

HELP!

My Teenager Isn't Going to Church

OBSERVATION #1: My diaconate view of the assembly during the Liturgy of the Mass reveals that parents of teenagers often attend Mass without their teenagers.

OBSERVATION #2: I too struggle with getting my teenage daughter and son to attend Mass.

OBSERVATION #3: These are good kids, and our faith journeys (mine included) are never linear, they have peaks and valleys, as well as a few cliffs and chasms.

SCARY STATISTIC: A 2018 study on young adults leaving the Catholic Church (*Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*) found people stopped identifying as Catholics at a median age of 13, long before they ceased attending a parish.

POTENTIAL SOLUTION: We can “force,” “encourage,” “bribe,” or otherwise make our teenagers go to church.

REALITY CHECK #1: Forcing our teenagers to go to church is not a viable long-term solution—we know this deep down.

REALITY CHECK #2: Teenagers need some freedom to make their own decisions.

SCARY STATISTIC (REVISITED): The aforementioned study found that disaffiliation is a process that happens over time for young people, typically prompted by a series of events or unresolved questions that accumulate over time.

BETTER SOLUTION: We can to address our teenagers’ potential, unresolved questions. Teenagers should have some freedom make their own decisions, but those decisions should be *informed* decisions (e.g. made on the best and most accurate information available).



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TALKING POINTS

When we forgo church, we are not taking God at his word. By doing so, we either are saying that God is a liar [LOOK OUT] or that we know better than God [NOTE TO SELF: EITHER OPTION IS NOT SOLID GROUND TO STAND ON].

God’s word is contained in the Bible, also known as, Sacred Scripture.

In Sacred Scripture, we hear this about and from Jesus...Then he took the bread, and said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given up for you; do this in memory of me.” Lk 22:19.

So, when we take Jesus at his word, we come to know that *Jesus is present* in the Eucharist.

There is no place to go for Jesus, as present in the Eucharist, than church.

By not going to church, we are essentially saying “no thanks” to Jesus.

By not going to church, we are putting other things (i.e. sports, sleep, work, [INSERT WHATEVER ELSE YOU CAN THINK OF] ahead of Jesus—THIS IS WHAT WE ARE DOING.

Sacred Scripture tells us to “Remember the Sabbath day—keep it holy.” Ex 20: 8. Holy = sacred or set apart. Sabbath = Sunday. God commands us to keep sacred each and every Sunday. And, there is nothing more sacred or “set apart” than the Most Holy Eucharist.

In Sacred Scripture, Jesus also tells us...“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.” Jn 6:54. When we say “no thanks” to Jesus in the Eucharist, we are not only placing “worldly” things ahead of Jesus, we are valuing what is seen/tangible (e.g. the here and now) over what is not seen/intangible (everlasting life). What can be more important than pursuing everlasting life?

Teenagers most assuredly have personal differences (gripes) about the Catholic Church and, perhaps, its teachings. However, we cannot let our personal gripes overshadow our so desperately needed, personal relationship with Jesus Christ (e.g. we cannot throw out the baby [Jesus] with the bathwater [the problems hold with the Catholic Church]).

Parents are the primary example to and educators of their teenage children. Let’s do our best to address their potential, unresolved questions and, by doing so, take every opportunity we have to worship and pray with them—together—at church!

HOPE