

# Christmas and Children's Liturgy of the Word

The USCCB has just approved the latest translation of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, which includes this directive in the Introduction regarding the dismissal of children for the Liturgy of the Word:

These celebrations in a separate place are forbidden on Christmas, Epiphany, Passion Sunday, the Easter Triduum, Ascension, and Pentecost. (26)

It has always been taught that the dismissal of young people from the assembly for a separate Children's Liturgy of the Word is not something that should be done every Sunday or every Holy Day as stated in number 17 of the Directory for Masses with Children:

*Sometimes*, moreover, if the place itself and the nature of the individuals permit, it *possibly* will be appropriate to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, location.

And further clarified in number 26 of the new Introduction:

Such celebrations for children in a separate place may be celebrated occasionally, but not exclusively, lest children's experience of the Liturgy of the Word in the full liturgical assembly be compromised.

Now, the new *Lectionary for Masses with Children* has specifically named the above days, including Christmas, on which the dismissal of the children is not permitted.

Note also from number 23 of the new Introduction that, "While the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* may be used in a separate Liturgy of the Word (at Sunday and Holy Day Masses at which children are present), only the *Lectionary for Mass* (adult Lectionary) may be used in the full liturgical assembly. The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* may never be used in the full liturgical assembly on Sundays and Holy Days."

The occasional celebration of the Children's Liturgy of the Word separate from the assembly is very helpful to young people, but the ultimate purpose of CLOW is to prepare children to fully participate in the regular Sunday (and Holy Day) assembly. Christmas is a day when the young people should experience the Eucharistic Liturgy in its fullness with the entire assembly. It is also a day to keep families together when they come to celebrate the joy of Christmas.

Issues of safety are also of concern when dealing with such large numbers of children, many of whom may not regularly attend Mass or be familiar with the process of dismissal for a separate Children's Liturgy of the Word.

Special care should be taken when celebrating a Christmas Mass at which a large number of children are present. Consideration should be given to musical selections and homily preparation. The Christmas Manger scene which may be blessed at the beginning of a Christmas Mass (*Book of Blessings*, 1541-1569) might be effectively done at this Mass.

