

Getting Family Rituals “Rite” Dr. Greg Popcak

In this space, I’ve been outlining a model of family spirituality called, the *Liturgy of Domestic Church Life*. To recap, “liturgy” is the “work” God does through the Church to heal the damage sin does to our relationship with him and each other. The *Liturgy of the Eucharist* restores our union with God and makes communion with others possible. Having experienced Christ in the eucharist, the *Liturgy of Domestic Church Life* helps bring Jesus home and make our faith the source of the warmth in our homes.

Just like the *Liturgy of the Eucharist* has different rites — that is, building blocks that make up the different parts of the Mass — the *Liturgy of Domestic Church Life* is made up of three rites. The *Rite of Christian Relationship*, which I wrote about last time, is the foundation of family spirituality. It’s the way families share Christ’s sacrificial love with each other through extravagant affection, responding generously to each other’s needs (even when it’s hard), and a loving-guidance approach to discipline, which teaches, guides and shepherds. The *Rite of Christian Relationships* helps families live their priestly mission of baptism, enabling them to consecrate the world to Christ through their witness of self-giving love.

The second rite in the Liturgy of Domestic Church life is the *Rite of Family Rituals*. Family rituals aren’t just “nice things we do when we have the time.” Family rituals are regularly scheduled, expected times when your family meets to work, play, talk and pray together--*every day*.

When families create strong, daily rituals for working, playing, talking and praying together, they model how to have a healthy, balanced, Christian life. The Catechism says that Christians live out the prophetic mission of their baptism by proclaiming the Gospel in our words “and the testimony of life” (No. 905). In that sense, the rite of family rituals helps families live out the prophetic mission of our baptism. Regular family rituals serve as an implicit catechism in cultivating godly attitudes toward work, leisure, intimacy and spirituality.

Over 60 years of research shows that family rituals, more than anything else, have the power to bind a family together, create a sense of community and team spirit, and enable parents to pass on their faith and values without having to preach, lecture, or yell. Family rituals communicate truths directly to our muscle memory. Why do we have the attitudes toward work, play, talk and prayer that we do? Because that’s the way our family’s always done things!

Work rituals include things such as cleaning the kitchen together after meals, picking up the family room together before bed, doing other household projects together, etc. The main point of family work rituals isn’t getting stuff done. It’s using the “stuff” of family life to become a team. Work rituals help families realize that chores aren’t just tasks you do as fast as possible so you

can get to the more entertaining stuff. They're the way families say, "You can count on me. Not just for the fun times. But all the other times, too."

Play rituals include things like game nights, family days, walks, movie nights, baking together, shooting hoops, doing projects together, etc. In a world where "fun" is often synonymous with "sin," play rituals show it's possible to have a joy-filled life — without killing your soul in the process.

Talk rituals include meaningful family meals, one-on-one time with your kids, family meetings, and other times where you make a point of bringing up conversations besides who has what practice and what needs to be picked up at the store. When families regularly discuss the highs and lows of the day, how God has blessed them that day, and how they could do a better job taking care of each other, they show they care about each other's hearts.

Prayer rituals include things like morning and bedtime family prayer, grace at meals, a family Rosary or chaplet, family blessings, family praise and worship time, reading/discussing Bible stories and, of course, participating as a family in the sacraments. Strong and abundant prayer rituals help you and your kids start to think about God as another part of your family — as the person who knows you best and loves you most.

Next time, I'll describe how God wants to use your family to be a blessing to others in the Rite of Reaching Out. For now, just remember, that family rituals aren't just nice things to do. They're an essential part of family spirituality; the best way Christian families can witness to an abundant, godly life.

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