

*Virtues
in Practice*



Faith ♦ Hope ♦ Charity

PARENT GUIDE

VIRTUES FOR THE YEAR OF

Faith

September: **FAITH**

—believing in God and all He has revealed

October: **REVERENCE**

—showing your deepest respect for things of God

November: **STEWARDSHIP**

—returning to God the first fruits of your time, talent, and treasure

December: **GENEROSITY**

—giving without counting the cost

January: **GRATITUDE**

—seeing everything as a gift and being thankful

February: **HONESTY**

—being trustworthy and true

March: **MERCY**

—caring for those who suffer

April: **JUSTICE**

—being fair and giving each his due

May: **ZEAL**

—being driven by an intense love for God

INTRODUCTION TO THE YEAR OF FAITH

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

"We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7)

"Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'It shall be done to you according to your faith.'" (Matthew 9:28)

"He said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm." (Matthew 8:26)

"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6)

"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? . . . Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." (James 2:14-16, 26)



Although each of the three years in *Virtues in Practice* is based on a theological virtue (faith, hope, charity), the definition of "theological virtue" is perhaps most clear in the case of faith. Most virtues are good habits that we gain through practice, but these three virtues are called *theological* because they are given to us by God Himself at our baptism. Not only does God Himself give us these three virtues, but they allow Him to live within us, and draw us to direct our lives toward Him.

We often think of faith as an act of our own will: "I choose to believe." In actuality, we cannot gain access to God by our own choice. Bigger than the universe, more brilliant than all the world's greatest geniuses combined, the God who created us is far beyond our understanding. We can know Him only because *He* chooses to reveal Himself to us. In His goodness He has willed not only to let us know *about* Him, but to let us know *Him*: through the gift of faith, we participate in God's own life, and He dwells within us. Stop and think about that for a minute. We are called to participate in God's life. This is not possible except as a gift from God; it is miraculous, and many of us never notice the reality of it.

Similar to the other virtues, the theological virtues grow. We deepen our faith through study and prayer—if we want to deepen our relationship with a person, we seek to learn more about him and to spend time being with him. It's the same with God. How can your family deepen faith through study and prayer this year? In baptism, you and your children received the "seed" of faith. What more can you do to help it to grow?

Faith is about seeing and doing. The person of faith sees what the unbeliever cannot imagine. We believe in the invisible. Faith is not like a political stance, a platform to be agreed upon, a membership badge to be worn. To say "I believe" or "I am a Catholic" means that God has given me an entirely different perspective on daily experiences and on the purpose of life. If I am a Catholic, I know that in my daily routine I am surrounded by powerful angels helping to guide people and nations. I know that the Mother of God and the saints—including those in my own family who have reached heaven—are constantly with me, intimately involved in my life and supporting me by the power of their prayers. If I am a Catholic, I know that physical things have deep meaning and that God works through them; that the grace needed to transform the world is available in the whispered words of the confessional box, in a drop of holy water; that God Himself is awaiting us in tabernacles around the world, hidden under the appearance of bread so that we can be *physically close* to Him. If I am a Catholic, I love the Holy Father as Christ's vicar on earth, and the Church because it is my family, and my source of life because *He* works through it. And most importantly, if I have faith I know that every human person is also a spiritual being and that the purpose of life is to gain heaven, to reach life with God in eternal joy and to avoid the danger of eternal misery without Him. This is how a person of faith sees the world.

If we see the world this way, it changes how we act, and it allows God to act in our lives. Christ was not able to perform miracles in communities that closed their minds and hearts to Him. In this Year of Faith, let us open our hearts to Christ! When we do, He is able to work miracles in us and through us.

Good works follow on faith and prove the authenticity of faith. True faith compels us to evangelize, that is, to share and proclaim the love and truth we have found in Jesus Christ so that His good news reaches to the ends of the earth. And because we know the eternal destiny of each person, we care for them as priceless. We all know that it is one thing to "talk the talk" and a far deal greater to "walk the walk". We must not only say "I believe"... we must live it.

