

Helping Children to Examine Their Consciences



At the end of the day, children can be invited to reflect on God's presence in their lives.

Greetings!

One of the elements of mature faith is the ability to see the presence and action of God in one's life. When I have said this to a room filled with parents gathered to discuss their children's faith formation, I see a lot of nodding. Yet most of us parents would admit to being unsure about how to teach children to look for God at work in their lives.

What would you like to say to God for the gift of this day?

When we teach children to examine their consciences at the end of the day, we are giving them a tool to help them with this process. Some parents might prefer a one-on-one conversation with each child at bedtime to facilitate this. Other families will find that members respond to a dinner-table discussion on God's presence in their day and their response. A lot depends on your children, their developmental stage, and their personality and temperament.

When we follow the practice of St. Ignatius, we begin by remembering that God's presence is with us always. You

might say, "Let's think about how God is with us, right here in this moment." Sit quietly with that for a minute. Then invite expressions of gratitude. "What would you like to say to God for the gift of this day?" or "Is there anything we might like to say to God for the many gifts we have received?" Next, ask your child to review his or her day from beginning to end. What happened? Did they feel God's presence in particular at any time or in any place? Invite them to think about their response to God. Having received so much, all we have and every good thing that is as pure gift, have we responded as we should? We can ponder this in many ways with children. Have we lived out that call to love perfectly? Where have we fallen short? In what other ways have we failed to follow in the path of Jesus? Ask God's forgiveness and entrust yourself to God's mercy. Finally, look forward. You might say, "Think about tomorrow, what God might be calling you to do and who God is calling you to be."

When we reflect this way with our children, we give them the tools to see God's presence in their lives. This is a gift both for now and the future. The ability to see God working throughout their lives helps children to discern what they are to do as they live in hope.