



Being parents makes us responsible not only for taking care of our children, but also for the spiritual education we give them from the moment they are conceived. For this reason, **I want to share with you 10 simple ways to get our children closer to God, even from the moment we find out we are going to be parents.**

*“Do we seek to understand ‘where’ our children really are in their journey? Where is their soul, do we really know? And above all: do we want to know? Are we convinced that they, in reality, aren’t waiting for something else?” (Pope Francis)*

### 1. Pray Out Loud During Pregnancy.

Our little ones hear our voice all the time, thus it is important to keep our moments of prayer as peaceful and calm as possible. Choose a comfortable place where you will not be interrupted or distracted. You can even set up an altar, or pray while contemplating a little card of the Virgin Mary or Jesus, so that your thoughts are focused on the prayer. Make your baby feel that that moment is unique and special for both of you; you can choose an hour of the day to make it a daily routine. While you pray, you can caress your belly so that your baby can feel that the prayer is dedicated to him, too.

### 2. Take Your Children to Mass.

Some people think it is annoying to take little children to Mass, since they cry loudly, make noise, make people uncomfortable, or simply can’t stay still. My recommendation is to take your child to Mass every Sunday, just as you used to do before he was born. If he is still a little baby and cries, you can calm him down by feeding him; if he is a little older, and he already crawls or walks, or has continuous tantrums, take him out of the church and take a little stroll until he calms down, then return to Mass. If your child is already 100% conscious that he goes to mass every Sunday, and does not want to stay still, cries his lungs out, or even lays on the floor, get out of the building with him, stoop down to his level and talk to him slowly and softly, explaining to him why you are there and why it is important to behave during Mass. If you pinch your child when he is in the middle of a tantrum, if you sharply pull him out of the church, you “kill” him with your

gaze, or yell at him outside of the church, he will detest every Sunday. They are children, and you have to put yourself in their shoes. At their age they cannot stay still for a long time or pay attention for more than 20 minutes at a time. Every time I go to Mass, I have to go out and calm down my child at least 10 times, then we return to Mass. Do not give up, because even though they are little, they know very well how to manipulate us. The important thing is for them to realize that no matter how many times we leave the church, we will always go back inside until the Mass ends.

### 3. Pray with Them Before Bedtime

It can be next to their bed or cradle; kneel down and pray. When children are little, everything amazes them and makes them curious; they have the ability of imitating both the good and the bad. And most probably, while you pray, they will try to get your attention; they will start talking, as if you were encouraging them to do so, they will sing, will take out their toys, or will pull your t-shirt. Take advantage of this opportunity to explain them what you are doing and invite them to join you in prayer. Invite them to repeat after you, or ask them: "What would you like to thank God for tonight?" "Do you want to send Virgin Mary a message with me?" You will notice that these questions will surprise them. Teach them how to make the sign of the cross. Try not make this moment too long, otherwise they will want to do something else. If your child is a baby, take his little hand and make the sign of the cross, then pray with him.

### 4. Make Them Familiar with the Images of Jesus and Mary

Every Catholic should have an altar at home. It does not have to take up a whole room, but it must be in a special place, visible and accessible to all the members of the family. It is very important that our little ones can find images of Jesus, Mary, and the saints. My son is 15 months old and we have taught him to send kisses to the Holy Virgin. Every time he sees an image of Our Lady, no matter where we are at, he sends her a kiss and my heart melts. Children learn very fast; it is fundamental to teach them as much as we can in the first 5 years of their lives. One day Juan José (my son), found my mom's keychain in a purse, saw that it had the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and without anyone telling him (his face reflected surprise), he looked at us for a second, and kissed her. You can place a crucifix in his bedroom, the image of Virgin Mary on his nightstand, or an image of the Guardian Angel.

### 5. Let Them Choose Movies and Books about God

Take advantage of your children's liking movies and tales. Buy movies like "Noah's Ark," "David and Goliath," "The Good Samaritan," "The Prodigal Son," "The Story of Joseph and his Brothers," "The Miracles of Jesus," "The Prince of Egypt," "Joseph: King of Dreams," etc. There are also many books that teach children the stories of the Bible with illustrations, in a fun way. You can buy coloring books or the so-called

“Children’s Bible,” available in many bookstores or libraries. This way, you can give your children many options to choose from. Never force them or punish them if they do not want to do an activity. Every weekend you can present them with a different option, or invite them to go with you to buy the book or movie they prefer. This is an easy and fun way for our children to learn about the life of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the saints from an early age.

## 6. Let them Participate in Activities Related to the Church

If there is a children’s missionary group in your child’s school, let him be a member. If he likes to act or sing, let him participate in religious plays, or encourage him to join the church choir. If his school collects clothes or food for the needy, explain to him why we must help our neighbors. Never prohibit your child from participating in these kinds of activities if he shows interest; let him have the experience, and always keep a positive attitude about his achievements and adventures. Let him know how much God likes his good behavior and solidarity, by letting him know that you are proud to be his parent.

## 7. Let them See that There are Kids that Do Not Have Everything

Taking our children to foundations or institutions that help others is a beautiful experience for all the people involved: the kids we visit, our own children, and ourselves. Helping them see that the world is not an ideal place and that not all children have a home with a dad and a mom will open their hearts. You can go to a foundation with foster children or orphans, or visit the Children’s Hospital. All children deserve to be loved and listened to. Allow your child to have this kind of experience at least twice a year. Organize a soccer game, a movie afternoon, or a get-together with an organization of your choice. This way, your child will understand that not all children have all the privileges he has; he will learn to share and see everyone as an equal. There will be no distinctions during the game, and he will become a conscious child, willing to help others anywhere.

## 8. Teach Them How to Appreciate Nature

It is not necessary to travel all the way to Ireland for your child to admire impressive landscapes. A flower is enough to teach your child that God is present in each and every one of his creations, even in the smallest; the sky, the sea, the stars, the moon, the trees, the mountains. You can try to ask your child how much he thinks God loves him (his answers may make your heart melt), but you can give him a little hint. You can challenge him to count the stars or guess how deep the sea is, and tell him that that’s how the love of God is: infinite as the stars in the sky, or as the grains of sand of the beach. It is important that our children know that everything that surrounds us has been created by God. Traveling to another city or country may be the perfect opportunity for you to talk to your children about God.

## 9. Teach Them that There is More Satisfaction in Giving than in Receiving

The Christmas season is perfect for this activity. There are two ways of doing it: the first one is to buy toys or clothes for children in need, so that they can also celebrate. The other option is to ask your children to donate some toys that are still in good condition and they no longer use. We must include our children in every step of the process, from buying or choosing the toys, to wrapping them and giving them away in person. This way, they will understand that things are not that easy for everyone to get, and that not all children have the privileges that we, as parents, can grant. This act of generosity can happen at any time during the year; what is important is to transmit to our children the love for those who most need it. When they finish this activity, you can ask them how they felt about giving a gift to another kid, or what they liked the most about being there. We can find God in many ways; teach them how much happiness there is in giving.

## 10. Teach Them to Say Grace

Breakfast, lunch, or dinner can be the perfect occasions to teach our children that we should thank God for everything He gives us, including the food on our table. I say this prayer to bless our food: "Lord, bless this food that, in your infinite mercy, we have today on our table. Give, oh Lord, bread to those who have none, and give us hunger and thirst for you to us who have bread. Amen." Remember that your example is the best tool; become a role model for your children and say grace no matter where you are. Ask your children to repeat after you, and you will see how they will learn to do it on their own.

Extracted from CatholicLink: <http://catholic-link.org/2016/11/01/10-children-closer-god/>