

Cultivating Patience as Children Wait for First Communion

Greetings!

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives. As we hand on the faith to the children we love, we work to foster understanding of the beautiful gift we receive at the Lord's table. By sharing that the bread and wine become Christ's very self, parents and mentors in the faith invite children to ponder what it means to be in communion with God and one another. They can further instill reverence for Christ's gift by teaching children to genuflect before the tabernacle. As little ones watch their parents, siblings, and extended family members receive the Eucharist, it is only natural that they desire to do so as well.

While we want to nurture a young child's desire for Eucharist, it may be difficult for a little one to understand why he or she may not receive. A four-year-old strongly desiring to receive the Eucharist sounds lovely in the abstract, but when one considers his or her capacity for self-regulation and for managing frustration, parents might struggle to know what to do when a child is upset about not being able to receive.

Acknowledge that your child's desire for the Eucharist is good and comes from God.

Some ask whether children of this age understand enough to truly desire the Eucharist. God comes to us through our sense experiences, and young children are particularly attuned to the sensory experiences. As they take in everything around them, they are primed for learning about the world. Through their participation at Mass, they often grasp more than we realize. It is best to assume that your child's desire is genuine.

Here are a few ideas for diffusing your child's frustration at not being able to receive. First, acknowledge that your child's desire for the Eucharist is good and comes from God.



The rich sensory experience of the Mass helps young children recognize and desire Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

Many parents might be tempted to quickly suppress a child's big feelings, seeking to avoid an embarrassing scene in the communion line. Remember that your child longs for the Bread from heaven. In response, you might say to your child, "You wish you could receive the Body of Christ. You want to be so close to Jesus! Let's ask him to come into your heart *right now* so that it will be easier to wait. Come, Lord Jesus!" This takes the child's desire seriously and offers them a way to remain with Jesus until they can receive.

One component of moral formation is the understanding that some things are appropriate only in certain times and contexts. Sometimes we must wait for what we want; all of us can benefit from a greater cultivation of patience. After acknowledging his or her desire, remind your child that waiting through different seasons is a normal part of relationships, particularly our relationship with the Lord Jesus. Finally, when the day comes when your child can receive, celebrate with great joy! Indeed, it is a special day for the whole family.