THE DAILY BREAD

The Mission of the Apostles



Leading the Domestic Church

A FORMATION BOOK BY

Kendall Peterson

The Everyday Apostle

THE DAILY BREAD

The Mission of the Apostles

Leading the Domestic Church

A Practical Guide for Fathers

✦ ✦ ✦

A Daily Bread Formation Book

The Everyday Apostle

INTRODUCTION

From Wanting To Doing

Many a Christian man is convinced that he ought to lead his family spiritually, that his home should be a place where the faith is lived and handed on, that he is called to be the spiritual head of his household. And then he goes home and does not know how to begin. The conviction sits in his heart while his family life goes on much as before, the faith relegated to Sunday Mass and the occasional grace before meals, because wanting to lead his domestic church and actually knowing how to do it are two very different things. The gap between the desire and the practice is where most well-meaning fathers get stuck, and it is the gap this book means to close.

This book is a practical guide for the father who already believes he should lead his domestic church and now wants to know, concretely, how. It assumes the conviction and supplies the method, the actual things a man can do, starting this week, to lead his family in faith: how to begin when he has never done it, how to lead family prayer, how to teach the faith to his children at every age, how to establish the rhythms and culture of a Catholic home, and how to persevere through the resistance and awkwardness that the work involves. The aim is to put in a father's hands the concrete tools of spiritual leadership, so that his good intention becomes an actual practice and his home becomes, in fact, the domestic church it is meant to be.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children. — Deuteronomy 6:6-7

We will begin with how to start when a man has never led his family spiritually and feels unequipped. We will take up the practical leading of family prayer, the beating heart of a domestic church. We will consider how to teach the faith to children at each stage of their growth. We will look at establishing the rhythms, traditions, and culture that make a home visibly Catholic. We will address leading a family when the father feels inadequate or the family resists. And we will see how a father's steady leadership, sustained over years, gradually forms a genuinely Catholic home and hands on a faith that lasts.

CHAPTER ONE

Starting From Zero

How to Begin When You Never Have

Perhaps the hardest part of leading a domestic church is simply starting, especially for the man who has never done it, who feels unequipped and awkward and does not know where to begin. Many fathers are paralyzed at this threshold, wanting to lead but unable to take the first step, intimidated by their own inexperience and unsure how to start without it feeling forced or strange. Overcoming this initial paralysis and taking the first concrete steps is where leading a domestic church actually begins, and it is more within reach than a man fears.

Do not despise the day of small things. — Zechariah 4:10

Start Small and Simple

The key to beginning is to start small and simple, with something modest and manageable rather than attempting a grand program that will collapse under its own ambition, for the father who tries to launch an elaborate spiritual regime all at once usually fails and gives up. A man does far better to begin with one small, simple practice, a grace before dinner, a short bedtime prayer with the children, a single new habit introduced gently, than to attempt a sweeping transformation of his family's spiritual life overnight. This small beginning is not a lesser form of leadership but the wise way to start, for a modest practice actually sustained is worth infinitely more than an ambitious one abandoned, and the small beginning can grow over time as the family adjusts and the father gains confidence. The father starting from zero should therefore choose one simple thing to begin with, establish it as a settled habit, and only then consider adding more, building his leadership gradually rather than attempting everything at once. Start small and simple, with one modest practice sustained rather than a grand program abandoned, and the father starting from zero takes the first real step toward leading his domestic church, a step that can grow over time into a fuller leadership.

Expect Awkwardness

The father beginning to lead his family spiritually should expect awkwardness, both his own and his family's, and should not be deterred by it, for the initial strangeness of a new practice is normal and passes, and the man who waits for it to feel natural before beginning will never begin. Leading family prayer or speaking of faith for the first time often feels awkward, both to the father who is unaccustomed to it and to a family unused to it, and this awkwardness can tempt a man to abandon the effort, concluding that it does not feel right. But the awkwardness is simply the normal discomfort of a new practice, which passes as the practice becomes familiar, and it is no reason to give up; the father should expect it, push through it, and trust that what feels strange at first will feel natural in time. Many a father has abandoned his spiritual leadership at the first

awkwardness, mistaking the normal discomfort of a new practice for a sign that he should not continue, when in fact he needed only to persevere through the initial strangeness until it passed. Expect awkwardness, the father's own and the family's, as the normal and passing discomfort of a new practice, and do not be deterred by it, for the strangeness fades as the practice becomes familiar, and the father who pushes through it finds that what felt awkward at first soon feels natural.

