



Prayer of the Month

Risen Christ,

In this month of Mary, guide our family to a greater understanding of the Sacraments, seasons and feasts of the Catholic Faith. Help us to find joy in them.

Amen.



The End or just the Beginning?

Spring is a time when we are looking forward to a number of major events in people's lives. We just celebrated Easter and are in the midst of Eastertide. During the next few weeks, many children will make their First Holy Communion. May is also the month for graduation and, for many young people, to celebrate Confirmation. May is also the beginning of the spring and summer wedding season. Reflecting on this time, it occurred to me that all of these events have something in common.

Our culture tends to see every one of these events as endings. Easter is the end of the season of religious practices. Many people who have been going to daily Mass all Lent will stop going after Easter. Parish activities will dry up because nobody will attend programs during the summer. First Communion is seen as an event to prepare for. There is a flurry of activity surrounding the ceremony and the celebration - and hopefully the catechesis - and then the big day comes and goes and it's all over. Graduation is seen as the end of the education career, and Confirmation is seen as graduation from religious education. Finally, a wedding is seen by our culture as the end of the search for "Mr. or Mrs. Right."

Parenting Tip of the Month

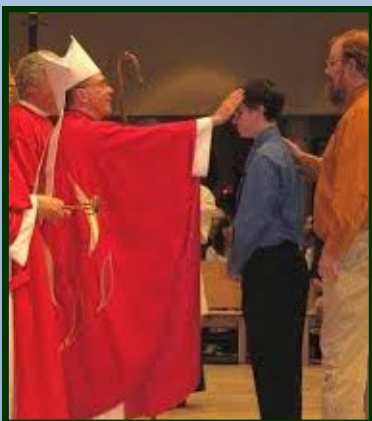
Understanding the liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church can help you know when seasons of the Church begin and end.

Read more at:

<http://goo.gl/j9OyYe>

But are any of these events really the end? Perhaps you already know that another name for graduation is "commencement." Commencement means "beginning." It was originally used for advanced degrees meaning "commencement into the rights and duties of the master or doctorate degree." However, it also came to be used for high school and undergraduate degrees because it was understood to mean the beginning of the next level of education or the beginning of one's work career. To look at graduation as the end stifles your growth. It's saying, "I have learned everything I need to know. No more growth is needed." How sad if that becomes our attitude toward life!

The same can be said of First Communion and Confirmation. These two sacraments are in fact called sacraments of initiation, along with Baptism. I was actually very pleased that the Director of Religious Education made this point during the first parents' meeting for my daughter's first communion class.



She told us that we weren't preparing our children to make their first communion, we were preparing them to begin a lifetime of receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Great point. The same should be said of Confirmation.

The sacrament of Confirmation is the anointing with the Holy Spirit to participate fully in the mission of the Church. Confirmation is the **beginning** of the adventure of the faith. It should absolutely not mark the end of religious education. As we move into the world from Confirmation we begin to discover which of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit will become dominant in our lives and what charisms the Holy Spirit will activate within us. Then our vocation and our mission take shape. All the while we should be equipping ourselves to fully engage in our vocation and mission by continuing to learn our faith. Learning our faith also deepens our relationship with God. That should certainly never end.

What about the sacrament of marriage? Certainly a wedding marks the end of the search for love, right? But what is marriage as a Sacrament? It's the sign of Jesus' love for his Church. Does a newly married couple really love like Jesus loved - completely, without reserve, even to the point of giving our life for our spouse? Hardly. Most seasoned married couples would say they haven't mastered love either. That's because marriage is a **school** of love. All vocations are. God calls us to our vocation to give us an intense training in selfless love. The wedding, Holy Orders, or religious vows are just the beginning of these lessons in love.

Here is another example of seeing a beginning as an end: Easter. You do know that Easter isn't the end of the story, don't you? In fact, the Easter Vigil celebrated on Holy Saturday is the definite beginning of a 50 day season of Easter. It also marks the "end" of the 40 days of Lent. You have to love the fact that the Catholic faith dedicates more time to a season of feasting and rejoicing (Eastertide) than it does to a time of fasting, abstinence and almsgiving (Lent).

It's interesting, isn't it? How we come to see as endings what are really beginnings? We do it all the time. Perhaps it may be good for us to stop and reflect on the possible ways that we can shift our perspective on the starting and stopping points of life. In doing so, you may quickly discover that there is much more to the story of the Bible. And there is much more to the Christian life. You may unlock a mountain of treasure if you would just stop treating beginnings like endings. And, in doing so, you will find more to celebrate in the Catholic Faith.

Don't check out of your faith. Never stop looking for the next adventure that God has in store for you. As Easter shows us, not even death is really an ending. It's just the beginning.

Following these recommendations can help you prepare your children 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.