



A Birthday Party for Jesus

Some Catholic families develop their own traditions that they pass along for generations. Then maybe some neighbors hear about one of these traditions and adopt it for their own families. Here's a story about one such tradition.

A childless couple had lots of sisters and brothers with many children—12 in all. This couple wanted to give their siblings a special gift. On the Saturday before Christmas, the couple invited their nieces and nephews for lunch and a birthday party for Jesus. The kids' parents had four or five hours to devote to last-minute shopping, house-cleaning, present-wrapping, visiting, or maybe just having lunch together and enjoying some quiet time.

Meanwhile, the childless couple fed the young cousins the sort of lunch kids like—hamburgers, hot dogs, potato salad, soft drinks. They played games for an hour or two—traditional games for the little kids and board games or card games for the older ones. Then came a luscious cake with ice cream, and they all sang “Happy Birthday to You” to Jesus.



While the kids were eating, their aunt asked them to think of what gift of themselves they could give to Jesus on his birthday. What could they do that would please Jesus now and throughout the year? Of course, there were some smart-alecky answers but most of the kids got the message. They came up with ways they could be nicer to a lonely student in their class, ways to be a peacemaker in their family, ways to make their school a better place, ways to make their parents' lives a little easier.

Then came story hour, with a neighbor skilled in storytelling delighting the children not only with the traditional Christmas story, but also with stories about animals—and even a ghost story or two. By this time the party was winding down and the kids were quiet and settled. When their parents picked them up, the young people left with thanks, feeling that they had attended an event planned just for them.

Because this party happened for many of their growing-up years, the kids had a better feeling about family, about the meaning of Christmas, and about the wonderful gifts that cost little but mean everything. In fact, some of them went on to adapt this tradition to their own families when they become parents.