You Are Qualified Enough

The father who feels unqualified to lead his family spiritually should understand that he is qualified enough, that he does not need to be a theologian or a saint to lead his domestic church, but only a believing father willing to try, for the leadership his family needs is within the reach of any ordinary Christian man. Many fathers hang back because they feel inadequate, insufficiently knowledgeable or holy to lead, but this is a misunderstanding, for leading a domestic church does not require expertise or perfection but only a believing father willing to pray with his family, to share the faith he has, to lead as best he can. The father need not have all the answers, need not be a model of holiness, need not know everything about the faith; he needs only to be a believer willing to lead, and his honest, imperfect leadership is exactly what his family needs. This recognition frees a man from the paralysis of feeling unqualified, for it reveals that the qualification required is not expertise or sanctity but simply the willingness of a believing father to lead his family as best he can. You are qualified enough, for leading a domestic church requires not a theologian or a saint but only a believing father willing to try, and the father who feels inadequate should understand that his honest, imperfect leadership is precisely what his family needs and is fully within his reach.

CHAPTER TWO

Leading Family Prayer

The Beating Heart of the Home

At the center of a domestic church is family prayer, the regular gathering of the household to pray together, and leading this prayer is the most important and most central act of a father's spiritual leadership. More than anything else, family prayer makes a home a place where God is actively present and sought, and the father's leading of it is the beating heart of his domestic church. Understanding how to actually lead family prayer, practically and sustainably, is therefore the core skill of leading a domestic church.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. — Matthew 18:20

Keep It Simple and Real

The first principle of leading family prayer is to keep it simple and real, resisting the temptation to make it long, elaborate, or forced, for simple and sincere prayer sustained is far better than an ambitious form that becomes a burden and is abandoned. Family prayer need not be elaborate to be real; a few simple prayers, a short reading, a time of asking God's blessing and bringing the family's needs to him, prayed sincerely, make genuine family prayer, and the father should resist making it longer or more complex than the family can sustain. The aim is regular, sincere prayer that the family can actually keep, not an impressive form that becomes a chore and is dropped, and so the father keeps family prayer simple and real, fitted to his family's capacity, prioritizing sincerity and sustainability over elaborateness. This simplicity also keeps the prayer real rather than performed, genuine rather than forced, which is essential, for family prayer that becomes a hollow ritual or a forced performance loses its value, while simple, sincere prayer keeps the family genuinely turned toward God. Keep it simple and real, prioritizing sincere, sustainable prayer over elaborate forms, and the father leads a family prayer that the family can actually keep and that genuinely turns them toward God, the beating heart of a living domestic church.

Make It a Fixed Habit

Family prayer must be made a fixed habit, anchored to a regular time and protected from the pressures that would crowd it out, for prayer that depends on remembering or on feeling like it will not survive, while prayer built into the settled rhythm of the family's day endures. The father does well to anchor family prayer to a fixed point in the day, most naturally a meal or bedtime, so that it happens reliably as a settled part of the family's routine rather than depending on anyone's remembering or feeling inclined; the fixed time is what allows the prayer to survive the busy and distracted days on which it would otherwise be skipped. This making of family prayer a fixed habit, protected and prioritized, is essential to its endurance, for the family prayer that is optional and occasional soon fades, while the family prayer that is a fixed and protected part of the daily rhythm persists through the seasons. The father therefore establishes family prayer as a settled habit at a regular time, guards it against the pressures that would crowd it out, and ensures that it happens reliably as part of the family's daily rhythm. Make it a fixed habit, anchored to a regular time and protected from crowding out, and the father ensures that family prayer endures as a settled part of the family's life rather than fading

as an optional occasional practice, keeping the beating heart of the domestic church reliably alive.

