham/vension, who does clean up duty...) Rituals are meant to bring people together for a common cause.

Clearly, rituals are powerful. They provide ways for families to formalize their togetherness. Rituals give family members a sense of belonging. In fact, in a recent study done reported in the Scientific American psychologists found that rituals impact one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

Parenting with the Heart of Christ

Even if you are just a casual participant in a holiday tradition (like the new girl or boyfriend thrown into the mix for the first time) an established family ritual can reduce your anxiety, increase your sense of well-being and alleviate your stress. Rituals put people at ease and that gives rise to the belief that “you fit in and are welcome in this place”.

During the coming holiday season, we encourage you to ritualize the upcoming celebrations with your family. Here are a few easy steps to get started.

1. Acknowledge the rituals that already exist. Before the holiday arrives, think about the way it has been celebrated in the past. Every family has some sort of ritual that they inherited from families of origin or that they created by establishing a “tradition.” Being aware that these rituals exist can help you maximize their impact on your family.

2. Find routines that can be turned into rituals. Why try to establish a new habit when your family already has habits in place? Instead, inject those habits with meaning and establish some roles to transform them into a ritual. Already eating together? Turn off the distractions and establish a ritual of conversation, asking everyone to share something significant about the holiday. Are there presents to open? Instead of opening them all at once, consider opening them so that everyone can appreciate the giver of the gift and acknowledge the love behind it. These small shifts in how you do things help define what your family stands for.

3. Capitalize on the power of the holidays. Your family kind of expects you to do things to make these times more special, so you may get less resistance if you want to enhance what is already in place. In particular, consider ways that you can include God, the creator of all these celebrations, into your festivities. When can your family stop and offer up a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the gifts that your family has received? Perhaps everyone gathered can recall the blessings from the past year for which they can give thanks to God.

4. Start small, keep it simple, and make it fun. The word “ritual” sounds all formal and official. But rituals aren’t always scripted or solemn. Greeting rituals can include hugging or shouting out a funny saying. A celebration ritual might be as simple as a special place setting or a little symbol put on someone’s plate or on their chair. As long as it’s meaningful and invites people to participate and belong, you have the making of a powerful ritual.

5. Start a new ritual. One of the most moving rituals that your family can enjoy this holiday season involves hospitality. Is there a way that you can open your home and hearth to someone who is without a place to enjoy the joy of the holiday? Think about neighbors whose family lives so far away that they will be alone. Consider co-workers who don’t have the funds to travel to see their family over the holidays. Check out the nursing homes and consider visiting someone who never gets a visitor. As the gospel tells us, “do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels”. Hebrews 13:2

One last point. Families can make use of rituals every day. The family that realizes the power of ritual doesn’t have to rely only on the holidays to use it. Rituals are a great way for us to build a community of persons and to accomplish the other tasks of the family that our vocation to marriage and family give to us. So extend your rituals beyond the holidays. Bring light and warmth to a culture of darkness all year, not just during the holidays.

Following these recommendations can help your children be better prepared to really learn and develop during their time in school. But this is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies for helping your children become the best they can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the Teaching the Way of Love program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the Teaching the Way of Love home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.