

Family Prayer: Bringing Families Closer to God

- ❖ Family prayer is both an opportunity to share the type of prayer that you find most spiritually satisfying AND your children's chance to share their faith perspective with you. Sometimes prayer is wonder-filled (especially for our youngest children), or prayer can be expressed as concern and petitions for the world (usually after age 6), or through the lens of God's mercy and our social justice work (often after age 13). Our children benefit from these conversations and we can grow from this shared opportunity with them.
- ❖ Start with what is comfortable for you and try to be consistent. And remember that it is never too late to try additional forms of prayer for as we change over time, so can our prayer. A few ideas for family prayer: before we eat or sleep, when we see someone in need, in the morning, birthdays, first days, last days, feast days, ordinary days, when we are worried or joyful. . .absolutely any time!
- ❖ Prayer can be expressed in an amazing variety: with our own words, with other's words, in silence, while considering scripture, in song, in gestures and especially in Mass. (Listening to or watching Mass remotely is a wonderful opportunity to answer questions about what is similar or different from the Mass we share at OSJ! Opportunities to do so are listed on the home page of oldstjoseph.org).
- ❖ Consider preparing a prayer space for your family to share for prayer. Allowing our youngest to prepare your prayer table is an unspoken invitation for them to begin to consider their own prayers. A small box or basket could hold a white cloth (an unfolded napkin will work) for your prayer table or shelf, a cross or crucifix, a small plant or vase, a candle that could be lit when parents are present, and any other tools you use for your own prayer (rosary, image of a Saint or holy person, a photo of someone not currently with you that you'd like to remember in prayer, or words that inspire you). Your prayer box or basket could hold a flag, beautiful items from nature (perhaps a place you have visited together), or a photo of someone no longer with you (a wonderful opportunity to share a story, remember a birthday, or share their signature dish at a meal). Children may want to create their own prayer cards with just a few words (remember, our Alleluia returns at Easter) or a verse from a daily reading. (Daily readings are available at usccb.org. Click on the calendar in the upper right side of the page). As you consider scripture together, remember to use very small pieces at a time (perhaps one verse), ask open ended questions, and slow your pace so that you have plenty of opportunity for all to participate. And remember that sometimes silence is an appropriate response to really big questions.
- ❖ Prayer is about responding to God's word and love. It was a way of mindfulness and being present with God. God already knows all, but our sharing brings us closer to God. Prayer can bring insight, it can move our heart, or comfort us when we are anxious. It is a gift that is deeply personal and always accessible. And it is one of the easiest gifts to share as a family as God is always calling us to prayer!

—Carol Hanlon
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