Lead, but Involve Them

In leading family prayer, the father leads but also involves his family, drawing the children and his wife into active participation rather than merely performing the prayer himself, so that the prayer becomes the family's together rather than the father's alone. The father's role is to lead, to initiate and guide the prayer, but good leadership draws others in, inviting the children to offer their own prayers, to read, to participate actively, so that family prayer becomes a shared act of the whole family rather than a performance the father delivers to a passive audience. This involvement engages the children, teaches them to pray, and makes the prayer genuinely the family's own, and it is an important part of leading family prayer well, for prayer the family actively shares forms them far more than prayer they merely watch. The father therefore leads family prayer in a way that involves his family, drawing the children and his wife into active participation, inviting their prayers and their involvement, so that the family prayer is a shared act that engages and forms them all. Lead, but involve them, drawing the family into active participation rather than merely performing the prayer, and the father makes family prayer the shared act of the whole family, engaging and forming the children and making the prayer genuinely the family's own rather than the father's alone.

CHAPTER THREE

Teaching the Faith by Age

Handing It On as Children Grow

A central part of leading a domestic church is teaching the faith to one's children, and because children grow through very different stages, this teaching must be adapted to each age, taking different forms for the young child, the older child, and the adolescent. The father who would hand on the faith to his children must understand how to teach it appropriately at each stage of their growth, for what reaches a small child will not reach a teenager, and the teaching must mature as the children do. Understanding how to teach the faith by age equips a father to hand it on effectively through all the seasons of his children's growth.

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
— Proverbs 22:6

The Young Child

With young children, the teaching of the faith is largely a matter of simple prayers, Bible stories, and the absorbed atmosphere of a faithful home, for small children learn the faith not through explanation but through simple practices and the environment they grow up in. The father teaches the young child by praying simple prayers with him, telling him the stories of the faith, surrounding him with the signs and practices of a Catholic home, and letting him absorb, from the very atmosphere of the household, that God is real and central and loved. At this stage the teaching is simple and concrete, suited to the young child's capacity, relying more on practice, story, and atmosphere than on explanation, and laying the foundation of faith in the child's earliest years through what he absorbs from his faithful home. This early foundation is deeply important, for the faith absorbed in the earliest years goes deep and lasts, and the father who lays it well through simple prayers, stories, and a faithful home has given his young child a foundation that will support everything built on it later. With the young child, the father teaches the faith through simple prayers, Bible stories, and the absorbed atmosphere of a faithful home, laying in the earliest years a deep foundation suited to the young child's capacity to absorb rather than to understand.

The Older Child

With older children, the teaching of the faith becomes more explicit, involving real instruction, the answering of questions, and the fuller explanation of what the faith teaches and why, as the child becomes capable of understanding more. As children grow beyond early childhood, they become able to understand the faith more fully, to ask real questions, to grasp explanations, and the father's teaching must mature accordingly, moving from the simple practices of early childhood to genuine instruction in the content and reasons of the faith. The father teaches the older child by explaining the faith more fully, answering his questions honestly and thoughtfully, helping him understand not only what the faith teaches but why, and preparing him for the sacraments and the fuller Christian life. This stage requires the father to know the faith well enough to teach and explain it, or to learn alongside his child, and to engage the child's growing capacity for understanding with real instruction rather than the simple practices that sufficed earlier. With the older child, the father teaches the faith through explicit instruction, the answering of questions, and the fuller explanation of what the faith teaches and why, maturing his teaching to engage the older child's growing capacity to understand, and handing on the faith at the deeper level the older child can now receive.

The Adolescent

With adolescents, the teaching of the faith becomes the harder and more delicate work of helping a young person make the faith his own amid doubts, questions, and the pressures of a secular world, requiring wisdom, patience, and much prayer. Adolescence is often the stage where the handing-on of the faith is most tested, as the young person questions, pushes back, encounters doubts and contrary pressures, and must move from an inherited faith to one he genuinely owns, and the father's role shifts accordingly. With the adolescent the father must engage honestly with doubts and questions, avoid the heavy-handedness that provokes rebellion, respect the young person's growing independence while continuing to witness and guide, and above all pray, for the adolescent's coming to own the faith is finally a work of grace that the father can support but not force. This stage requires great wisdom and patience, a careful balance of continued guidance with respect for the young person's freedom, and a willingness to walk with the adolescent through the hard passage of making the faith his own. With the adolescent, the father does the delicate work of helping a young person own the faith amid doubts and pressures, engaging honestly, avoiding heavy-handedness, respecting growing independence, and praying much, for this hardest stage of handing on the faith requires wisdom, patience, and trust in the grace that alone can bring the adolescent to a faith genuinely his own.