In the Year of Faith, virtues such as faith and reverence provide an opportunity to renew Catholic devotions at the parish and school. These could include a Living Rosary in October, a Saints Gallery in November, a school Christmas pageant that is focused on the birth of Jesus, a Faith Rally or Family Retreat for Catholic Schools Week, praying the Stations of the Cross or acting in a Passion Play, 40 Hours of Eucharistic Adoration in Lent, or Crowning Our Lady in May. Since "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26), the Year of Faith also emphasizes service. Virtues such as stewardship, generosity, mercy, and justice provide opportunities to focus on class or school service projects (trips, collections), joining the Holy Childhood, or incorporating service-learning across the curriculum.

In the Year of Faith, let us seek to deepen our relationship with God, to know Him and to serve Him by serving others. May each of us be among those Our Lord had in mind when He told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29).

HOME PROJECTS FOR SEPTEMBER

FAITH—believing in God and all He has revealed.

Grades Pre-K-2—Saint Martha

1. Pray a simple daily prayer for deeper faith, such as: “God, I believe in You, help me to know You more.”
2. Make brief visits to Jesus in the tabernacle a few times this month.
3. Read a Bible passage aloud each night.
4. Discuss what we believe about the Trinity, Incarnation, and Eucharist.
5. Ask a priest to bless a new crucifix, holy water font, or sacred image for your home or your child’s bedroom. Practice using it as a reminder to pray each time you enter the room.

Grades 3-5—Saint Jerome

1. Pray the *Act of Faith* each day.
2. Spend time together in Eucharistic Adoration using these steps as a guide ACTS(Q): A=Adoration, C=Contrition, T=Thanksgiving, S=Supplication, Q=Tell God what is going on in your life; ask Him questions and listen for answers.
3. Discuss different prayers to say during the silent moments of the Mass, especially before the Scripture readings (“Lord, place Your Word in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart.”) the elevation of the host (“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!”) and after receiving Holy Communion.
4. Discuss the lesson from the readings and homilies at Mass each Sunday this month.
5. Watch video clips of Pope Francis (see the Vatican’s official YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/vatican) and discuss how we love the Holy Father because he Christ’s vicar on earth. Discuss how the pope and all bishops are successors of the Apostles.

Grades 6-8—Saint Augustine

1. Memorize the *Apostles’ Creed* or the *Nicene Creed*.
2. Pray the rosary or attend Eucharistic Adoration with a friend, more than once if possible.
3. Make a commitment with a friend that both of you will spend five minutes reading Scripture each night. Share the effect it has on you.
4. Is there a Church teaching you don’t understand? Look it up in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (available at the Vatican website, www.vatican.va).
5. Lead a faith-sharing meeting at your house. Read Scripture with a few friends and discuss your faith.
6. Follow current Church news from the Vatican News Service (www.news.va/en) or a Catholic news service such as Zenit News (www.zenit.org) or Catholic News Service (www.catholicnews.com) and discuss with a friend or your parents.

HOME PROJECTS FOR OCTOBER

REVERENCE—showing your deepest respect for God and the things of God

Grades Pre-K-2—Saint Hyacinth

1. Take a tour of the church when it is empty. In a whisper, point out the statues, sanctuary, altar, tabernacle, sacristy, windows, etc. Practice showing reverence to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist by genuflecting facing the tabernacle.
2. Discuss the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Practice making a *Spiritual Communion*.
3. Discuss why bowing is a sign of reverence. Practice bowing gently at some of the following times: before receiving Holy Communion, when entering the sanctuary, when passing before the tabernacle, when saying Jesus' Name, when saying the *Glory Be*, during the *Creed* at the words "by the power of the Holy Spirit. . . became man".

