

CHILDREN’S LITURGY OF THE WORD: SOME PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

The topic of Children’s Liturgy of the Word has been a popular one in recent months, and inquiries have come into the Offices of Catechetical Services, Worship, and the Education Resource Center. Therefore, the three offices have “teamed up” to share with you the following information about this liturgical practice.

A review of the purpose of Children’s Liturgy of the Word reminds us that this is a liturgical experience. It is participation in [liturgy](#) with the children. It is not a catechism class or any other form of religious education. Leaders of the Children’s Liturgy of the Word are not catechists, but rather, they are leaders of prayer. Children participate in this Liturgical celebration in order to hear the proclamation of God’s Word and to make their own response to it.

Furthermore, it is no secret that parents are the first and best teachers of their children in the practice of the faith. The Christian spirit of the family is greatly fostered when children participate weekly in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist with their parents and when this practice is begun early in Catholic family life.

Children learn about liturgy best when they are in the midst of the assembly, side-by-side with participating adults, seeing, smelling, feeling, and hearing the Liturgy done well. As catechists, we are aware that the front of the church, where the “sea of tall adults” does not block children, is the best place for children to experience the Liturgy with all its sense-stimulating beauty.

Certainly there is great value in using, for example, a Wednesday evening religious education/faith formation session to instruct children in the significance of the ritual elements of liturgy or to grind wheat and make bread together in order to experience and relate the significance of this rich symbolism.

Nonetheless, no formation session, no matter how well done, can substitute for a child’s actual participation in the Liturgy where he or she will see and smell and feel and hear the Liturgy, be formed in truth by the grace of Word and Sacrament in communion with the Body of Christ, and be present during the Eucharistic Prayer.

The *Directory for Masses with Children* published by the Holy See in 1973 tells us that it is sometimes appropriate to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, room. However, because of the importance of participation in the Liturgy for faith formation, the Church outlines the way to celebrate the Children’s Liturgy of the Word. The Children’s Liturgy of the Word is structured like the Liturgy of the Word at Mass.

Children's Liturgy of the Word begins with the dismissal of children after the Opening Prayer, prior to the proclamation of the Word so children can hear the Sunday Word proclaimed from the Children's Lectionary, the only designated and approved source of the readings for Children’s Liturgy of the Word.

Children's Liturgy of the Word includes the rituals of the adult assembly such as the acclamations before and after the readings, the sung psalm, and a breaking open of the Word that is similar to a homily. As baptized members of the assembly, children return for the Prayers of the "Faithful" and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Word should not supercede the importance of the children’s presence at the other parts of the Mass. We must be mindful that children are dismissed only for the Liturgy of the Word and should return to [the assembly to](#) participate in the [remainder](#) of the Liturgy. Timing can be difficult but is critical.

A final consideration is the fact that Children’s Liturgy of the Word is meant to form children in their experience of the Catholic Liturgy. Therefore, the utilization of Catholic resources to aid in the use of the Catholic Lectionary within the shape of the Liturgy of the Word is most essential.