CHAPTER FOUR

Building the Culture

Rhythms, Traditions, and a Catholic Home

Beyond prayer and explicit teaching, a father leads his domestic church by building the culture of the home, the rhythms, traditions, and physical environment that make the household visibly and pervasively Catholic. This culture forms the family powerfully, often below the level of conscious awareness, and the deliberate building of it is an important part of a father's spiritual leadership. Understanding how to build the Catholic culture of a home, through its rhythms, traditions, and environment, equips a father to form his family through the very atmosphere of the household.

But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. — Joshua 24:15

The Rhythms of the Year

A father builds the culture of his domestic church in part by establishing the rhythms of the liturgical year in the home, marking the seasons and feasts of the faith with their proper customs so that the family's life is shaped by the calendar of the Church. When a

household observes Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, the feasts and solemnities of the year with their proper customs, foods, and devotions, the faith becomes woven into the very calendar of the family's life, and the children grow up in a world whose time is shaped by the mysteries of Christ. The father establishes these rhythms by introducing the customs of the liturgical seasons into the home, marking the great feasts and seasons with family traditions that embody the faith, so that the year itself becomes a teacher of the faith and the family's life takes on a sacred shape. These rhythms form the family powerfully, making the faith concrete, festive, and woven into the flow of the year, and the father who establishes them builds a culture that teaches the faith through the very shape of the family's time. The rhythms of the liturgical year, established in the home through the customs and traditions of the seasons and feasts, are a central element of the Catholic culture a father builds, shaping the family's life by the calendar of the Church and teaching the faith through the sacred shape of the year.

Traditions That Embody the Faith

A father also builds the culture of his home through family traditions that embody the faith, the particular customs and practices that become the family's own way of living the faith and that carry deep meaning for the children. Family traditions, the particular customs a family develops around the feasts, the sacraments, the ordinary and extraordinary moments of family life, are powerful carriers of faith and meaning, becoming the family's own embodiment of the faith and lodging deep in the children's memory and formation. The father builds these traditions by establishing and maintaining the customs that embody the faith in his family's particular life, the special practices around Christmas and Easter, the family rituals around the sacraments, the traditions that mark the family as Catholic and carry the faith in a form the children cherish. These traditions form the children deeply, giving them a lived experience of the faith embodied in cherished family customs, and the father who builds them creates a culture that carries the faith in forms the children will remember and pass on. Traditions that embody the faith, the particular family customs that become the household's own way of living the faith, are an important element of the Catholic culture a father builds, carrying the faith in cherished forms that form the children deeply and lodge in their memory for a lifetime.

The Visible Signs

Finally, a father builds the culture of his domestic church through the visible signs of the faith in the home, the crucifixes, images, sacramentals, and physical environment that make the household visibly Catholic and surround the family with reminders of the faith. The physical environment of a home forms its members, and a father builds a Catholic

culture in part by filling his home with the visible signs of the faith, a crucifix in a central place, holy images, a family altar or prayer corner, holy water, blessed objects, so that the household is visibly and tangibly Catholic. These visible signs are not mere decoration but tangible reminders of the faith, means of grace, and signs that this is a Christian home where God is honored, and they form the family through the constant presence of the faith in the very fabric of the household. The father builds this visible Catholic environment deliberately, surrounding his family with the signs of the faith, so that the home itself, in its very appearance and furnishings, witnesses to and reinforces the faith. The visible signs of the faith in the home, the crucifixes, images, and sacramentals that make the household tangibly Catholic, are an element of the culture a father builds, surrounding the family with reminders of the faith and forming them through the constant presence of the faith in the physical fabric of the home.

