



Parent Pages

Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church*

* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

The Holy Bible at Home

The Holy Bible for the Youngest Children

Before birth, still within the mother's womb, the child absorbs sounds, especially the voices of the parents. There are numerous benefits to reading to a child in the womb, both for the baby and the parents. This bonding lowers maternal stress. Scientific studies show that reading aloud causes a baby's fetal heart rate to lower. Reading to the child is also a way for other family members to connect with the baby, i.e., allowing the baby to hear and know the voices of siblings. After the baby is born, the child will turn its head toward the parent when the parent speaks, recognizing the parent's voice. Through reading aloud, the baby hears the parent using many different emotions and expressive sounds. This supports the child's social and emotional development. Reading books to infants and toddlers helps their development in a number of ways. Not only does the baby become familiar with sounds and words, but with a love for books and a passion for reading. Among all the books in the home, the family introduces the Holy Bible to nurture the child's ability to listen and respond to God's Words.

Many parents purchase a Bible for their family when the child reaches the age of reason (around the age of seven) or has the capacity to read. But before the child can read, families may introduce the child to the most precious book in the home, the Holy Bible. The youngest child is capable of showing love and honor for this holy book. To introduce the Holy Bible to the toddler, the parent holds up or points to the Bible, "This is the Holy Bible, God's Words for us." Carefully and solemnly model how to carry the Bible, with two hands at chest height in front of us.

On another day, say, "Let's listen to God's Word, let's get the Holy Bible." Keep your words brief and something familiar to the child. Later announce: Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world." (John 8:12) We want to lift up that when



Isaiah, age 4, with the Holy Bible

we read the scriptures; Jesus' light is present to us. Ideally, in the home, the Bible should have its own table with a cushion, even a lovely, golden cushion. An older sibling may assist in making the cushion for the Bible.

Love and Reverence for the Bible

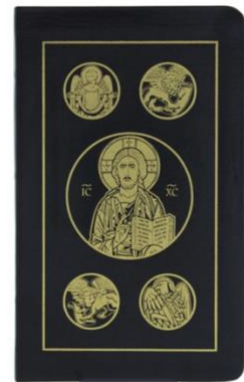
How do we honor the Holy Bible in our home? Is it given a place of respect and dignity? Is the Bible placed in a way that allows it to be accessible to everyone in the family?

• Carrying the Bible

The parent or older sibling models how to hold and carry the Bible. It is held with two hands, carried in front of us, at chest height. We walk slowly and carefully when carrying the Bible. Model how to pick up and set the Bible down on the cushion or pillow. The older children may recall that the priest has such a love for this book at Holy Mass/Eucharist that he kisses it. How can we show our love too? We can honor the Bible by holding it and passing it around lovingly. Family members may demonstrate how to hold and pass the Bible (one hand on top, one on bottom).

• How to Open and Turn the Pages of the Bible

How do families show reverence for books? When the child is ready, parents want to give practical lessons on how to open a book (open using the outside edge of the cover) how to turn pages (left hand holds the book open while gently using the right hand to turn the pages from the top right to the middle of the edge of the page) and to explain the purpose of the book jacket (it is there to protect the book and should always be kept on the book). The way we care for a plant, the way we fold a cloth, communicates the value of these items. We can translate different feelings and emotions by how we move.



The Holy Bible in the Atrium

In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium with the younger (and the older) children, we celebrate the beginning of the year with the Enthronement of the Bible at the Prayer Table. The children walk slowly and carefully in procession, carrying items to be placed upon the prayer table, i.e., a small processional cross, a green prayer cloth, a cushion or pillow on which to place the Holy Bible, the Holy Bible, a candle, a statue of the Good Shepherd, a lovely handwritten prayer card, etc. Every child has an item to place on the prayer table. The children and the catechist meditate on a verse of scripture and offer a response from the heart. This response may be in the form of a spoken prayer, a song, moments of silence, or deep contented sigh. This celebration helps

- To prepare for the atrium year where we will meditate on the Word of God found in the Holy Bible.
- To link the Bible in the atrium to the Liturgy of the Word at proclaimed at Mass/Eucharist.
- To nurture the ability to listen and respond to God's Words.

The children discover that it is in the Bible that God speaks to us, and we listen to his Word. When we listen to the Word, the Holy Spirit enlightens our hearts, and unites us more closely with God.