Grades 3-5—Saint Tarcisus

1. Ask a bishop, priest, or deacon about their ordination, or a religious about the day he or she professed vows. If you are related to someone who is ordained or a religious, ask your relative.
2. Discuss how sacramentals open our hearts to grace. Discuss the proper reverence to be shown for blessed objects (never place them on the floor, never throw them away but when they are worn out or broken, burn or bury them). Choose one of the following sacramentals and practice using it this month to open your heart to grace:
 - Blessings: blessing before meals, blessing oneself with holy water, signing one's children with the Cross at night or before leaving the home
 - Blessed objects: Bible, holy water, rosaries, scapulars, medals, crucifixes, statues, images, relics
3. Acknowledge the presence of Our Lord by making the *Sign of the Cross* whenever you pass a Catholic church this month.
4. Learn to pray the *Angelus* or the *Stations of the Cross* to show reverence for the Incarnation or Redemption.

Grades 6-8—Saint Margaret Clitherow

1. Decide on some new ways to keep the Lord's Day holy. Remember that holy means different, or set apart from the ordinary. Some ideas could include spending extra time with your family, appreciating creation, preparing for Mass by looking up the readings, preparing special meals and/or using nice dishes, doing your homework on Saturday, praying together as a family, giving up worrying or complaining on Sunday, abstaining from whatever consumes you (videogames, TV, texting, internet), calling relatives, sending cards, etc.
2. Learn about how clergy, religious, and laity pray the Liturgy of the Hours to sanctify the day. Try it out a couple times this month. See the free features on www.ebreviary.com.
3. Break the habit of using the Lord's name in vain. If you forget, make the *Sign of the Cross* as a reminder.
4. Practice reverence for Our Lady during the month of October. Pray the rosary or the *Memorare* this month.
5. Pray this month for yourself and for our society to grow in reverence for persons as images of God, for the miracle of life, and for mothers.
6. This month take the time to really listen to those who speak with you. When they talk to you, don't multitask. Give each person your full attention. Do you notice a difference?

HOME PROJECTS FOR NOVEMBER

STEWARDSHIP—returning to God the first fruits of your time, talent, and treasure

Grades Pre-K-2—Saint Elizabeth of Hungary:

1. Think about something you do well—reading, writing, drawing, tying your shoes, etc.—and offer to help someone younger than you develop this skill.
2. Ask your parents if you can put some money in the poor box at church or in the Sunday collection.
3. Sacrifice a treat and give the money to the poor.
4. Practice saying the *Sign of the Cross* first thing in the morning when you wake up, to dedicate all your time that day to God.
5. If you take a dance class, show your latest routine to someone who is lonely or sad.
6. Choose a way to practice taking better care of the supplies and toys entrusted to you at home or school.

Grades 3-5—Blessed Fra Angelico:

1. Be a good steward of class property: offer to one of your teachers your help in repairing books or other classrooms items that are damaged or need cleaning.
2. Draw or paint a picture as a gift for someone who is sick or suffering.
3. Sing in the church choir.
4. Are you a good reader? Choose a fairytale with a good moral or a story about a saint and read it to a younger child.
5. Be diligent about remembering to bring a donation for the offertory at Sunday Mass this month.
6. Choose a new way to conserve resources or recycle.
7. Dedicate to God the time and talent you spend in after-school arts, sports, or academic competitions. Make a point to pray before each practice, rehearsal, game, etc., and as you strive for excellence, do it for Him and for your group/team.
8. Is there a class that is hard for you? Consecrate that time to God. In your prayer before that class, ask God to help you put forth your best effort out of love for Him, since it is His will that you do this activity in the time He gave you.

