

Leader's Guide for
GRANDMA'S BREAD* and *EL PAN DE LA ABUELITA

“Values are as much caught as taught.”

Summary

Grandma's Bread is a story of a friendship between a grandmother and her grandson, a story about tradition, family, Church, Easter and Eucharist. It illustrates our understanding of the Eucharist so beautifully because the film uses the simple image of toasty-brown, freshly baked bread to symbolize how we ourselves die and rise, as Jesus did, every day of our lives. Just as our deepest understanding of Eucharist is felt and comprehended not by our minds but in our hearts, so the full depth of meaning the viewer gains from the film *Grandma's Bread* may be difficult to put clearly into words. It is a story to be experienced and felt, yet one that gently and powerfully touches on the essence of Eucharist.

The story begins in a grocery store where Nonna (the Italian name for “Grandma”) and her grandson Mario are shopping for ingredients for Easter Bread. Mario's father, Robert, waits very impatiently outside in the car while Nonna methodically reads labels and compares prices. When Nonna and Mario finally come outside, Robert complains about having been forced to wait so long for them.

As Nonna and Mario work on the bread, Nonna tells Mario a little of what being an immigrant to this country was like and how their Church family helped them to adjust to a new way of life. Baking this bread is clearly a spiritual ritual for Nonna, who invokes God's love and utters brief prayers as the different ingredients are added to the dough. Mario works alongside Nonna and promises to hold on to this Easter bread tradition, even when he grows up.

After the bread is made and the clean-up is finished, Nonna becomes very weak and realizes something is seriously wrong. The paramedics are called and they bring her to the hospital. Soon afterward Mario learns that his grandmother has died.

When Robert and his wife Kathy go through Nonna's belongings a couple weeks later, they discover her baking pans and recipe book. Kathy decides to give them away, as she feels she could never measure up to Nonna's cooking. Later that day, as Mario comes home from school, he sees the bag with Nonna's utensils and recipe book and begins to cry.

As the day of Mario's First Eucharist nears and preparations are being made, Mario seems very subdued. He tells his mother that Nonna had promised to make her special bread for the big day. Realizing what this means to Mario, Kathy tries to find a similar recipe in her own cookbooks and begins to work on the bread, with great misgivings. In the midst of her frustration, Mario walks in and hands her the bag

containing his grandmother's utensils and recipe book. Mario's father, Robert, who up until this point has been very impatient with all the fuss being made over "tradition," translates the Italian for Kathy. We get the feeling that he too has gained a deeper understanding of family, tradition, celebration and commitment—Eucharist!

The story concludes at Mario's First Eucharist breakfast where Nonna's bread brings the family together.

Theological Orientation

The Eucharist is so beautifully simple and so awesomely complex that a story like *Grandma's Bread* is of help to all of us as we grow in our understanding of the sacrament. There are people who question whether children or those with mental challenges can possibly be prepared for First Eucharist; they consider it an adult sacrament. But who among us can say that we truly understand the Sacrament of the Eucharist? Our understanding of the Eucharist is something that grows with us and is enhanced, colored and enriched by every experience of our lives.

Grandma's Bread is like that. It is meant to be experienced rather than explained, but it is important for the teacher, group leader or parents to be aware of the important themes presented in the film.

1. Family: As breaking bread around the dinner table is the most common, and sometimes the only, way of bringing our modern families together, so the Eucharist is the focal point of Christian community (family of the Church).
2. Tradition: As families celebrate special times in ways they have "always" been celebrated, so the Church relies heavily on its tradition in order to celebrate.
3. Friendship: As Nonna's family grew as a direct result of the friendship between Nonna and Mario, so the Church family grows through the interconnecting friendships within the community.
4. Easter Bread as symbol of the Body of Christ: source of unity, new life and shared love.
5. Death, Resurrection, and "Real" Presence: Though Nonna had died a month before, she is very much a part of Mario's First Eucharist celebration, living in his heart and in her special bread. Jesus lives in our hearts and in his special bread.

Media Orientation

Grandma's Bread is a film ideally suited for preparation for First Eucharist, but it is no less effective for use in all levels of religious education dealing with the Sacrament of Eucharist. The powerful themes of family, tradition, friendship and resurrection are dealt with in a simple yet profound manner. *Grandma's Bread* is one of those unique and versatile films that communicate well to all ages.

Be sure to preview the film yourself and, after doing so, perhaps record on paper your immediate impressions of the film. This will help you to more effectively lead a discussion later.

Suggested Process

1. Discuss: Have you ever been very close to someone who died? Have you ever had a pet that died? Is there something about that person or that pet that you especially remember about him/her or did you save something that belongs to them? OR Are there special times or meals when your family gets together that mean a lot to you? Why?
2. Without making a connection between the previous discussion and the film, show the film.
3. Discuss the film:
 - a. Feelings: What part of the story do you especially remember? How did you feel at that part: Sad? Happy? Loving? What did you like best about Mario? About his grandmother Nonna? About Mario's parents?
 - b. Retelling the Story: What were Nonna and Mario doing at the beginning of the story? What special thing are they shopping for? Did you notice the special present that Nonna bought for Mario? What was it? What did Mario and Nonna prepare together in the kitchen? When Mario's friend came over to play, what did Mario tell him? What happened to Nonna just as she was taking the bread from the oven? What did Mario's parents tell him when they returned from the hospital? When Mario's parents cleared out Nonna's things, what did Mario secretly save? When did he let his mother know he had saved it? What were Mario and his family celebrating at the end of the story?
 - c. What did Nonna say coming to a new country was like? Who helped her to adjust? (the Church family) In what ways is the Church a family? How do we know that Nonna's and Mario's own family is important to them? Why do you think having Nonna's Easter bread at his First Eucharist celebration was so important to Mario? How did Nonna help to bring the family together?
 - d. A tradition is a special way of celebrating an event we'd like to remember. (Most of us celebrate our birthdays with birthday cake and Christmas with a Christmas tree.) What kinds of family and religious traditions were you aware of in the film? How do they compare with the traditions celebrated by your own family?
 - e. How do we know that Nonna and Mario were good friends? How did their special friendship help the whole family to grow closer? How can our friendships in God's family, the Church, help the whole Church to be a closer family?
 - f. Toward the beginning of the film Nonna is afraid that something is dying, and she asks Mario's

help to prevent that from dying. What is it? (family tradition) How does it “come to life” later in the film? Is Nonna present at Mario’s First Eucharist celebration? Explain your answer.

- g. Talk about why Jesus might have chosen bread, such an ordinary food, as the symbol of his presence in the Eucharist.

Follow-Up Activities

1. Bake bread together. You might want to invite some parents in to help you—or better yet, some grandparents!
2. Have the children talk with their parents to find out about their own family history. Invite them to share with the class a story of one of their ancestors.
3. Have the children write a short story beginning with “A friend is...” Ask them to draw a picture of one of their special friends.

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NOTE: This guide can be printed and cut down in size to be stored with the DVD version of this video program. Simply cut ¾ inch from each side of the page for a guide that, when folded, can be placed inside of the DVD case or attached to the DVD or VHS case.

For use with:

Grandma’s Bread on VHS (7152V) and DVD (D7152)

El Pan de la Abuelita on VHS (7526V) and DVD (D7152)

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