

Are Catholic Families Different? Five "Marks" of the Catholic Family [Dr. Gregory K. Popcak OSV Daily Take](#) 5/1/2015



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Are Catholic families supposed to be different? What would that difference look like?

The Church has been considering these questions in earnest, especially in light of the upcoming World Meeting of Families and the 2015 Synod on the Family. While I don't presume to offer definitive answers, considering the Church's writings on

the matter, here are what I would like to suggest are the five most important differences that distinguish a family committed to living the Catholic vision of family life.

1. Catholic Families Worship Together: The Eucharist is the source of the deep love and intimacy Catholic families are called to live out. To celebrate this, Catholic families attend Mass together on Sundays and Holy Days (and at other times as we are able) and actively participate in the sacramental life of the Church. Also, recognizing that we sometimes struggle to love each other as we should, Catholic families regularly go to confession (recommended: monthly) to seek God's healing, grace, and inspiration to love more and better.

2. Catholic Families Pray Together: Catholic families are called to love each other with the love that flows from God's own heart. We can only do this if we ask God—together—to teach us what this means. Therefore, in addition to both our individual prayer life and our worship with our parish communities, we gather together for family prayer each and every day. We use our daily, family prayer time to...

- Praise and thank God for his blessings.
- Ask forgiveness for the times we didn't love as we should.
- Ask for the grace to love each other and the world better.
- Pray for both our needs and the needs of the Family of God.
- Seek God's will for our life.

We treat family prayer, not as a duty or a chore, but as the key to true intimacy and joy in our home.

3. Catholic Families are Called to Intimacy: Most importantly, the Christian life is a call to intimate communion (cf. Jn 17:21). Catholic families serve that goal by being schools of love (CCC 1657) where we learn how to love God and each other with our whole hearts, minds, souls, and strength (Lk 10:27). To do this, we constantly seek new ways to be even more open with and loving to each other as husband and wife, parents and children.

For instance; children are supposed to be the visible sign of the loving union between husband and wife. Catholic families live this out both in our openness to life and by working hard on the quality of our relationships with each other.

To do this, we cultivate marriage and parenting habits that make each member of the family feel loved and valued and practice all the virtues that help us live life as a gift (EV#92). For instance; we choose loving guidance approaches to

discipline that teach virtue and good behavior instead of merely punishing wrongdoing. We schedule regular one-on-one time with each family member so that we can get to know each other's thoughts, feelings and heart's desires on the deepest level possible. And we take an active interest in all the things that each family member finds true, good and beautiful even when those interests doesn't come naturally to us.

4. Catholic Families Put Family First: Because our family relationships are the primary means God uses to help us become the people he created us to be, we treat family life, itself, as the most important activity in our week. We create and protect family rituals — like regular family dinners, time for prayer and worship, weekly game nights and "family days," and regularly scheduled times for communication and relationship-building — that give us regular time to work, play, talk and pray together. We hold these activities as sacred rituals of the domestic church and value them over all other activities that would seek to compete with them.

5. The Catholic Family is a Witness and Sign: We recognize that God wants to change the world through our families. We actively participate in this plan in two ways.

First, we work hard to be witnesses of the love, joy and intimacy that every human heart longs for. We'll share this love in good times and bad, in sickness and health, for richer or poorer.

Second, we carry this love outside the home by serving our community in a manner that keeps our family together. We intentionally practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy within our home and outside of it. We regularly talk about how we can do a better job of living out our family mission to be a sign of God's love in the world.

How About You?

Again, I don't presume to offer the final answer to the question of what makes a Catholic family different, but perhaps these five "marks" can at least start the conversation. What can your family do to more faithfully live the Catholic difference?

Dr. Greg Popcak and his wife, Lisa, are featured speakers at the 2015 World Meeting of Families and the authors of 20 books including [For Better...FOREVER!](#) and [Parenting with Grace](#). Learn more at www.CatholicCounselors.com.

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