

Faith-Sharing Deepens Our God Experiences

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An extremely wise and holy guru lived upon the mountain. The people in the valley were eager to learn from him and finally convinced him to come down to visit them. The people got all dressed up and assembled to meet him.

As he looked at their eager faces, he said, "Do you know what I'm going to say?" They quickly replied, "No."

"Oh, you foolish people," he replied and went back to his mountain.

After much persuading, the elders of the village convinced him to come again. The crowd was even much bigger this time. He looked at them as they gathered and asked, "Do you know what I'm going to say?"

Remembering the results of the last visit, they immediately answered, "Yes!"

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed and returned to his mountain.

A long time passed, but finally he was persuaded to come one more time. He began by asking, "Do you know what I'm going to say?"

The people of the valley replied, "Some of us do; some of us don't."

The guru looked at them wisely and said, "Great! Those who do tell those who don't." He returned to his mountain.

We certainly have need in our lives for "gurus" – people who can mentor us and guide us in our faith journey. At the same time, though, we also need to realize the wisdom within each one of us. This is especially true when we are speaking about God and our experiences of God.

It is extremely helpful and advantageous to know the wisdom of the centuries: to listen to Scripture and the tradition of the Church in relationship to the questions: who is God, how does God relate to us, how can I describe and understand God?

That never completes the entire picture, though. We each have experiences of God .. and only then do we begin to touch the reality of what our faith is all about: that God is real and close and interacts personally with each one of us.

One of the key ways in which each of us grows in faith is by listening to others' experiences, thoughts and feelings. That listening broadens us, suggests fresh ways of thinking, stretches us to consider things that we might have missed or never thought about. At the same time, in our sharing

with others, our verbalization of our experiences, thoughts and feelings concretizes them; in the telling we are often led to understand our experiences in new ways.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* underlines the importance of the group as one of the elements of catechetical methodology in section #159 when it says, "...groups are practically a vital necessity for personality formation. ... they promote a sense of dialogue and sharing as well as a sense of Christian co-responsibility."

Our catechetical endeavors help to acquaint people with the wisdom and teachings of our tradition. That is proper and necessary! We also need to help children, youth, and adults possess the skills and comfortability with sharing their faith with others. We need to provide times within religious education sessions, catechist meetings, and during prayer time for people to talk about their experiences – not just their knowledge.

Some guidelines for faith sharing:

- 1) Faith-sharing needs to be done in small groups, usually just two or three people.
- 2) Sharing one's faith with another is a great gift ... and the one who receives is in the midst of an awe-filled experience. Therefore, what is shared within that small group stays within the small group.
- 3) The small group needs some direction ... a question or open-ended sentence which flows from the Scripture reading, the theme or concern of the session, etc. Catechists can phrase these according to the age and needs of the group.
- 4) The groups need to be guided in the awareness that faith-sharing is not a time to give advice to the other people; it is a time for each person to listen to the experiences of the others.
- 5) It's perfectly acceptable not to share. Our goal is to enable people to become comfortable with faith-sharing, but on a particular day or with a particular topic, someone might not be able to talk. That is perfectly all right.

What follows are some ideas for faith-sharing topics and questions. Many of them can be moved into different categories, depending upon the needs of the group and how the question is phrased.

All of these ideas can also be used personally – without a group -- in prayerful journal writing.

<i>FAITH SHARING STARTERS ABOUT GOD FOR YOUNG CHILDREN</i>

- What do you want to say thank you to God for?
- When do you pray? What do you say to God?
- What color reminds you of God?
- What's the best thing you could do to make God smile?
- Who helps you to think about God?
- How does it make you feel when someone tells you that you are a child of God?

- Do you know any people who love God? How can you tell they love God?
- What does God sound like?
- What if God whispered to you right now. What would God say?
- When do you think about God?
- I wonder how God's heart looks.
- I wonder how your family looks inside God's heart.
- Do you think God had fun making us? Why or why not? What sort of things do you think God enjoyed making the most? What animals do you think God liked the best after they were made?
- What if you named the five most wonderful gifts from God?

FAITH SHARING STARTERS ABOUT GOD FOR MIDDLE GRADE CHILDREN

- What happened to you last week that reminded you of God?
- What do you think God looks like?
- What are you asking God for right now?
- Imagine what God wants our world to be like.
- Who taught you about God? What did they teach you?
- What if you saw someone through God's eyes? How would that person look?
- What do you think makes God sad?
- What if you could know all the things God feels about you?
- What if you could ask an animal a question about God?
- Do you ask God things? What? Does God ask you things? What?
- If you sang a song to God, what song would you sing?
- Finish these sentences:
 - God is _____.
 - God does not _____.
- How would you describe God to a person who has never heard about God?
- What if you could ask God three questions?
- What if you could see inside God's heart?
- What if you had to use another word for God?
- If God gave you a compliment, what would it be?
- I wonder how many ways there are to praise God.
- What if you asked the stars some very old questions about God?
- If you asked God to teach you to pray, what would God say?
- Pretend God was going to create a new heaven and a new earth, and God was asking you for some advice on how to do a better job. What things would you tell God to make better? What are some of the problems with our earth that you think God would like to have fixed?
- What if God came to us dressed as someone we know?
- What if God appeared to us as someone very poor?