Grades 6-8—Saint Joseph Moscati:

1. Discuss with a friend what humanitarian cause you are most passionate about, and why. (Examples: clean water, medical attention for the uninsured, the pro-life movement in our country, shelters for local homeless, food pantries/soup kitchens.) Choose a way that you and your friend can promote awareness of this ministry. If you communicate electronically with your friends, could you use the same media to communicate these needs?
2. Discuss tithing with a friend. Why do you think many people have abandoned this practice? Do you think it is important? Do you plan to tithe when you are older? If so, how can you start now?
3. Try out as a cantor for church.
4. Teach your favorite sport to a younger child who doesn't know how to play.
5. When things get busy we forget to pray, but it's when we need prayer the most! If you have a crazy busy day this month, deliberately set apart a few minutes for prayer. Later, reflect on how that impacted your day.

HOME PROJECTS FOR DECEMBER

GENEROSITY—giving without counting the cost

Grades Pre-K-2—Saint Nicholas

Grades 3-5—Saint Mary Magdalene

Grades 6-8—Saint Maximilian Kolbe

PROJECT CHOICES FOR THIS MONTH:

1. Many families already have traditions of giving to the poor during the Christmas season. We all want to keep a spirit of peace during Advent to prepare our souls for the coming of Christ at Christmas, so if your family already gives to the poor during Advent, please don't feel obliged to start something new! Just reflect on whatever it is you do to be generous every year in December.
2. Is God calling you to give ALL? If you think God might be calling you to be a priest or Sister, pray this month for the grace to answer God's call with a generous "yes".
3. Find out about Christmas giving opportunities at your parish and participate in one during Advent.
4. If you don't already have a family tradition of giving to the poor during Advent, consider starting one, such as
 - anonymously adopting a family and leaving gifts on their doorstep
 - sacrificing something you want for Christmas and using the money for the poor
 - gathering with members of your extended family to do service for the poor rather than exchanging gifts

HOME PROJECTS FOR JANUARY

GRATITUDE—Seeing everything as a gift and being thankful

Grades Pre-K-2—Saint Francis of Assisi

1. Before you go to bed each night, thank God for ten things He gave you that day.
2. Every time you see something beautiful, say “thank you” to God.
3. Remember to say “thank you” whenever someone gives you something: food, a ride, a shared toy, etc.
4. Write a thank you card to someone who helps you. (Parents can take dictation from younger students.)
5. Take a nature walk. Look closely at God’s creations, large and small, and thank Him for each one.

Grades 3-5—Saint Julie Billiart

1. Before you go to bed each night, thank God for ten things He gave you that day.
2. Whenever someone gives you a compliment, humbly accept it. Then pause for a moment, and in your heart remind yourself that all your talents and goodness are a gift from God and thank Him.
3. Keep a gratitude journal: throughout the day, jot down things for which you are grateful, such as beautiful things you see, compliments, accomplishments, kindnesses, etc.
4. Think of one person/thing/situation that you think you might be taking for granted. Make a goal of expressing gratitude for that person/thing/situation several times this month.
5. When you eat meals this month, think about the ingredients in each dish, and in your heart thank God for the plants/animals He made/grew and the hard work of the people who contributed to the meal. For example, if you eat bread, thank God for growing the grain, for the farmer who harvested it, the miller who ground it, the trucker who drove it, the baker who mixed it, the hen who laid the eggs, the cow that gave the milk, etc. Isn’t it amazing what we take for granted?

Grades 6-8—Saint Josemaría Escrivá

1. Each time you pray, before *asking* God for things, pause to tell Him three things for which you are grateful.
2. With a friend, think of one person/thing/situation that you think you might be taking for granted. Make a goal of expressing gratitude for that person/thing/situation several times this month. Expressing gratitude might be in prayer, by saying “thank you” directly to the person, or telling your friend about times when you are grateful.
3. Discuss with a friend different ways that a person can show gratitude. Do people show gratitude differently, according to their personalities? Try out one of the things your friend does to show gratitude and let them try out one that you usually do. Keep tabs on each other through the month. Was that way of showing gratitude awkward or helpful?
4. Make a “no whining” pact with your friends. Each time you catch them complaining, they have to say three things for which they are grateful.
5. Have a contest to see which of your friends can say “thank you” to the most teachers/parents during the day—but only earnest thanks count!

