



# Parent Pages

## Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church\*

\* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

## Holy Habits and Blessings

We attempt to encourage holy habits in the life of our family in the form of rituals and as we prepare for sacred liturgy. Every community and culture has traditions and rituals. Our family is no different. We shared the gesture of the Sign of the Cross with our daughter when she was a toddler. We wanted her to understand that the Sign of the Cross made on her forehead at her baptism claimed her for Christ, that this sign proclaimed that she belonged to Jesus and that he was as close to her as the cross she traced on her body. We wanted her to know this cross as a shield, that would protect her. It was a gesture she made several times a day in her personal prayer, meal prayers and bedtime prayers, and also at Sunday liturgy. Around the age of seven, when at Sunday Mass, she decided that when she made the triple Sign of the Cross before the Gospel was proclaimed, she would now add her own *fourth* Sign of the Cross in the air in front of her. She did this very subtly, so much so that I did not realize this was her weekly ritual until she told me about it several years later. She said that she makes the fourth Sign of the Cross as a way to ask God to watch over where she goes in the future and the rest of her life, to take care of her. One simple gesture became a holy habit.

We know that our children develop habits from their parents and the life of our families. Do our children hear the words of our own prayers as parents? Do they see the gestures made in our prayers for one another?

### When a Child Begins the School Day

Bless your children as he or she leaves for school or logs on to Zoom for virtual learning. Bless the children as you hand them their snack or lunchboxes, placing a hand on their heads and tracing a small cross, offering one of the following blessings:

- *May God bless you and keep you.*
- *May the Lord's face shine upon you.*
- *May God give you peace.*
- *May God give the angels watch to keep you from harm.*
- *I bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

- *God, bless N,,, 's search for knowledge and let all her learning become a prayer.*

### When A Child is Sick

It is difficult for us when our children are not feeling well. As parents we want to keep our children safe and to protect them. Facing an illness we may feel helpless, so we turn to the Lord. It is in these moments, that we recognize we are totally dependent upon God, and we pray:

- *Lord, may N... receive healing this day. Let the medicine work quickly and restore him to health. Take away the pain and give him restful sleep.*
- *Lord of all healing, we pray for N...may he be comforted with your love, protection, and strength.*
- *Jesus, in the Scriptures, we read how you cured the sick, we lift up our child to your care and ask you to bless our family with your healing and peace.*

### Prayers of Thanksgiving and Praise

The natural prayer of the young child is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. The prayer of the young child is usually short. Even if the prayer is short or few words are spoken, that does not mean that the prayer is short-lived. When the child is captivated by a particular gift from God, they can remain focused on that gift and enjoy that gift for a long period of time.

We need to remember that prayer is a conversation with God, not an academic assignment. The children must have the greatest freedom to speak or not to speak. There will be those children who do not want to reveal their prayer, either in spoken word or in written form.

The prayer of the young child is in response to the wonder and joy they have experienced, i.e. because God has given, the child is able to respond in praise and thanksgiving. Some examples of their prayer:

- Thank you, God, for you.*
- Thank you, God, for me.*
- Thank you, God, for the light.*
- Thank you for making bread.*
- Thank you for everything.*
- Thank you for the whole world.*
- Thank you for coming into our hearts.*
- My body is happy.*

Silent prayer or, alternatively, singing, are other common responses. Silence is sometimes the best response to God. Just enjoying His presence with us. Psalm 65:1 proclaims: *Silence is praise to you, O God!*