

St. Isidore and St. Maria

St. Isidore, a saint of the 12th Century is a real-life example of one being “touched by an angel”. When Isidore’s parents died their only inheritance to him was a simple plow. With that he went to work as a field hand for Squire de Vargas, a large landowner in Spain. Fellow laborers began reporting to the Squire that attending daily mass caused Isidore to arrive late for work each day. However, the results of Isidore’s daily work proved that Isidore had not defrauded the Squire. Curious as to how this could be, the Squire hid himself so he could observe Isidore’s actions. As de Vargas advanced to admonish Isidore’s behavior, he was surprised to see a second team of white oxen led by unknown figures plowing beside the team of Isidore. This experience is often quoted “the one who plows with angels does the work of three farmers”. Others also reported seeing angels assisting Isidore at various times.

Isidore was present at the multiplication of food. Once he accompanied a train of beggars to a dinner to which he was invited. He was late because he had stayed at the church too long in prayer. The host, fearful there would not be enough food, was assured by Isidore that there would be enough for him and for Christ’s poor. Yet another example of multiplication of food is associated with Isidore’s love of animals. He took a grain sack and distributed half of it to starving birds while his companions mocked him for his waste. Yet when he arrived at the grain mill, the sack was once again full and produced more than the usual amount of flour.

But Isidore’s life of holiness was not relegated only to angels and miracles in the fields. He and his saintly wife Marie loved the poor. They often kept only scraps of food for themselves and shared the best of their own simple meal with those who had less. The loss of their only son, who fell into a well, also tested their faith in one another and in their God.

In an age when holiness was associated with celibacy and the monastery, Isidore and Maria (honored as a saint in her own right in Spain) were married laypeople. In an age when courage and valor were associated with the armies that were gradually reclaiming Spain from its long domination by the Moors, Isidore is a civilian. In an age when wealthy men like de Vargas were being awarded large tracts of land on the frontier between the recently conquered Christian land and lands still under the domination of Islamic rulers, Isidore was a poor man, a mere “hired hand” with no hope of owning a farm, much less an estate.

For us, Isidore and Maria are our example of faith. They were a true flesh and blood farm family whose lives reflect the Gospel we heard tonight. Their lives practically shout at us the power and glory of God who is in complete control of creation.

(Adapted from www.catholiccharitiesnwo.org/storystisidoremaria.htm)

Three Key Faith Activities

Family Faith Conversations

- ✓ Take advantage of teachable moments. The more in touch we are with our own faith journey, the fewer teachable moments will escape us.
- ✓ Take time to listen and share. What is the “talkative” time of day for your child?
- ✓ Invite discussion on a provocative issue or controversial topic.
- ✓ Allow doubts and different opinions to be expressed.
- ✓ Be willing to be questioned about your own views and beliefs.
- ✓ Take opportunities to pray together.
- ✓ Use Scripture as a source for discussing an issue.
- ✓ Take one-to-one time with each child. Build personal memories together.
- ✓ Use media (TV, radio, computer, etc.) and current events as discussion starters. “What do you think about pornography on-line as it relates to censorship and free speech?”
- ✓ Tell and read good stories together.

Family Ritual & Devotion

- ✓ Initiate at least one annual religious ritual in your family each year.
- ✓ Rediscover and retain the ethnic religious traditions that are your legacy.
- ✓ Give your family rituals time, space and planning.
- ✓ Get a book or two on family prayer and ritual.
- ✓ Share responsibility for celebration and ritual among all family members.
- ✓ Adopt the attitude: *If it's worth doing, it's worth doing poorly!* Even if we're not very good at doing ritual, it still has a powerful impact.
- ✓ Tell stories of “Jesus & His Friends.”
- ✓ Give simple blessings to each other and the things we use daily: bikes, school supplies, etc.
- ✓ Try this simple exchange when leaving the house in the morning. Parent: “This is the day the Lord has made.” Child: “I will rejoice and be glad.”
- ✓ Set up a regular time for family prayer. E.g. Tuesday night family prayer. Whichever family member is in charge can lead the prayer however he or she wishes, and at the end select next week's leader.
- ✓ Do seasonal rituals: Advent, Lent, Easter, etc.
- ✓ Celebrate Baptism Days as well as birthdays. Light the child's Baptismal candle and tell the story of his or her birth and Baptism.

Family Outreach & Service

- ✓ Regularly invite children to join in social action. Be invitational without inflicting guilt.
- ✓ Expose children to advocates, victims and situations. Diffuse their fear and ignorance.
- ✓ Actions should be within children's capacities. Look for opportunities in which children can play a specific role, and respect their limits.

