

May
In the Year
of Mercy

Your Family's
Door of Mercy



Teaching the Way of Love

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PLEASE PRAY THAT

- Families will be environments that teach how to receive God's great mercy.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be used as a source of grace and forgiveness by more Catholics.
- Families can become a place of loving correction, true repentance and true forgiveness.
- We will all learn to forgive in love so we can receive forgiveness in love.
- Our love for God will grow stronger and be passed on to our children.
- Children will feel the love and mercy of God because of their parent's love.
- No child (or parent) will ever feel they are beyond God's loves and mercy.

Teach Your Children to Receive Mercy

This is issue of the Teaching the Way of Love newsletter we want to a very important reality about mercy. We've talked a lot this year about exercising mercy within our family and teaching our children how to show mercy in its many forms. But in our faith lives *receiving* mercy is just as important as showing mercy.

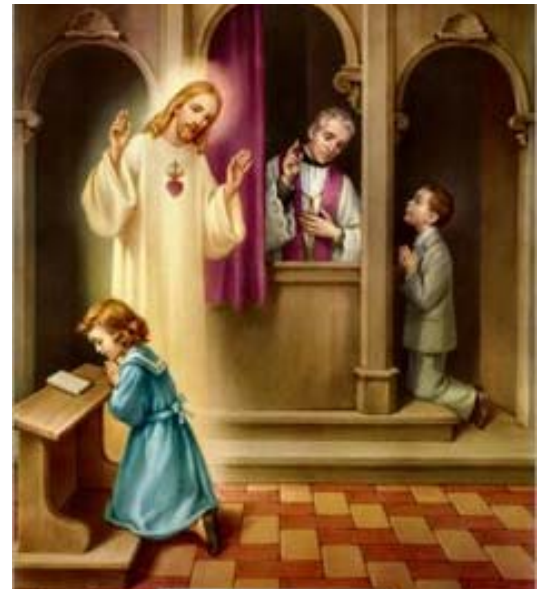
The greatest gift we can give our children is to teach them how to receive mercy. This begins with calling our kids out when they sin. While this may sound odd, our children need to understand that they have a fallen nature; they are capable of using their free will to set themselves apart from God. You can't receive mercy without first recognizing that you are a sinner and that your sins cause suffering.

In a world where "catching a child doing what is right" is applauded more than pointing out erroneous behavior, you may be scratching your head asking, "are they really saying that we need to correct our kids?" Yes – that is exactly what we are saying because kids whose faults are *charitably* corrected become ready to receive mercy. Admonishing them for their wrong doing reminds them that they are not perfect; that they can cause pain and suffering: that they need mercy.

Remember, mercy is **love**. Mercy is defined as loving someone in the midst of their suffering. Sometimes mercy means alleviating that suffering (like many of the Works of Mercy). Sometimes it means sharing in that suffering and supporting them through it. The related word "compassion" means literally to suffer (passion) with (com) someone.

How can we learn to receive mercy well – and teach our children the same? Here are some steps.

Have True Repentance. Part of knowing what mercy truly is means understanding and teaching our children that mercy is not the same thing as getting "off the hook" for what we do wrong. Mercy and forgiveness are not about ignoring sin. They are about recog-



The Sacrament of Confession

From the public domain

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

nizing it as detrimental. We need to see how our sins destroy our relationship with God and with each other. Then we need to be truly sorry (sorrowful) for that damage. Only then can we receive the mercy that God offers us. If we are unrepentant – or if we fail to even realize we’re sinning – we cannot turn to God for mercy.

The same is actually true for receiving mercy in our earthly sufferings. How can we receive the merciful love of others if we don’t recognize that we’re suffering? The most common manifestation of this unawareness is “ungratefulness.”

Receive Mercy as Love. What is the best way to receive a gift – by focusing on the gift or by focusing on the giver? Have you ever received a gift that you really didn’t want, but were able to acknowledge the love and thoughtfulness that went into it anyway? That’s receiving a gift well. We want to receive mercy the same way, whether it comes from God or from others. If we don’t, we start to see mercy as our due. And that means that our hearts are really hardened.

Return Mercy with Love. How do we respond to mercy? If mercy is love shown to us, the most appropriate response to it is to return love for love. Receiving mercy from God or from another person should increase our love for them. But especially when we receive God’s mercy our love should extend to other people as well. Do you remember Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant? At the end of the story the servant could not receive his master’s mercy because he refused to show mercy to someone who owed him much less than his master had forgiven. One way to see this is through the eyes of justice. If we do not forgive others, why should we be forgiven? But a more complete understanding is that the unforgiving servant missed out on mercy because he could not love. The heart that was hardened against giving mercy was also hardened against receiving it because the servant was not living in love.

Seek Mercy – Especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This sacrament is probably the most underutilized because it is very hard to admit we have done something wrong (which is a soft way of saying we have sinned), that the wrong has harmed us and that we need to ask for mercy. Yet, this is *the* Sacrament that was created to provide the greatest outpouring of mercy from God. Whether we recognize it or not, our utmost suffering is spiritual and not physical. If we truly understood how much we have lost – personally as well as collectively as human beings - we would truly be overcome by sorrow. Take your children to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and let them experience first-hand God’s love and forgiveness. It can truly change their life.

Here is your May Challenge

Your challenge for this month begins with a trip to the confessional. Plan a time when all members of your family who are beyond the age of reasoning can receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Schedule your domestic church encounter with Confession within 30 days of reading this newsletter.

Once you have all received the Sacrament, plan a time to sit down and celebrate God’s great love for your family. Here are some discussion starters you can use when you are together.

How does the Sacrament of Reconciliation bring our family closer together?

How can we help each other be more merciful?

What can we do to help this family draw closer to God and His will for us?

This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you 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.