

Teaching Children to Pray the Rosary

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I love teaching the Rosary to my first graders. The Rosary helps them learn important prayers, highlights Scripture stories, and keeps their hands occupied when we are sitting together in a circle.

In May I hand out rosaries to each student, usually a week after they learn the Hail Mary. I explain that they were blessed by a priest earlier in the day. (One year, I actually took a photo of our pastor with his hands full of the rosaries to show the children.) Despite my explanation of the Rosary, it seems like I have to remind my class constantly that it's not a necklace, or a crown, or a toy to swing and wrap around their fingers.

I compare the rosaries they receive to the sacramentals they have used or seen at home. For example, I'll ask, "How many of you had an Advent wreath in your house last year?" A bunch of hands usually go up. I'll then ask, "How many of you have a cross hanging somewhere in your house?" Again, almost every hand goes up. Finally, I'll ask, "How many of you take the cross down off the wall and play with it?" Wide-eyed horrified gasps follow.

I go on to explain that there are objects that we pray with, like a cross in our house or the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in our church. I tell them that the rosary is one of those things. We treat these things a certain way because they are sacred objects. (*Sacred* is a vocabulary word we use a lot, so I know it will resonate with the children.) They usually start connecting the dots and see the Rosary as more than a necklace, but as a way of praying.

Admittedly, I make some modifications in how we pray the Rosary so that it aligns with what we've covered in class. This lesson usually falls around Mother's Day, so I focus on the Joyful Mysteries. Because the children haven't yet learned the Apostles Creed, we start by praying a Glory Be instead. I lead the prayers with simple explanations such as, "Move your finger to the third bead," or, "We're still thinking about when Gabriel told Mary she would be the mother of Jesus." The children pick up the rhythm fairly easily and maintain focus. I hold up my rosary as we pray so they can see which bead I'm holding. We pray just one decade at a time due to the time constraints of class, but I'm considering changing to praying only three Hail Marys with each mystery so that we can go through all five Joyful Mysteries instead of just one.

I encourage parents to bring their own rosaries and join us in prayer. Parents might benefit from hearing the explanation of the Rosary and a reminder not to rush through the prayer. While we may not be able to pray an entire Rosary, it's still a good way for the children and their parents to pray together. In fact, **one mother told me that her son started asking to pray a decade of the Rosary together before bed.**

Catechists can encourage family prayer, and teaching children to pray the Rosary is a great way to begin, even if it's just praying one decade. How do you teach the Rosary to the children in your class? How do you encourage families to pray together?

Don't forget to [download Rosary Craft Activities here](#). The prayers and Mysteries of the Rosary can be found in the Prayers and Practices of Our Faith section of [Finding God](#) or the What Catholics Should Know section of [Christ Our Life](#).