- ✓ Integrate fun whenever possible. Combine the action with a fun event. Join with other families.
- ✓ Do “with” instead of do “for.” Respect and promote the dignity of others. Learn from those you hope to serve.
- ✓ Consider both works of justice and works of mercy. In addition to caring for victims, work to change systems that victimize them.
- ✓ Once a month food delivery to needy families via St. Vincent de Paul.
- ✓ Help serve in a soup kitchen.
- ✓ Commit yourselves to visiting an elderly person on a regular basis.
- ✓ Volunteer with Habitat for Humanity.
- ✓ Take part in donation efforts for re-useable clothing and other items.
- ✓ Participate in *Save a Family Plan* to support a poor family in another country.

For Family Reflection and Discussion

- What is one immediate step your family could take to incorporate some of these faith-building activities?

- What is one long-term goal your family could set in order to grow in faith?

Tips and Guidelines for Family Ritual

- ✦ If celebrating ritual moments is new to your family, start small. Choose an event or occasion that marks a real turning point in your life as a family (first job, getting a learner's permit, etc.) and mark it with a simple but festive meal that includes a prayer or reading, reflection or story telling, and a short blessing.
- ✦ Involve all family members in planning and celebrating the ritual event. While the ritual may focus on an event of particular significance for one family member, the way you celebrate should remind everyone of the interconnectedness of family life.
- ✦ Celebrate according to your family's personality and stage in life. Pee Wee families will do it differently than adolescent families, and loud families will certainly be different than quiet ones. Incorporate music, food, readings, stories, etc., that speak to your family.
- ✦ Involve family friends in your ritual sharing. Invite key members of your extended family and your special friends to take part. Hospitality is a treasured trait in healthy families.
- ✦ Keep the sharing and ritual simple and straightforward. If the events you celebrate are central to your life as a family, God's presence should not be too hard to identify.
- ✦ Do not force participation. Schedule the celebration for a time that is convenient for all family members. Make the experience as attractive as possible. If a family member declines to take part, go ahead anyway.
- ✦ Evaluate your experiences and make necessary changes.

Faith Sharing Questions on Marriage

1. How did you meet?
2. When in your relationship did you hear God calling you to celebrate the sacrament of marriage with each other?
3. How did the proposal of marriage take place?
4. How do you remember feeling the night before your wedding day?
5. What do you most treasure about your wedding day and the celebration of the sacrament?
6. What challenges have you had to face as a married couple?
7. What gifts and blessings are part of your relationship?
8. What humorous moments or learning moments surface for you?
9. How do you think marriage witnesses to others God's faithful love? How is faith and your relationship with God part of your marriage?

Characteristics of Christian Marriage

- Marriage is a lifelong commitment.
- Marriage is more than a contract. It's a covenant.
- The love of spouses ideally reflects God's unconditional love for all creation, and Christ's love for the Church.
- Marriage is more than a private agreement between two persons. In addition to the promise made between spouses, there are two other promises made at every wedding: 1) the couple promises to the community to be a living witness and model of covenant love, and 2) the community promises to support and hold accountable the couple in journey of life and love.

One version of the vows as they are written in question form in the Rite of Marriage are:

*I, ____ take you, ____, to be my wife/husband.
I promise to you true to you in good times and in bad,
in sickness and in health.
I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.*

Compose your own marriage vows here:

Cohabitation: Did You Know?

Cohabitation refers to couples living together prior to, or outside of marriage. The church teaches that sexual activity is appropriate only for couples who are married. Yet a high percentage of couples cohabit (live together) before they marry.

Consider these facts and statistics:

- A little over half of all first marriages are preceded by cohabitation.
- Fewer persons are choosing to marry today; the decision to cohabit as a permanent or temporary alternative to marriage is a primary reason.
- Only 53% of first cohabiting unions result in marriage. The percentage of couples marrying from second and third cohabitations is even lower.
- 40% of cohabiting households include children.
- The median duration of cohabitation is 1.3 years.
- Those not completing high school are almost twice as likely to cohabit as those who complete college.
- When cohabiters do marry, they are more at risk for subsequent divorce than those who did not cohabit before marriage. The risk of divorce is 50% higher for cohabiters than non-cohabiters.
- Those who cohabit more than once prior to marriage have even higher divorce rates.
- Cohabiters who marry tend to break up in the early years of marriage. Cohabiters and non-cohabiters have the same rate of marriage stability if the marriage remains intact over seven years.
- Cohabiters have more conflict over money after they marry than non-cohabiters.
- Domestic violence is more common with cohabiters than with married persons, and this pattern is more likely to carry over to a subsequent marriage relationship.
- Cohabiters who marry are less effective at conflict resolution than those who did not cohabit.

(Source: Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples: An Information Report on New Realities and Pastoral Practices by the Committee on Marriage and Family, USCCB, 1999.)