HOME PROJECTS FOR FEBRUARY

HONESTY—being trustworthy and true

Grades Pre-K-2—Blesseds Jacinta and Francesco Marto

1. Be careful! We never want to lie, but saying “Well, it’s *true!*” does not make it okay to say something hurtful. Practice saying one thing each day that is true and is a compliment to someone. Don’t say it unless you really mean it! Tell them something you like about the way they are or something they’ve done that day.
2. Discuss and practice respectful ways to tell the truth about how you feel when you are unhappy with something or someone, or don’t want to do what you’re told. Sometimes, we can tell the truth to Jesus in our hearts—without saying anything out loud—and offer it to Him as a sacrifice.
3. Do not tell any lies this month. That includes being sneaky and hiding things to avoid getting in trouble.

Grades 3-5—Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

1. Start a “No White Lies” club and promote it among your friends.
2. Start an Anti-Rumor league: it’s dishonest to spread stories that hurt someone’s reputation *even if they are true*, because it makes the person look worse than they really are. It’s even worse if the stories are false! Identify rumors for what they are and STOP them!
3. Analyze some of the ads you see on TV. How do they manipulate the truth?

Grades 6-8—Saint Athanasius

1. Discuss what it means that the truth “sets us free” (John 8:32). Look for movies with examples and watch one together.
2. Rather than doing what’s popular, dare to be yourself. Track how many times you defy the norm to be yourself and make it a contest between your friends.
3. Do you have any small pangs of guilt about hiding something or rationalizing something you know is wrong? Are there rules you know you’ve broken (for example, pirating movies or music, copying from a friend on simple homework assignments)? With a friend, list some common forms of dishonesty and make a pact to be counter-cultural in one of these, so as to become someone who is totally trustworthy.
4. Fight calumny, rash judgment, and detraction (see your workbook or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2477 for definitions of these). Make a pact with your friends that this month you will say only what is true, kind, and helpful, and guard the good reputation of everyone.

HOME PROJECTS FOR MARCH

MERCY—caring for those who suffer

Grades Pre-K-2—Saint John Vianney

1. Look for those who are hurt on the playground or elsewhere and help them. (Be careful, it's not helpful if there is a big crowd of people trying to help). Sometimes just staying with the person helps.
2. Donate food or clothes to those in need.
3. Pray for someone you know who is suffering. It could be someone close to you, or a group of people in another part of the world.

Grades 3-5—Saint Faustina

Choose one of the spiritual or corporal works of mercy and choose a way to practice it this month. If you choose a spiritual work of mercy, make sure you understand what type of suffering it relieves.

Spiritual Works of Mercy	Corporal Works of Mercy
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Admonish the sinner. 2. Instruct the ignorant 3. Counsel the doubtful. 4. Comfort the sorrowful. 5. Bear wrongs patiently. 6. Forgive all injuries. 7. Pray for the living and the dead. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Feed the hungry. 2. Give drink to the thirsty. 3. Clothe the naked. 4. Visit the imprisoned. 5. Shelter the homeless. 6. Visit the sick. 7. Bury the dead.

Grades 6-8—Blessed Teresa of Calcutta

1. "A joy shared is a joy doubled; a sorrow shared is a sorrow divided." Ask someone you know about what causes them suffering, especially in their heart. Fully open your heart to listening to them with loving concern. Show mercy by your care for them, and help to carry their cross by praying for that intention this month.
2. Discuss the relationship between the virtues of mercy and forgiveness. Are all acts of mercy acts of forgiveness? Are all acts of forgiveness acts of mercy? How does lack of forgiveness cause suffering? Choose something from your discussion to practice this month.
3. Practice one of the spiritual or corporal works of mercy (see above).

