
Holy Hacks: September 20, 2019

By the Rev. Julia Mitchener

A teacher in a Roman Catholic parish was preparing her students for their First Communion. She asked the children to write down what they should do when receiving the sacrament. To her amusement, one pupil's response read, "Step 1: Don't bite the priest!"

It's easy to suppose that children's Christian formation is all about things like figuring out the logistics of Communion, memorizing the Lord's Prayer, and learning the plot lines to a handful of Bible stories. Certainly this is all very good information to have, but there is one thing I think is even more important; namely, that children develop a tangible, indelible awareness of God's love.

There are few more basic human needs than to know that we are loved. Children must receive love from their significant adults in order to thrive. Likewise, children's spiritual growth flourishes only with experiences of God's love—hearing the great stories of God's love for God's creation, for example; tasting God's love in the Holy Eucharist, seeing God's love on the faces of those who care for them in the church nursery and teach them Sunday School.

You can help with this at home as well, by reminding your children of God's love for them each day. Singing "Jesus loves me" is pretty much the best bedtime prayer I know. Pointing out signs of God's love as you go about your regular routine is great, too. Maybe there's a beautiful sunset one evening that the whole family can admire while remembering the story of how God made everything that is and called it good. Or a visit to a favorite relative could be an occasion for talking about how God shows God's care by giving us relationships that bring comfort and joy. I often whisper something to my children that the Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, likes to ask people to say to their neighbors right in the middle of worship services: "God loves you, and so do I!"

However you go about it, make sure your kids know how much they are cherished by God and by our friend and brother, Jesus. This is so important. Not biting the priest is fine, too!