

FRUIT, WATER AND FLOWERS

Many times, St. John Paul II and Pope Francis in their talks and writings strongly encourage families to become domestic churches. Our new Ukrainian Catholic Catechism devotes a whole chapter on the domestic church and its importance.

What is a domestic church? One aspect of such a church is living the liturgical year. A good way to describe such a church is by way of a real life example.

I was very fortunate to be raised in such a church. My mother made certain that we lived the liturgical year celebrating its services, rituals and customs. Many times my mother would say in Ukrainian, "Today is a Holy Day. We have to go to church." Often times, I would ignore her by not getting out of bed. She would come upstairs and go to the washroom fill up a glass of water and throw it on me. As a result, I ended up at Divine Liturgy in church.

There were many highlights in the liturgical year that left an impression on me. I could still vividly picture myself walking to Divine Liturgy with my mother holding a fruit-basket to be blessed on the Feast of the Transfiguration or walking with her holding flowers to be blessed on the Feast of the Dormition. I strikingly recall the Feast of St. Nicholas walking to church again with my mother to go to Divine Liturgy and then go to our much anticipated St. Nicholas play in the parish hall.

I clearly remember the great Feast of Pentecost. My mother would decorate the inside as well as the outside of the home with greenery symbolizing the birth of the church. On this most Holy Feast, we would take part in celebrating Divine Liturgy at the parish cemetery followed by a family picnic at the grave site waiting for the priest to bless our grave.

One of the greatest highlights of the liturgical year was Holy Supper on the eve of the Nativity with all of its unique symbolic rituals and customs while eating twelve different dishes of food with a large family gathering and singing carols. When the festivities were over, we prepared ourselves for the solemn mid-night Divine Liturgy. It was full of joy.

I keenly remember the Feast of Theophany where on the eve of this Holy Day, the family gathered for another Holy Supper similar to the one on the eve of the Nativity. The following morning, we took part in the celebrating of Divine Liturgy and the impressive solemn blessing of water. The blessing took place outside with troughs of water surrounding the church. It was cold, but as a child, I was awestruck at witnessing this holy event.

I would be remiss in not mentioning how we had to fast and abstain during Philip's Fast (Advent) and The Great Fast (Lent). It was very strict; no dancing, no singing, no music at all, no dating, no radio, abstaining from meat on Wednesdays and from meat and dairy products on Fridays.

Easter was awesome with the special traditional foods and the singing of Christos Voskres! The priest came to homes blessing the Easter baskets. Our home served as a gathering for five to ten families bringing their Easter baskets to be blessed. While waiting for the priest, it was a thrilling sound to hear the footsteps of the priest on the porch. I would joyfully shout out, "The priest is coming. He is here!" On Resurrection Sunday, we arose early at 4:30 a.m. to get ready for 6:00 a.m. Sunrise Services; Matins, Procession, and Divine Liturgy.

Such was the living out of the liturgical year as a way of life. This living created a strong sense of the sacred for my family and for many other families. This way of life creates domestic churches which in turn create a strong parish family in Christ, and furthermore contributes to making society, our culture aware of the sacred. It is no wonder that the new Ukrainian Catholic Catechism devotes a whole chapter on the importance of a domestic church.