CHAPTER FIVE

When It Is Hard

Leading Through Inadequacy and Resistance

Leading a domestic church is not always smooth, and a father will often find it hard, whether because he feels inadequate to the task or because his family resists his leadership, and he needs to know how to lead through these difficulties. The father who expects easy success and is defeated by his own feelings of inadequacy or by his family's resistance will abandon the work, while the father who knows how to persevere through these hard realities can lead his domestic church faithfully despite them. Understanding how to lead through inadequacy and resistance equips a father to persevere when leading his domestic church is difficult.

And he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Leading Despite Your Own Weakness

A father must learn to lead despite his own weakness and inadequacy, not waiting until he feels adequate, which he never will, but leading as the imperfect man he is and relying on God's grace to work through his weakness. Every father feels inadequate to the spiritual leadership of his family, aware of his own sins, his limited knowledge, his failures to live what he teaches, and this feeling of inadequacy can paralyze a man or drive him to abandon the effort. But God's grace is sufficient and is made perfect in weakness, which means a father need not be adequate in himself to lead, but can lead as

the weak and imperfect man he is, relying on grace to work through him despite his inadequacy. This frees a father from the paralysis of waiting to feel adequate, for it reveals that God works through weak and imperfect fathers who lead despite their inadequacy, relying on grace rather than on their own sufficiency. The father should therefore lead despite his own weakness, not pretending to an adequacy he lacks but leading honestly as the imperfect man he is, trusting God's grace to work through his weakness. Leading despite your own weakness, relying on grace rather than waiting for an adequacy that never comes, is how a father leads his domestic church through his feelings of inadequacy, trusting that God's grace is sufficient and is made perfect precisely in the weakness the father honestly brings.

Handling Family Resistance

A father must also learn to handle his family's resistance, the reluctance or pushback he may meet from a spouse less interested in the faith, from children who resist, or from a family unused to spiritual leadership, leading wisely and patiently through this resistance rather than being defeated by it. A father's efforts to lead his domestic church may meet resistance, from a wife who does not share his zeal, from children who roll their eyes or push back, from a family culture unused to the practices he introduces, and this resistance can discourage a man or tempt him to give up or to force the matter harshly. The wise father neither abandons his leadership in the face of resistance nor forces it heavy-handedly, but leads patiently and winsomely, introducing practices gently, winning his family over by love and example more than by insistence, and persevering through the resistance with patience. This requires wisdom and patience, a careful leading that neither surrenders to resistance nor provokes it by heavy-handedness, and a trust that steady, loving leadership will, over time, win the family more effectively than force. Handling family resistance with patience and wisdom, neither abandoning leadership nor forcing it harshly but leading winsomely and persevering, is how a father leads his domestic church through the reluctance and pushback he may meet, winning his family over time by love and example rather than being defeated by their resistance or provoking it by force.

Perseverance Through the Dry Times

Finally, a father must persevere through the dry times, the seasons when his leadership seems fruitless, his family unresponsive, and his efforts without visible effect, continuing faithfully through the discouragement rather than giving up when he sees no results. Leading a domestic church, like all spiritual work, passes through dry seasons when the father's efforts seem to bear no fruit, his family seems unmoved, and his leadership feels futile, and these dry times are a chief cause of fathers giving up. The faithful father

perseveres through them, continuing to lead through the discouragement, trusting that his faithful efforts are bearing fruit he cannot see and that the harvest will come in time, refusing to abandon his leadership merely because he sees no immediate results. This perseverance through dryness is essential, for the fruit of a father's spiritual leadership is often slow and hidden, and the father who needs to see results will give up before the harvest, while the father who perseveres faithfully through the dry times will, in due season, reap. Perseverance through the dry times, continuing to lead faithfully through the seasons when his efforts seem fruitless, is how a father sustains his spiritual leadership despite discouragement, trusting that his faithful leadership bears hidden fruit and that the harvest will come if he does not give up.

CHAPTER SIX

The Long Work of Formation

What a Father's Leadership Builds Over Time

The leading of a domestic church is not the work of a day or a season but of many years, a long labor of formation whose fruit appears only over time, and a father does well to understand the long view of what his steady leadership builds. The father who takes the long view, who understands that he is engaged in a years-long work of formation, is equipped to lead faithfully over time rather than expecting quick results and giving up. Understanding the long work of formation, and what a father's sustained leadership builds over the years, sustains a father in the patient labor of leading his domestic church.

