

# The Sunday dilemma

OK, I'll admit it. Most Sundays I go alone to the 9 a.m. Mass and John goes to the 11. Our boys stay home.

It's not that we don't want our sons to experience the beauty of the Mass, to hum along with the hymns, smell the incense, and maybe even practice genuflecting. It's just that we don't want to be the disruptive family that prevents our fellow congregants from hearing the homily—or even worse, the Consecration.

Yes, there are cry rooms, and we have tried our share. But they often seem to breed poor behavior—and we have a star mimic on our hands.

We could easily feed our boys cereal or crackers to get them through Mass, but that would be a hard habit for us to break. Besides, long before I knew him, my husband earned extra cash cleaning pews for the now-deceased Monsignor Anthony Sauerwein at St. Louis Church in Clarksville. We don't want to leave a mess behind.

Sometimes I take Leo to Mass on my own, and that usually goes better than I expect—though I will admit that there's something really peaceful about a cherished hour at Mass all to myself.

And so every Sunday we struggle with the decision of what to do. Do we take the boys or go separately?

This Sunday, of course, was Easter, and we wanted to go as a family. So we got everyone dressed and headed off to 9 a.m. Mass. I usually pack a few children's books, maybe even a notepad or two for scribbling. This time we let them each bring

a new stuffed bunny from their Easter baskets.



How did it go?

There were some wonderful moments. Daniel loved the guitarists and flipping through the hymnals. Leo sang along with the “Alleluia.” He whispered to ask me why we are baptized when we are “little kids ”— which he and his brother were when they were newly home from China. Leo even echoed “I do” during the renewal of the baptismal vows.

At other moments, as the boys climbed up on the kneelers, wriggled across the pew, and dangled their legs into the aisle, I worried that we were being terribly distracting. But we are walking a fine line as parents. We want exemplary behavior, but we also want our sons to want to come to Mass. We don’t want it to be an hour-long ordeal for them. So we are trying not to spend the Mass engaged in constant correction — though we want them to behave well.

At one point during the homily, just when I thought Leo — his head at one end of the pew and his feet at the other — wasn’t paying a bit of attention, he sat up and leaned over. “Mama,” he whispered, “the priest keeps saying that Jesus rose from the dead.”

The highlights for the boys, of course, were dropping the envelopes into the basket and shaking hands with the very kind, patient people who sat around us at the Kiss of Peace. Both boys stayed in the pew with us until after Communion, when John took our younger (and, at the moment, noisier) son to the back of the church.

At the end of Mass, the smiling woman — and mother of five grown children — behind us told Leo how well he had behaved. Then we went to say hello to the priest.

We don't even know his name, but something about this older Jesuit must have been appealing to Leo. They shook hands formally, and then as we walked past him, Leo turned and threw his arms around the priest's legs in a spontaneous, genuine hug.

Getting through Sunday Mass with a preschooler and a toddler may not sound like much — especially when we're talking about the miracle of the Resurrection — but I could have sung "Alleluia! Alleluia!" the whole way home.

Who knows? Maybe we'll try again next Sunday.

