

Plug into Positive Feelings

What are your child's feelings as the day of First Eucharist approaches? Is he or she proud, nervous, scared, joyful, full of expectation, neutral? Your child probably will experience many of these emotions as he or she approaches First Eucharist in joyful expectation. After all, Eucharist is much more than information and knowledge; it is about feelings—about a loving relationship with Jesus.

By the time your child receives Christ in the Eucharist, his or her feelings about it have been under construction a long time. Ideally, he or she has already met Christ in the goodness he or she sees in you. If you are loving and kind, he or she will see Jesus in the same way. Your words and actions are important, and they come from the feelings you carry in your heart. It is from the heart that you communicate to your child. How you feel about Jesus, the Church, and this sacrament will lead your child closer to Christ or put distance into the equation.

I'm sure you want to make First Eucharist a positive experience in your child's life. That often means new clothes, a cake, and a family celebration. But if your attention is tied up more in the practical arrangements than in preparing the heart of your son or daughter, you may miss a huge opportunity to grow together in Christ. Your child is likely to feel that the peripherals are what's important, and that the rest of it—the Eucharist itself—is only marginal. Because you have a post-event party to plan, classes and requirements that need to be fulfilled, and questions of your own about faith, you most likely have a mixed set of feelings about your son or daughter's First Eucharist. You'll need to sit down and address these feelings individually until your mind is eased and your sights focused.

Feelings Are Always Charged

Feelings about Eucharist are something like electricity. They come in positive and negative, and they are always charged. It's a rare person who has no negative feeling about life, but if those feelings are aimed at God or the Church, they are like a force field standing between Eucharist and the human heart. Most people deal with feelings that impact their faith—from alcoholism to a painful divorce, or family conflicts. Do these feelings affect their children?

Of course they do! However, the result need not be negative. Negative feelings can open a circuit rather than blow a fuse. Coming to God in need with trust rather than resentment makes your faith much stronger. Such trust is rewarded in Eucharist. Through the offering of his Body and Blood, Christ really heals broken hearts, wipes away tears, and offers a peace that darkness cannot overshadow. This feeling-level discovery makes a big difference in life. When your child recognizes the good feelings in your heart about Eucharist, he or she will see it as something good for his or her own life, too.

Passing on Positive Feelings

If Eucharist is already a positive experience in your life, you may still have some difficulty presenting its concept to your child. So you may be looking for some new ways to think about the sacrament that are age-appropriate. The following are some dynamic presentations of Eucharist that can be shared with and understood by your child:

- Eucharist is more than just a ritual. It is an action that grasps the saving hand of God and prepares a room within your heart for the love of Christ to dwell. In Exodus, one of the most passionate cliff-hanger accounts you'll ever find in Scripture, God freed the Hebrews from slavery. He led them by the hand, out of captivity, across the Red Sea—an impassable barrier. He gave them a mysterious bread to eat as they wandered in the desert on the way to the Promised Land. The Eucharist parallels the story of Exodus. Jesus came to free all people from struggles with every kind of slavery. He parts seas of addiction, hatred, and other seemingly impossible barriers. He feeds Christians today with a mysterious bread—his Body and Blood—as they wander through deserts of frustration seeking a land of refreshment and peace.
- Of course, you don't always have to think of the Eucharist in such gripping terms. It can also be useful to compare the Eucharist to a dinner at home with close friends. Imagine you're preparing the meal, while laughing and talking about big and little things with your friends who stand nearby. Then you serve dinner. Everyone lingers at the table—glasses are refilled, plates are handed back for seconds. The chatting continues on afterward until no one can stay awake any longer. In the end, it's not so much the meal that brought you together but the friendship that the evening celebrates.
- Beyond this personal relationship with Jesus that you experience in Eucharist, you can recognize your union with others—people who also belong to Christ. The Eucharist is God's saving grace for all that calls those who receive it to a mindful generosity. When you minister to the parts of Christ's Body that are in need—the poor, the excluded, the hungry you share in the Body of Christ. "If you love me, care for my lambs," Jesus told Peter.

Feelings Under Construction

As you share your feelings about Eucharist with your child, be sincere and honest, but don't set up unreasonable expectations. For instance, don't tell your child that receiving the Eucharist is going to be the happiest day of his or her life. It's unrealistic and way too much to lay on a child. Maybe it should be the best of all days, but if anything goes wrong—he or she gets in the wrong pew after communion, the cousins get into a royal spat at the party—it could just as easily be a bad day. At the end of such a day, a young person may come away with the feeling that if this was the climax, then the rest of his or her life is going to be very dismal indeed. Instead, begin making connections to help your child experience a "positive" day—the gateway to good feelings about a relationship with Jesus.