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. — Galatians 6:9

Formation Happens Over Years

The formation of a family in the faith happens not in dramatic moments but over years, through the steady accumulation of daily practices, teaching, and example, so that a father's leadership is a long work whose effect is built up gradually over the whole course of his children's growth. There is no single moment in which a family is formed in the faith; the formation happens through the long accumulation of ten thousand ordinary moments, the daily prayers, the repeated teaching, the sustained example, the rhythms and traditions maintained year after year, building up over the whole course of childhood into a formed faith. This means a father's leadership is a long work, sustained over many years, whose fruit is the cumulative effect of countless ordinary acts rather than any

single dramatic intervention, and the father must settle in for the long haul, understanding that he is building something gradually over the whole course of his children's growth. Formation happens over years, through the steady accumulation of daily practices maintained over the whole course of childhood, and the father who understands this is prepared to lead faithfully over the long haul, building his family's faith gradually through the countless ordinary acts of sustained leadership rather than expecting it to be formed in dramatic moments.

The Example That Teaches Most

Through all the years of formation, it is the father's own example that teaches most, for children are formed more by what their father actually is than by anything he says, and the deepest and most lasting formation flows from the father's own lived faith. A father may lead family prayer and teach the faith diligently, but his children will be formed most powerfully by what they see him actually be, by whether his faith is real in his own life, by whether he lives what he teaches, by the kind of man his faith has made him. This means that the most important thing a father does to form his family is to be, himself, a genuine disciple whose faith is real and visible, for his example will teach his children more than all his explicit instruction, and his lived faith is the deepest formation he gives. The father must therefore attend above all to his own discipleship, knowing that his example is his most powerful teaching and that his children will catch the faith from what he is far more than from what he says. The example that teaches most is the father's own lived faith, which forms his children more powerfully than any explicit instruction, and the father who would form his family well attends above all to being himself a genuine disciple whose real and visible faith teaches his children more than all his words.

Entrusting the Harvest to God

Finally, a father must entrust the harvest of his leadership to God, laboring faithfully to form his family while recognizing that the final fruit, his children's genuine and lasting faith, is a work of grace that he cannot guarantee but can only prepare and pray for. A father does his part, leading, teaching, forming, and praying, but he cannot finally control the outcome, for his children's coming to a genuine and lasting faith is a work of their own freedom and God's grace, which the father can prepare and support but not compel. This recognition keeps a father both humble and free, humble because he cannot take credit for his children's faith as though it were his achievement, and free because he is not crushed by responsibility for an outcome he cannot control, able to labor faithfully and entrust the harvest to God. The father therefore does his part faithfully, forming his family as well as he can, and entrusts the harvest to God, praying for his children's faith and trusting the outcome to the grace that alone can bring it. Entrusting the harvest to

God, laboring faithfully while recognizing that the final fruit is a work of grace, is the right disposition of a father's spiritual leadership, keeping him humble and free as he does his part and leaves the outcome, his children's lasting faith, to the God who alone can give it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Home That Sends

Why Your Leadership Reaches Beyond the Home

A father's leadership of his domestic church, which might seem a purely private matter concerning only his own family, in fact reaches far beyond the home, for the family a father forms becomes itself a force in the wider mission, and strong Catholic homes are the seedbed of the whole Church. The father who understands that his leadership of his domestic church serves the wider mission is encouraged to see his private labor as part of something larger, and to lead his home not only for his own family's sake but for the sake of the mission his home will serve. Understanding how a father's leadership reaches beyond the home completes the vision of why leading a domestic church matters.

