

Homily inspires, Creed tells our story



**Whispers in
The Pew**

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One of the 2014 Archdiocesan Synod priorities is understanding the Mass. Catholic Herald Family, working with the synod implementation evangelization and Sunday Mass pastoral priority team, is publishing a six-part series designed to help parents teach their children about the Mass. This third part continues the focus upon the Liturgy of the Word.

“Keep your fork!” That was the theme of a homily I heard when I was 11 years old. Fr. Mark, the homilist, explained those words came from a young woman who was dying. As the story goes, the woman asked to be buried with a fork in her hand. Why? Because she always looked forward to dinners when her mom would tell her to keep her fork as the dishes were being cleared. “Keep your fork” meant the family could expect a tasty dessert.

The young woman wanted to be buried with a fork so that, at her funeral, mourners could ask about the strange object in her casket. She wanted the priest to tell everyone, “Keep your fork! The best is yet to come.” Heaven awaits us. As good as life on earth can be, the best is yet to come.

When consulting with my family to get the details of this 30-year-old homily straight, Google helped us discover that the “keep your fork” story was probably not original to Fr. Mark. It seems to be a well-worn tale of hope used by Christian preachers everywhere.

I don’t mind. I love the fact that my family has been discussing forks – and the promise of paradise – for 30 years.

Can you recall great homilies that stick with you even today? (We might also recall some bad preaching, I suppose.) But which

homilies inspire you, challenge you, console you?

I have to admit, going to Mass with young children can distract me from the preaching. But on days when I’ve done more refereeing than listening, I look for gratitude in my heart.

God has given us a great gift: the freedom to sit together with family, in a safe building, surrounded by our community and the Word of God. The German word *Gemütlichkeit* describes this feeling of warmth and coziness, this gratitude for being side by side.

The homily helps us reflect on the readings and brings us together as children of God; our response to the preaching is a bold declaration of faith. With the Creed, we suddenly rise to our feet and recite, in unison, the story of our salvation. We invoke the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and recall the marvels and mysteries of Christianity.

The Creed is our story. Sunday Mass lets us gather as God’s family and pass it on.

I love to imagine the Communion of Saints professing the faith with us. Everyone saved by Jesus’ death and resurrection joins in the Creed. And Jesus listens to each one of us with delight, as if we were the only person ever created.

The Profession of Faith is a lovely time to remind our children of people they love, living or dead, and invite them to recite the very same Creed that was on the lips of our ancestors.

The Universal Prayer (or “petitions”) similarly draws us into the fullness of the church. Whether we’re praying for the health of a parishioner, the intentions of the pope, or private intentions deep in our hearts, we intercede for the church and the world. Our prayers matter.

And our prayers at Sunday Mass are particularly powerful. Thanks be to God, Mass is the best prayer we have.

Action Steps:

Reflect! If attending Mass with your children feels stressful, spend quiet time on a Sunday evening to identify specific causes of stress.

Maybe the entire liturgy feels like a hot mess, but a careful look might suggest strategic improvements: trying a different Mass time or seat in church; rotating children’s Mass books to stay fresh; asking a friend or grandparent to join you in the pew; etc.

Share! Let your parish pastor or liturgist know how you’re doing. Maybe your parish wants to help young families, but doesn’t really know where to start. Does the “cry room” need updating or remodeling to be more inviting? Can the first two pews be reserved for families with small children? Could a parish library provide religious books for children?

Absorb! Our children may not know the entire Creed by heart right now, but they will. Repetition, every Sunday, allows them to soak in the words. To guard against mindless reciting, however, we parents can start a discussion once in a while to see how they are growing in understanding.

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