

Praying with Children

Blessings and Family Prayers

In ways large and small, parents seek what is best for their children. This desire is expressed in a variety of practical ways every day; such as preparing healthy foods, ensuring adequate opportunity for sleep, teaching good manners, and sharing enriching activities as a family. Incorporating prayers of blessing into your family's daily routine is another way to express this desire for the very best for your children. When we pray for God's blessing, we acknowledge that God is the source of all that is good. In prayer, we ask God to bless us, to bless others, and to bless our activities. We do so with confidence and trust in God, who also seeks what is best for each of us. To pray in blessing for our children is to join our desires for them with God's own desire for them. Daily life provides parents with many opportunities to offer prayers of blessing with and for their children.



Bedtime Blessings

As part of bedtime prayers, invite your child to name the people he or she would like to pray for. This can take the form of a simple litany, praying, "God bless . . ." as your child names family and friends. As your child grows older, you might offer a simple prayer intention for each person as you pray. For example, if a sibling is sick, you might ask for God's healing presence, praying, "God bless [name] and help her [him] feel better soon." Later, you might suggest that your child offer the prayer intention. Conclude by praying your own prayer of blessing for your child as you trace the Sign of the Cross on your child's forehead.

Morning Blessings

Even in the most organized households, mornings can become a frenzy of activity as family members prepare to leave for work, day care, school, and daily errands. Establishing a morning routine that includes a prayer of blessing for family members as they leave the home can help to strengthen and encourage each person to live faithfully as a follower of Jesus. Ask each family member to name particular challenges or activities he or she may face during the day, and pray together, asking God to bless each person and his or her activities. Parents can trace the Sign of the Cross on each child's forehead in blessing before leaving the house each day.

Mealtime Blessings

The importance of gathering for family meals cannot be overstated. Not only are meals important for providing daily nourishment, but they are also occasions for strengthening our spirits by connecting with the people who are most central to our lives.

Meals are natural occasions for prayers of blessing. We pray in thanks to God for his goodness to us. We ask God to bless our food and make our lives a blessing to others. Pray together Grace Before Meals and Grace After Meals. Mealtime can also be an opportunity to ask family members to name the good things that God has shared with them throughout the day and to pray together in thanksgiving.

Blessings at Family Celebrations

Each family has its own cycle of special occasions and celebrations. Over the years, you will plan many family birthday parties, anniversaries, and celebrations of the sacraments. These occasions are also opportunities for prayers of blessing. Be intentional about taking these opportunities for prayer and look for other occasions to celebrate and pray together as a family. Among the occasions to consider as opportunities for family prayer and celebration include the feasts of the Church year, the anniversary of your child's Baptism, New Year's Day, and the start of a new school year.

Blessings in Times of Transition and Difficulty

God walks with us through the challenges and difficulties of life. Prayers of blessing call forth God's protection and remind us of God's faithfulness. We can ask for God's blessing when we make decisions, large and small, and pray for family members and friends who are discerning life choices, about new jobs, college choices, vocation to marriage, or religious life. We can pray for God's blessings when we move to a new home. We can ask God to bless those who are sick and offer prayers of blessing together when family members are sick. And we pray for God to bless those who are near death and those who have died.

Incorporating Items Blessed for Prayer

The Church has a rich sacramental tradition. Holy water and blessed candles can be brought into the home and used for family prayer. Crosses, crucifixes, rosaries, statues, and icons can be blessed by a priest, making them holy reminders of God's power and presence in our lives. Display these sacred objects in your home and make them focal points for your family prayer.

Prayers of blessing for these occasions and many others can be found in *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers: Revised Edition* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2008).

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