

# Catholic Family Challenge

Judgment—for good or ill—awaits us all. That's some heavy stuff, and seems out of step with the "I just want to live until I die" philosophy sold on your standard magazine rack. So how do we face the world and the question of judgment, as Catholics? Well, practice makes perfect. With that in mind, here are some questions to help you get started, whether you're on fire with faith or barely hanging on.

\*for best results, review periodically, perhaps once a week\*

## **1) How have you built your relationship with God?**

**(Read Ephesians 4:15-16)**

If you're not growing, you're dying. The same applies to all of your relationships, even your relationship with God.

## **2) What are you doing to get your spouse to heaven?**

**(Read 1 Corinthians 7)**

It is a truth of marriage that husband and wife are meant to be partners, equally yoked in their work toward heaven. Does your relationship reflect the other-centered love of the Trinity?

Be sure to pray for your spouse and with your spouse.

## **3) How are you joining your fellow Christians in community?**

**(Read Phil 2:1-11)**

Christians were not meant to live in isolation; spend time in the presence of other Christians, lifting them up and being lifted in return. The people we spend time with are a reflection of our values.

## **4) Do you participate in celebrations with God by joyfully attending Mass on Sunday and Holy Days? (Read Exodus 20:8; Luke 22:14,19)**

Sunday should be party central. While Catholics are often quick to talk about the sacrifices of Lent, we are often more hesitant to talk about how we party down.

Yet, truly, Mass, Holy Days, feasts of our patron saints, Baptisms and other occasions are worth celebrating! Encourage your family to find unique ways to celebrate. Turn Sunday into a day of song, craft together, hit the lake, have a dance party, invite people over for dinner. It doesn't matter exactly what you do as long as your heart is in it and it's in honor of our Creator.

Some families are unable to observe Sunday as the Sabbath. Perhaps you instead observe on Saturday. Regardless of what exact day you use, it's important that you take time to have a day of rest.

**5) What are you doing to recognize and take seriously the fact that you are the primary educator of your children?**

**(Read Deuteronomy 11:18-19)**

When you are parenting young children, you are responsible for the fate of their immortal souls.

Formal religious education is no substitute for raising your child with a strong foundation. Praying together, talking about the issues of the day through a Catholic lens and explaining matters of faith to your children will impact them more than any time spent in a classroom.

**6) Are you conscious of the types of media your family consumes and the time you spend being entertained as opposed to being engaged?**

**(Read Romans 12:2)**

Parenting, work and chores are wearying, and it's natural to want a break! Yet, instead of flipping on the TV to watch whatever is on, evaluate what you watch. People of any age are forming their interior culture every time they participate in media, from books to websites to Facebook to apps on your phone. Think about the kind of "diet" you're eating: is it nourishing and filling, or are you ingesting cheesy poofs and carcinogenic mind soda?

Even good, mentally nourishing media sources should be consumed in moderation – we need time unplugged with our families and communities to truly engage with our God, our loved ones and even ourselves.

**7) What are you doing to safeguard every member of your family from pornography and the dangers of digital sexual exploitation?**

**(Read Matthew 5:27-28)**

The average age of first exposure to porn is painfully young – and getting younger. Young or old, porn is intrinsically damaging. From desensitizing us to the inherent beauty of sex and marriage to degrading the dignity of human beings, we must fortify our homes – and particularly our digital devices – against it.

Humans are visual creatures. We act out what we see. Children and teens, in particular, are likely to be the victims of exploitation, especially as electronics make photo sharing easy. Protect yourself, your spouse, your sons and your daughters by setting limits for devices and learning together about the dignity of our bodies.

**8) Do you foster a Catholic culture in your home?**

**(Read Joshua 24:15)**

Keeping the Bible and the Catechism in easy-to-reach places, having a family altar and relics or icons as a focal point of your home, maintaining a holy water font and having your house blessed by a priest are all physical reminders of who is at the center of your family culture.

**9) How many times did you eat together as a family in the past week?  
(Read Hebrews 10:25)**

Jesus ate with his disciples all the time – it's His model for bonding. With the chaos of this modern life, if activities and commitments are consistently standing in the way of family dinner, it may be time to reconfigure things. Sharing stories and emotions from the day, using teachable moments and praying before meals are just a few of the things that make this practice so important.

**10) When was the last time you prayed together as a family?  
(Read Matthew 18:20)**

Shared prayer shows your family that faith is more than “do as I say not as I do.” It is the foundation of the domestic church, as it deepens your relationship with God, your family's relationship with God, and your relationship with your family.

**11) Do you live an openness to life?  
(Read Psalms 139:13-16)**

As the Divine Creator of the universe, God is decidedly in favor of life in its many forms. Do you walk in this truth in all aspects of your life? God's plan for life extends through our sexuality, and beyond. It is important to know and understand the church's teachings about contraceptives and the life-giving role Natural Family Planning is intended to play. Are you welcoming children, staying open to a family of whatever size God determines for you?

From the disabled to the unborn to the impoverished, immigrants, elderly, and infirm, those of us who are capable of welcoming, nurturing, and protecting these vulnerable lives are obligated to do so.

**12) Are your money habits IN the world, or OF the world?  
(Read Deuteronomy 14:22)**

God gave us a place as stewards of the earth, giving us “dominion” over the plants and animals. That is easily lost in the creature comforts and keeping-up-with-the-Joneses mentality of our American life. Our consumption and money habits reveal our priorities. Look at what yours say about you. Do they strain our environment for temporary comfort, or are they working to store real treasure in eternity?

**Other thoughts to ponder:**

Can you name the Holy Days of Obligation for this year?

Do you or your children have a concept of sainthood outside of plaster and paint?

When is the last time you spent time volunteering?

Who is your patron saint? His or her feast day?

Do you have sacramental dates on the calendar and celebrate them, such as Baptisms, marriages, First Communions, etc.?

When is the last time you read the Bible? The Catechism?

Do you help your children pray and discern their vocations?

Do you discern God's will for you life?