

How to Talk  
to Children  
about



TOM QUINLAN

# Introduction

“How do I talk to my child about...?” This is not an uncommon question among parents as well as teachers and catechists. Abstract concepts, hard-to-broach subjects, and sensitive issues all require a particular kind of language that gives a child enough information without being overly complex or confusing. The same is true for aspects of our faith. How do we talk to children about the great big concept of God or about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus? How do we explain the gestures, symbols, and ritual of the Mass or approach issues of morality and making sound choices?

This series of books provides parents as well as teachers and catechists with a range of questions about these topics. Each one offers terminology relatable to a young child’s experience as well as family activities to stimulate further conversation and comprehension. In sharing these responses, you are likely to find yourself more than capable of talking to your child about these and other topics of faith and practice.

# Why do we call it “Mass”?

---

## **For your information**

In the Latin Mass, the prayer of dismissal contains the word *missa*, which conveys a sense of going on mission. The mission on which each of us is sent is the same mission Jesus sent his disciples to accomplish. We are to bring *good news* (which means *gospel*) of the saving love of our God to all people!

A more ancient term for Catholic worship is *liturgy*. In Greek, it means “work of the people,” and early Christians adopted it to describe their worship. The word is used today to describe various structured (or ritualized) worship services. The Mass, for example, has two major structures: Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Mass (or liturgy) is the prayer of all of us. We should give our full self in this great prayer. We sing and respond and offer our hearts and minds. The *body of Christ* (as St. Paul calls us) gathers, celebrates, and is then sent forth to be the presence of Jesus in the world. By helping children learn the songs and responses and by your own active participation, you are encouraging their participation in the Mass.

## **Talking with your child**

First, help your child understand that Jesus came to bring the good news (gospel) of his Father in heaven to the world. Ask your child what this good news could be. It’s a really important question. Here are some key points for discussing this:

- God loves us all...so much that he became human!

- Jesus brings a special message of hope to all of us, but especially to the poor, the outcast, and the sick.
- Jesus proves that we have nothing to fear, even from death itself.
- Through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God offers us forgiveness, joy in this life, and life eternal in heaven.

Jesus then invites us, his disciples, to help him share the good news with others. Ask your child how your family can share the good news of Jesus with people you know. Try to name specific ways you each already do this. (Hint: It's about *both* what we say *and* what we do.)

When we bring the good news of Jesus to others, we are sharing in his mission, his purpose. Explain that in an old language (Latin), the word for *mission* is related to the word *Mass*. And so, when we leave Mass, we should be ready to do the holy work of God out in the world!

Listen with your children to the last words, the dismissal, at Mass, and talk about what it means. (Dismissal rite options include: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord” and “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”)



### **Prayer**

*Father God, you sent your Son, Jesus, to share the good news that you love and save us. And now you ask us to be followers of Jesus and helpers in his mission. Open our hearts to say “yes” always to what you ask of us. Amen.*

# Is that the Bible they are reading from up there?

---

## **For your information**

The book is called a “lectionary” and it contains many passages from Scripture. However, it is not the Bible.

The Catholic Church and many other Christian faith traditions use the same lectionary. Its purpose is to make sure that the most important readings from Scripture are proclaimed over time. The readings are set out in a pattern to match the themes of the liturgical (church) year. So, for example, in Advent we hear readings about getting ready for Jesus.

There is a Sunday lectionary, which has a three-year cycle, with an emphasis on the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, respectively. (John’s gospel is spread throughout the cycle.) You’ll notice that when you listen to the Sunday readings at Mass, there is usually a connection between the first reading and the gospel reading. There is also a weekday lectionary with a two-year cycle, for use at daily Mass.

Because the Church uses the lectionary, the same readings are proclaimed in every Catholic Church in the world every Sunday. This is a sign of our unity as Catholics.

## **Talking to your child**

Ask what your child understands about the Bible. (This is more than just what they know *from* the Bible.) Here are some valuable points to share:

- The Bible is not a book. It is a collection of various forms of writing (letters, stories, poems, history, etc.) gathered over the course of centuries.

**ACTION STEP** Try spending some time each week in family prayer that includes reading the gospel passage proclaimed at Sunday Mass. (Sunday evening might be a good time.) Then give everyone a chance to share what they think the Scripture means and how each person feels called to live out the passage this week. (There are many ways to get the lectionary readings for Sundays and weekdays, including the internet and apps.)

Create a prayerful setting for this family time. Have a special place in your home to gather, with a crucifix or image of Jesus, a Bible, and perhaps personal items of faith. You can light a candle to help your children experience the word of God as light for your family.

- We call the Bible the “word of God.” This means that while human beings produced these writings, God provided inspiration to make sure that the writings communicate divine truth.
- The Bible contains the Hebrew Scriptures (known as the Old Testament), which is about all that happened before Jesus.
- The Bible contains the New Testament, which is about Jesus and the early church.

Now explain that the big book up front in church is called a “lectionary” and that it contains special readings selected from the Bible for us to hear every Sunday (and even daily). Encourage them to listen carefully at Mass to see if they can find connections among the readings at Mass and the connection to the season we are celebrating in the life of the Church.

### **Prayer**

*God, the Father, you sent Jesus to proclaim your word. Open our ears and hearts so that we can understand your message and live out your truth each time we read from or listen to Scripture. Amen.*