

Dear [Insert names],

We have been thinking of you recently, and we regularly keep you in our prayers. Your child's fourth and fifth years are likely to be marked by moments of intense happiness and equally intense animosity. Don't worry – it's all part of the process of learning, growing, and becoming more independent. Hold the good moments tightly, as Mary did, "treasuring them in your heart." The difficult moments will pass, as your child becomes more sure of his or her place in the world. Continue to create a household of faith, rely on the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen you, and be assured that your child, like Jesus, will "increase in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." (Luke 2: 51-52)

Here are some things to think about and to do in your child's preschool years:

*Take a hike or a walk.* Talk with your child as you visit a park or enjoy an outdoor activity. Draw his or her attention to the beauty of nature and ask him or her to name the features that he or she most appreciates. When you return home, read Genesis 1: 1-2:3 from a children's Bible, and invite your child to draw illustrations of the story, drawing on all he or she saw on your hike.

*Re-tell Sunday's Gospel.* As you are driving home from Mass on Sunday, or later at Sunday dinner, re-tell the Gospel, leaving easy details for your child to remember and share. The more you do this, the more actively your child will listen and pay attention at Mass, creating a more prayerful experience for you and your child!

*Add "God bless" prayers to your bedtime routine.* Begin the prayer by making the sign of the cross on your child's forehead (your pattern for many years now!), saying, "God bless (your child's name)" and ask your child to name others for whom he or she wants to pray. Not only does this actively involve your child in the prayers, but it raises his or her mind and heart to others. Alternate "God bless" prayers with "Thank you, God" prayers and teach the importance of gratitude.

*Begin family meals by inviting each person to share a detail of their day,* and to offer a brief prayer of thanksgiving for the day that is passing. Remember to thank God aloud for something positive about your child as often as possible.

*Participate in a parish collection for the poor,* and bring your child with you to deliver the gifts to your church, explaining that your family is acting as Jesus does by giving to those who are in need.

*Watch a movie together,* and point out the ways in which the characters in the movie are or are not acting as our Lord would want.

May our Lord fill your heart and mind with peace and joy,

[Signature]