

PRAYER - Part Two

Praying as a Family

Praying together as a family is a great way to celebrate the presence of God amid everyday life and to bring God's love and peace into the home. Through prayer, families can discover how to live a faithful life in the everyday world. It may seem a difficult task in today's busy society, with so many competing activities. Yet this is precisely why it is important for families to find time to pray together.

Modelling

As parents we ought to be people of prayer if our children are to be people of prayer. Children learn firstly from what they observe. In other words, we need to model prayer in the home before we can expect our children to pray. If we desire that our children develop a closer and personal relationship with God, we need to be a model to them of how this can be done within the context of daily life.

Scripture tells us that Jesus prayed often to his Father in heaven. To keep the relationship between ourselves and God open, we too need to pray often.

A Time and a Place

The first step to introducing family prayer is to nominate a time that fits the family's schedule. Such times may include

- mealtime,
- in the morning or
- before bedtime.

Other times to gather for family prayer are on special occasions, such as birthdays, anniversaries, welcoming a new baby, to name a few. Many families also make time for more extended prayers, just before or after the evening meal while the family is still at the table to pray the Rosary for example.

Involve all Members

All members of the family can pray, no matter how big or small. The child who can understand the meaning of words can begin to understand the basic and simple essentials of prayer. Each can contribute in their own special way. They can, for example, hold hands with other family members and be quietly attentive during grace and bedtime prayers. They can reply also with the word, 'amen' after prayers led by others. As children grow, they can take a more active part in family prayer. Build their interest by giving them parts to say and tasks to perform.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

The following ideas may become a springboard for what is possible. Each family has different needs and situations that need to be considered so there is no one correct way to pray.

Children find spontaneous prayer quite natural as it allows them to simply talk to God in their own words, sharing their inner thoughts and feelings

- Encourage children to praise God, give thanks to God, to ask God for their personal needs and for the needs of others. Also encourage them to express their desire to restore their relationship with God by asking forgiveness.
- A way of raising older children's awareness of the presence of God within their day spend a moment with them before bedtime. Ask them firstly to reflect on the day with a simple question such as 'What do you remember about today?' Allow your child to share their experiences. If, for example, your child reveals that they had a fight with someone at school, encourage your child to ask God for forgiveness and the help to make up the next day. Pray with gratitude for the experiences which have been a source of joy and blessings, or in thanksgiving for what your child has received.
- Relating prayer to the events of everyday life enables children to understand the significance of prayer. Lead them to share and thank God for what they appreciated about the day. The little prayer from the heart may be a simple as 'God, thank you for sunshine'. As time progresses your child's prayers will become more personal and in tune with their own life experiences.
- If praying as a family may seem a little daunting at first, begin with a simple bedtime prayer as you tuck each of your child/ren in for the night. Simply making the Sign of the Cross with your children is a start to understanding prayer. The sign of the cross is a powerful prayer that raises awareness within your children of the presence of God.

When we develop the habit of prayer, it begins to permeate all aspects of our lives. We become aware of God's presence in our lives and we share the happenings of our daily lives with God and with one another. On the other hand, if we do not make time for prayer each day, our relationship with God will weaken and we may find ourselves slowly drifting away.

FAMILY PRAYERS

For parents who find it hard to pray as a family, mealtime is a natural meeting time and therefore conducive to praying as a family. One way to introduce mealtime prayer may be as follows.

The first night, place a candle on the table. As you approach the table light the candle and ask the children (and other adults) to put their forks down. State your intention. Tell your family members that tonight you wish to share a prayer with them. Say a simple prayer, for example:

Dear God, thank you for the food we are about to receive and bless those who have no food tonight. Amen.

The following evening place the candle on the table and repeat the instructions about not eating until after the prayer. Ask a member of the family to light the candle and then repeat the same prayer.

By the third night the family will be reluctant to begin the meal until you give the cue. The table will automatically have the candle placed on it. You may find that one of the children will ask to light the candle and the other members will wait for the prayer before they begin their meal. Repeat this until the end of the week.

During the second week ask a different member each night to light the candle. At first, the family will pray the prayer that you have introduced, but over time the prayers will become more personal as each child becomes comfortable with praying and the prayers will become more personal and relevant to the situations within your family life.

If we persist and try not to break the cycle, before long mealtime prayer will be an integral part of family life.

Family Faith

This resource is designed to assist parents in the task of sharing your faith with your children. The resource contains

- Information for parents in child friendly language
- Family activities which help to integrate faith with life
- Scripture readings to discuss with your children
- Prayer moments
- Hints on how to pray with children, highlighting different ways of praying as a family.