FAITH SHARING STARTERS ABOUT GOD FOR JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH

- When was a time you felt in tune with God this past week?
- When have you felt God speaking to you?
- How is God like - or different from - "The Force" in "Star Wars?"
- Where do you pray best? Why?
- What advertising slogan would be a good description of God?
- Finish this sentence: I most needed God when _____.
- When have you been on holy ground?
- What most confuses you about God?
- What kind of God would God be if we understood Him completely?
- What kind of God did Jesus bring to us?
- Describe a time you felt God was at work in your life. Next, describe a time God felt far away. What made the difference?
- Finish this sentence: "If my relationship with God was the basis for a TV show, I'd call it _____."
- Finish this sentence: "The one question people ask about God that I don't have an answer for is _____."
- What if you could ask God to solve one problem in the world?
- What if God said to you, "What do you want me to do for you?"
- Finish this sentence: The person that most easily influences me to believe in God or at least to think about God is _____.
- Finish this sentence: I want my God to be _____.
- What is the hardest challenge God might ask you to accept? What is so hard about it?
- You are walking through a forest. You head toward a clearing, discovering a bright meadow and you see a man dressed in white, standing alone. You know instinctively that the person is an angel sent by God. The angel comes to you and said, "God has sent me to tell you his dreams for you." What does he say?

**FAITH SHARING STARTERS ABOUT GOD
FOR CATECHISTS TO SUGGEST TO FAMILIES FOR HOME USE**

- Gather the family together to read the newspaper. Does any news show God's presence and care in the world?
- Invite each family member to share:
 - What's your favorite adjective for God?
 - How has God blessed our family?
 - I wonder what would make our family feel like shouting Alleluia.
 - If God had one sentence to say to our family I think it would be _____.
 - I think God is _____.
 - The Bible says we are created in the image of God. Do you think you look like God?

- The place where I like to pray to God is _____.
 - Our home is God's home because _____.
 - My favorite way of praying to God is _____.
 - Do you think God has a plan for our family?
 - (saying to each other family member) "I think the thing that God likes most about you is _____."
 - Finish this sentence: "I think the thing God likes most about our family is _____."
 - I pray to God because _____.
 - Finish this sentence: "I felt God was especially with our family when _____."
 - (Use any of the questions from the above three sections to use during family faith-sharing times.)
- Invite every family member to look around your home. What object do you see that reminds you of God? Why?
 - Invite every family member to tell all the other family members what part of God / what characteristic of God she/he sees in each of them.
 - Psalm 111 is an acrostic, which means that the lines of the psalm begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.
 - What good things does God do for us?
 - What gifts does God give us that we can't touch or see?
 - How can we show God's goodness to others?
 - Create a litany of thanks for the good things God does. Assign letters of the alphabet to each person. Think of good gifts from God that begin with the letter they have been assigned.
 - Invite each family member to tell about a time when they knew God was with them.
 - Read one of the following and have each family member answer, "In that passage, I think God wants me to hear _____."
 - Mark 10: 13-16
 - Luke 9: 23-27
 - Ephesians 6: 1-4
 - Luke 10: 25-37
 - John 13: 1-9
 - Ephesians 6:18-20
 - As a family, prepare a booklet based on Psalm 136: 1-9 for a shut-in. Have each choose and portray several verses from Psalm 136: 109, then arrange all the finished pictures together in the sequence of the verses. Between each picture write the words, "For God's loving kindness is everlasting." Bind the pictures together in a folder or tie them together with yarn. Title your book "God's Loving Kindness." Make arrangements to deliver "God's Loving Kindness" together to your special person.

- Select one of these passages, which speak of God’s kindness and love, from Scripture:
 - Isaiah 43: 107 (you are precious)
 - Exodus 19: 3-4 (love made visible)
 - Psalm 103 (God is tender and compassionate)
 - Hosea 11: 1-9 (reins of kindness)
 - Isaiah 49: 14-16 (I will never forget you)
 - Psalm 136 (boundless love)
 - John 15: 9-17 (as the Father loves me, so I also love you)

Read the Scripture you select as God’s personal love letter to your family. Talk about how you experience God’s love and care in your family life. Spend time in quiet prayer so each member of the family can talk to God in his/her heart. Invite every family member to write a personal love letter to God or Jesus. Share love letters if family members wish to do so. Young children can express their feelings of love by drawing a picture or making something special for God.
- Write a contemporary gospel describing God’s faithful love in your family’s life, both past and present. Some families might choose photography, movies, audio cassettes or videos to record their family’s gospel, instead of just writing it down.
- “God gives us many kinds of special abilities” says 1 Corinthians 12:4. What special ability does each person in your family have to make your home a happy home? Share ideas and compliments.
- Write on ten slips of paper the following Bible promise references (one on each slip): Joshua 1:9; Psalm 16:11; Genesis 28:15; Matthew 11:28; John 3:15; John 1:12; 1 John 1:0; Psalm 34:17; Jeremiah 33:3; Matthew 5:8. Fold the slips of paper and hid them throughout the living room/family room. At a given signal the hunt begins! When all ten slips are found take turns reading the promises from the Bible and talking about what God has promised. After reading the promises, work together as a family and paraphrase Romans 4:21 in ten words or less. What does this verse say about God’s promises?
- Go on a walk together and look for great and small things that God has made. Have everyone find one small things that she/he can take home. Work together and make a table centerpiece out of small things God has made.

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