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. — Matthew 5:16

A Family That Witnesses

The family a father forms becomes itself a witness to the world, for a genuinely Catholic family, visibly different in its love, faith, and life, stands as a powerful sign in a culture where such families have grown rare, witnessing to the faith simply by what it is. A father who leads his domestic church well forms a family whose quality of life, love, and faith is visible to others and witnesses to the faith that produces it, so that his family becomes, by its very existence, a form of evangelization, a living demonstration of the Christian vision of family. This means that a father's leadership of his home serves the wider mission by producing a family that witnesses, a visible sign of the faith that draws and provokes the watching world, and the father who leads his domestic church well is engaged, through the family he forms, in the mission to the culture. A family that witnesses, visibly different and evidently good, is one way a father's leadership reaches beyond the home, for the family he forms becomes a sign to the world, witnessing to the faith by its very life and serving the wider mission simply by being what it is. The home a father leads becomes a family that witnesses, and his private leadership thereby reaches outward into the mission to a watching world.

Children Who Become Apostles

The children a father forms go out from the home as apostles in their own right, carrying into their schools, friendships, future families, and callings the faith they received, so that a father's leadership reaches, through his children, into a future and a breadth he will never see. The home is a seedbed, and the children formed in it go out into the world carrying the faith, becoming themselves witnesses and apostles who will touch lives and shape a future far beyond the home that formed them, so that a father's leadership of his domestic church bears fruit in the apostolic lives of the children it forms. This extends a father's leadership far beyond his own home and his own lifetime, reaching through his children into the many lives they will touch and the future they will shape, so that the faithful leadership of a domestic church sends out into the world apostles who carry its fruit forward. Children who become apostles are a chief way a father's leadership reaches beyond the home, for the children he forms go out as witnesses and apostles into a world and a future he will never see, carrying forward the faith he handed on and multiplying his leadership's fruit in the lives they will touch. The home a father leads sends out apostles, and his leadership thereby reaches, through his children, far beyond the home into the wider mission.

Renewing the Church From the Home

Finally, a father's leadership of his domestic church contributes to the renewal of the whole Church, for the Church is renewed and the faith handed on across generations chiefly through strong Catholic homes, and the father who leads his home well is laboring at the foundation of the Church's future. The great movements of renewal in the Church's history have always been rooted in and sustained by faithful families, and the future of the faith in any place depends largely on whether the faith is being successfully lived and handed on in its homes, so that the father who leads his domestic church well is contributing to the renewal and the future of the whole Church. This gives a father's private leadership a significance he may never have suspected, for in forming a strong Catholic home and handing on the faith to his children, he is building a cell of the Church from which the faith will flow forward, contributing to a renewal on which the Church's future depends. Renewing the Church from the home is the deepest way a father's leadership reaches beyond his own family, for the renewal of the whole Church depends largely on her homes, and the father who leads his domestic church well labors at the very foundation of the Church's future. The home a father leads is a seedbed of the Church's renewal, and his faithful leadership reaches, through the strong Catholic home he builds, into the future of the whole Church.

CONCLUSION

Lead Your Home

Wanting to lead a domestic church is not enough; a father must actually do it, and this book has been about the how, the concrete practice of leading a home in faith. We have seen how to start from zero when a man has never led his family spiritually; how to lead family prayer, the beating heart of the home; how to teach the faith to children at each stage of their growth; how to build the Catholic culture of rhythms, traditions, and visible signs; how to lead through inadequacy and resistance; how to sustain the long work of formation over years; and how a father's leadership reaches beyond the home into the wider mission.

None of it requires a father to be a theologian or a saint, but only a believing man willing to lead his family as best he can, relying on God's grace to work through his weakness. The leadership a domestic church needs is within the reach of any ordinary Christian father who is willing to begin, to persevere, and to lead his home, imperfectly but faithfully, toward God.

So lead your home. Begin with one small practice this week; establish family prayer as the beating heart of your household; teach the faith to your children as they grow; build the rhythms, traditions, and visible signs of a Catholic home; persevere through your own inadequacy and your family's resistance; settle in for the long work of formation; and know that your faithful leadership reaches beyond your home into the renewal of the whole Church. You are called to lead your domestic church, and the how is within your reach. Begin, persevere, and lead your home toward God, and you will build, over the years, a genuine domestic church from which the faith will flow to your children and, through them, to a future you will never see.

✦ ✦ ✦

Leading the Domestic Church: A Practical Guide for Fathers is part of The Daily Bread Library.

The Everyday Apostle · everydayapostle.com