

PRAYER - Part One

One of the greatest influences in shaping the spiritual lives of our children is the experience of prayer. It is in the home that prayer is discovered and deepened. As we relate with our family members day in and day out, we learn also how to relate with God.

What is Prayer?

Prayer is a response to a loving relationship with a loving God. Prayer can be described in various ways but two elements are always noted, relationship and communication. In the words of St Theresa of Lisieux, prayer is 'raising our mind and heart to God'. She describes prayer as essentially conversation with God; listening to God's presence and responding to that presence.

Prayer is central to our lives as Catholics because it is about relationship with God. It is an essential part of our Christian living. It is not just a duty: rather it is part of the reality of what it is to be a Christian. As Christians, we are always in relationship with God, whether we are aware of it or not. It is through prayer though, that we are awakened to the presence of God in our lives.

Just as communication is essential for developing our relationships with one another, prayer is the source of our communication with God.

The Purpose of Prayer

Through prayer we communicate our inner-most feelings, thoughts and desires with a God who loves us intimately. As we pray our relationship with God is deepened. As we pray, God draws us closer, guiding our thoughts, making us spiritually stronger in our daily lives.

As our children pray, they too come to know God personally. They come to appreciate that God personally cares for them and is always with them. In the words of St Augustine, "God loves each of us as though there is only one of us". They come to understand that God knows them intimately because God listens to them.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Choose one (or more) of these activities to share with your family.

- Share with your child/ren *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth* by Douglas Wood. This book is a beautiful and endearing picture book about the bond between a grandparent, a boy and the power of prayer. Each time the boy and Grandad walk in the woods, the boy listens for the prayers of the earth. Discuss the elements of prayer that come through the story and the power of prayer in daily lives.
- Families with small child/ren, as you tuck them in at night, recall the wonders of the day. With your child/ren thank God for the special blessings of the day. For example:
 - *Thank you God for the sunshine today. Amen.*
 - *Thank you God for grandma and grandad who came to see us today. Amen.*

Each night thank God for something new in the day.

- Make a Prayer Jar.
Take an empty jar and blank pop sticks. Invite family members to write the names of a person, or an intention which is in need of special prayers on the blank pop sticks. Ask them to return the pop sticks to the jar.

Each evening before mealtime invite one member of the family to pull out a pop stick from the jar. As a family, pray for the person or intention named on the pop stick.

Keep building up the prayer jar.

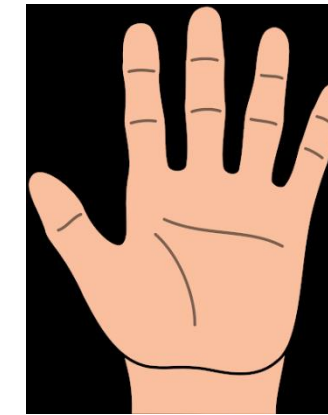
Family Faith

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.

FAMILY PRAYERS

Teach your child/ren Pope Francis' five-finger prayer. This simple aid to prayer has been popularized by Pope Francis. It is a helpful approach to teaching children pray in their own words. Ask child/ren to concentrate on each finger on one hand. As they do so, lead them to pray for the particular group of people represented by that finger.



- **Thumb (people who are close to you).** Invite children to think of family members and their close friends. Ask children to give thanks to God and ask God's protection over these people.
- **Pointer (people who point the way).** Invite children to think of the leaders in their life, such as teachers, priests, school principals. Ask them to offer God thanksgiving for these people and ask for guidance in their important work.
- **Tall Finger (people in authority).** Invite children to think of the big people in the world who need prayers. Ask them to call on God to give wisdom to our Church leaders, government, military, police and other special leaders.
- **Ring Finger (people who are weak).** Invite children to remember those who are sick, live in poverty, or are treated badly. Ask them to pray that God give them new strength.
- **Little Finger (your own needs).** Remind children that God wants to hear their needs as well. Ask children to pray for growth in mind, body, and spirit.

End the prayer with

We make our prayer through Jesus our Lord. Amen.