



## How I Practice Catholic Values Outside of School and Church

*By Heather Miller*

Attending Catholic school, we learn to follow Catholic values while we're there but what about when we go home? Do we follow our faith away from school and church? One way I live my faith is by going to Catholic Youth Ministry. I've found that it enables me to learn about life and my faith with teenagers who are experiencing the same things I am. Others who've "been there, done that" help me by sharing experiences. Talking to others about my faith makes me feel proud of my religion.

At one point in my life I treated my faith like a secret, believing that if people saw they would laugh at me or judge me. Then I began to ask, "What do I care what others think about me or my faith? Isn't it what God thinks infinitely more important than what they think?" Now I'm not afraid to pray publicly, like when my family prays before meals in restaurants. I've eaten with other families, and I've had to ask if we could say grace because people don't even think about it anymore. I pray to God every night before I go to sleep and have started saying the rosary. It calms me and enables me to block out the day's drama or unimportant things and to focus on what's most important – God in all aspects of my life – even in homework. He's there in all things. Would I be giving all I am to God if I didn't try to be the best I can be, homework and all? Still, He wants more than just my prayers.

What is prayer without action? Praying for God to fix the world will help. But God asks us not only to pray but also to work. I love to be involved in the community. Helping in my neighborhood and community all across the globe makes me feel good about my faith.

This summer I'm attending Catholic Heart Work Camp and will travel to New Jersey to help people in need by cleaning up and fixing the community's houses and buildings. Helping others brings me closer to God in a special way because seeing people or animals in need enables me to see Jesus in them. When you think about it, Jesus was poor. He first slept in a hay-filled food dish for animals. That doesn't scream first class to me. When I help those less fortunate than I am, I can see Jesus, the good, in others, and it pushes me to strive for Jesus in me.

Another way I practice Catholic values is in my respect for all life. I'm active in the pro-life movement and feel passionate about protecting life. I'm an avid letter writer to my representatives in Congress, the House, and the Senate. I write to campaign for human and animal rights, but I know that writing alone will not make things better for people and animals, so I participate in pro-life clubs and activities, including the annual March for life. By doing this, I want people to realize that humans, regardless how small, should be valued. I want my friends to know I adamantly believe that every living thing is important and meaningful. In addition to the March for Life, I volunteer at animal rescues and shelters; I recently spent nearly twenty hours at the county animal shelter helping to build chicken coops, enclosures, and nesting boxes.

Through prayer and action, I have learned that understanding and believing what your faith teaches is important, but living your faith is what really counts. I want to be someone who puts her faith into action in order to help make the world better. To do this, I have to practice my Catholic values everywhere and always, not just at church and school.