

How to get family relationships 'rite'



Family life is a liturgy. “Liturgy” means “public act of worship.” Although we’re used to thinking of liturgy as something we do at church, your family life is a liturgy, too. Last month in this space, I described [five ways the liturgy of domestic church](#) life allows us to consecrate the world to Christ. This month, we’ll start looking at the three “rites” that make up the liturgy of your Catholic home.

In a sense, rites are the building blocks of a liturgy. For instance, the Mass has an opening rite, a penitential rite, an offertory rite and a Communion rite, just to name a few. These rites guide us through a meaningful celebration of the Mass. The absence of any of these rites can negatively impact the quality, integrity or even the validity of the liturgy.

Looking at what our Catholic faith and the social sciences teach us about family life, we might say that the [liturgy of domestic church life](#) is made up of three essential rites, each of which is necessary for a happy, healthy and holy Christian home. The rite of relationship enables families to create an intimate, loving communion of persons in the home. The rite of family rituals enables families to model how a Christian person relates to work, play, people and prayer. Finally, the rite of reaching out enables families to be a blessing to others with all the gifts they have been given. The three rites of the liturgy of domestic church life empower family life to form us in the priestly, prophetic and royal mission we received in baptism. In this column, we’ll take a closer look at the first – and most foundational – of these three rites, the rite of Christian relationship.

[Read more from our Domestic Church series here.](#)

The quality of the relationships in our home is the heart and foundation of an authentic family spirituality. As Pope St. John Paul wrote in *Evangelium Vitae*, when it comes to family life, “the celebration which gives meaning to every other form of prayer and worship is found in the family’s actual daily life together, if it is a life of love and self-giving” (No. 93).

Research consistently shows that parents’ ability to pass their faith on to their kids is directly related to the degree to which kids experience faith as the source of the warmth in their home. In other words, the closer, warmer and more loving a household is, the more kids can experience their Catholic faith making a real, practical and positive difference in their daily lives. That makes them want to own it for themselves.

The rite of Christian relationship enables families to provide ongoing formation in the priestly mission of baptism. How? A priest offers sacrifices that unite heaven and earth and make the common holy. When families work to love each other – not just with the love that comes naturally to them, but with Christ’s sacrificial love – they consecrate all the interactions that go on between them all day long. Everything about the way they work, play, interact, love and even correct each other becomes an opportunity to encounter Christ and grow in holiness.

The rite of Christian relationship involves concrete practices such as:

- Extravagant affection that allows love to be experienced as incarnate, intimate and personal.
- Catching each other being good. Encouraging virtue with praise and sincere affirmation.
- Responding promptly, generously and consistently to each

others' needs.

- Scheduling regular one-on-one time to, as Pope Francis puts it, “waste time with your kids.”
- A loving-guidance approach to discipline that focuses on teaching, accompanying and encouraging good behavior instead of merely yelling, lecturing and punishing bad behavior.

Families that practice these habits, and others like them, celebrate the rite of Christian relationship, sowing the seeds of Christ's self-giving love in their home – seeds that “give meaning to every other form of prayer and worship” that the family might wish to engage in.

Learn more about Dr. Greg Popcak's books, tele-counseling practice and radio program at CatholicCounselors.com