HOME PROJECTS FOR APRIL

JUSTICE—being fair and giving each his due

Grades Pre-K-2—Saint Anthony of Padua

1. When you share things this month, take equal amounts.
2. When you have something you cannot divide, give everyone a turn without complaining.
3. Make sure the rules of the games you play are fair to everyone this month. Sometimes fair means different; if your baby brother or sister is playing, the rules should be easier for them than for you because they are new at it.

Grades 3-5—Saint Katharine Drexel

1. Is there a group of people you know who are not given equal pay, opportunities, or rights? Write a letter to a government official asking for justice.
2. Estimate and add up all the expenses it costs to raise a child from birth through college (ask your parents for help). How should children respond, in justice, to the sacrifices and love of parents? How should they respond now, and how when they are older? Choose something to do this month, or write a letter to your 40-year-old self, reminding you what you owe to your parents and how you should try to repay them.
3. See #2; do a similar exercise estimating how much time a teacher gives for you in a year. What do you owe that teacher, in justice?
4. What has God given to you? Make a list. We always give to God in love, but think about what you owe Him, simply in justice. Make a list for that too. Sometimes we think we are being really generous with God, when in fact, we are barely fulfilling our duty. Ask your parents to check your answer and help you to choose something from your list to practice this month.
5. What has your country given to you? Make a list. What do you owe in return? Make a list for that too. Choose something from the second list to practice this month.

Grades 6-8—Saint Thomas More

1. Research to find whether you, your family, or your school are purchasing things that are produced through acts of injustice (for example, goods produced through unjustly low wages or child labor in a foreign country). Find an alternative, and write to the manufacturers to tell them why you are no longer buying their product. (Search online for words like “boycott lists” “boycott brands” or “consumer boycott”, but be a critical thinker: you can never believe everything you read and in this area there are many political or finance-driven agendas. If you read something accusing a company of unjust practices, look for a trustworthy source to validate the accusation or consult a trusted adult.)
2. Interview a lawyer or a judge. Ask why they think justice is important.
3. Interview an adult you admire. What do they think a person owes to God, family, and country?
4. Does giving each his due mean giving each the same? Practice looking for places where exceptions should be made and discreetly stand up for true justice.
5. Research the rights of a U.S. citizen. Write a letter to a government official to defend a right that you think is being violated.

HOME PROJECTS FOR MAY

ZEAL—being driven by an intense love for God

Grades Pre-K-2—Saint Paul

1. Every day this month, tell someone something about God.
2. Choose something about which you can be tempted to be lazy (like cleaning your room) and do it with extra energy this month as a gift to God.
3. Make little notes and drawings about God and leave them where family members, friends, or strangers will find them (but don't litter!).

Grades 3-5—Saint Dominic

1. Research to find the percentage of Christians in countries throughout the world. Do you think there are people in the world today who have not even heard of Jesus Christ? Choose a country and pray for the missionaries in that country this month.
2. Do you know someone who is Catholic, but doesn't go to church anymore? Pray for that person this month and offer sacrifices for him or her.
3. Find places (stores, homes, etc) where you think people need to find God, or places where you suspect people are being led away from God. Discreetly make a cross with holy water somewhere in that place or tuck away a blessed miraculous medal there.

Grades 6-8—Saint Francis Xavier

1. Be bold in your faith! Go out on a limb and talk about your faith with an acquaintance who does not know you are Catholic.
2. Is there someone you know who is seeking meaning in life? Invite him or her to learn about the Catholic faith.
3. Have you ever thought of going extreme, and becoming a Sister or priest? Interview a priest or religious to find out about their life. Let them inspire you with ideas about what you could do for God this month.
4. Discuss whether it is prudent or cowardly to hide your faith in certain circumstances. Do you think everyone who knows you knows you are a Catholic? Consider wearing a crucifix or another silent way to preach the faith to everyone you meet.
5. Are there opportunities for mission trips in your diocese? See if you can join one this summer.