

To the parents of toddlers who struggle their way through Mass

Every Sunday I see you beginning the marathon that is Mass with a toddler, and the memories come flooding back.

You might look at my children, who are 7 and 9, and think I have it easy. And I do. I walk into Mass without a battle plan. But I can close my eyes and be back in your shoes.

How well I remember not knowing whether we'd make it through the opening hymn without needing to duck out of the church.

How vividly I recall bringing books and quiet toys and the faith that this Sunday would be better than last.

How clearly I remember feeling judged by those around me as our children made noise or loud comments or bounced around in the pew.

You're there right now. There's no silver bullet for surviving this chapter in your life. And it's only so comforting to know you might be burning off time in Purgatory every Sunday.



But I want to assure you that one day you'll be singing that closing hymn, and you'll realize you didn't carry a wriggling, screaming child out of the church once that Mass.

One day you'll be surprised to discover you heard the whole homily.

And one day a person in a pew nearby will lean over and say, "It's unusual to see a child who's so well-behaved in church."

Let's hope that happens sooner rather than later.

Getting through that stage of life is a journey, and many Sundays are one step forward, two steps back—or five enormous steps back and looking at each other and saying, "Do you think we should try the cry room again?"

Then one day you'll do something crazy like what we did this weekend.

We sent our children to Mass at the Baltimore Basilica with their grandparents. I was a little nervous about it. Both of our sons know how to behave at Mass, but they can forget, and...they are still children. And we were sending them to Mass after a fun, tiring Saturday. They weren't exactly enthusiastic about the fact that Baba and Mama had evening plans, so our boys were going to Mass without us.

And we were going to take them to Mass again the next day. They were just a little less than thrilled.

But after Saturday evening Mass, as our sons were walking out of the Basilica with my parents, the new rector—who had celebrated the Mass—told our boys they were “awesome.”

They are awesome. Truly, they are. But he meant their Mass behavior, as they sat in the second row, well within his view, was awesome. When I heard the story later—and that people sitting near them had also complimented my parents on their behavior—I almost teared up.

Dreams, my friend, do come true.

Your mileage may vary, of course. What I wish for you, though, is that you can hold onto the belief that all the time and energy and tested patience is worth it.

For now? I’ll be cheering you on—from my semi-quiet pew where I’m reminding people when to kneel and fold their hands and sing and pray.