

## JANUARY – FAMILY PRAYER

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*The Christian family needs to put first things first by cultivating a relationship with God together through prayer. Prayer is essential for families to develop Christian joy, faith, hope and love.*

### **Breaking Open the Theme**

The Christian family is called to offer to Christ all of its activities through a life of prayer. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives this advice about prayer: “We cannot pray ‘at all times’ if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, families need to set aside a definite time for formal prayer together in order to have prayer infuse everything they do. Family members must build their life around God rather than fit God into their busy schedule. If families attempt the latter, then they are sure to find prayer dry and will eventually leave it out of their schedule altogether.

To help nourish a shared prayer life, it is a good idea to learn more about different ways of praying and to establish a rhythm of praying. Different forms of prayer include vocal prayer (saying out loud a formal prayer, giving praise, asking for forgiveness, thanksgiving, adoration, petition, etc.); meditation on Scripture or other religious writings; and contemplation, in which a person just listens to and talks with God as one would with a friend.<sup>42</sup> But there are other ways of praying, such as through song and art.

A family should consider its rhythm of prayer, such as morning or evening prayer, grace before and after meals, and prayers before bedtime. Some rhythms are weekly, such as Sunday Mass and entering into the Sabbath rest. Some rhythms are yearly, such as the liturgical year and its feast days. Finally, some rhythms of prayer should be unique to each person’s family, such as prayerfully celebrating birthdays, anniversaries of family members’ weddings, baptisms (or other sacraments) and patron saints. The possibilities are endless, but it is necessary to develop a rhythm because “life is shaped by rhythms: the rhythm of heartbeat and breathing, the rhythm of day and night, of meals, of weeks, and so on. Mental prayer should become a daily event as vital to us as the basic rhythms of existence. It should become the breathing of our souls.”<sup>43</sup>

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## **Meditation**

*From Pope John Paul II's Familiaris Consortio*

Family prayer has its own characteristic qualities. It is prayer offered in common, husband and wife together, parents and children together. Communion in prayer is both a consequence of and a requirement for the communion bestowed by the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony. The words with which the Lord Jesus promises His presence can be applied to the members of the Christian family in a special way: “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Family prayer has for its very own object family life itself, which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to His call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc. — all of these mark God’s loving intervention in the family’s history. They should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven. The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God’s unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer.<sup>44</sup>

1. Is prayer at the center of our family life? If not, why?
2. How can we better build a rhythm of prayer into our family’s life? In what way can we mark significant family moments throughout the year with prayer?
3. What are our family members’ preferred ways of praying — vocal, meditative or contemplative? Is there a way to incorporate each family member’s preferred way of praying into family prayer?

## **Scripture Reading — Psalm 65:6-14**

*A prayer of gratitude for God’s blessings*

You answer us with awesome deeds of justice,  
O God our savior,  
The hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of those far off across the sea.

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You are robed in power,  
you set up the mountains by your might.  
You still the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
the tumult of the peoples.  
Distant peoples stand in awe of your marvels;  
the places of morning and evening you make resound with joy.  
You visit the earth and water it,  
make it abundantly fertile.  
God's stream is filled with water;  
you supply their grain.  
Thus do you prepare it:  
you drench its plowed furrows,  
and level its ridges.  
With showers you keep it soft,  
blessing its young sprouts.  
You adorn the year with your bounty;  
your paths drip with fruitful rain.  
The meadows of the wilderness also drip;  
the hills are robed with joy.  
The pastures are clothed with flocks,  
the valleys blanketed with grain;  
they cheer and sing for joy.

### Family Project

The *Catechism* recommends that we find places favorable for prayer. One of the places it suggests is a “prayer corner” in the home.<sup>45</sup> If you do not already have one, make a prayer corner in the home in order to facilitate prayer. This sacred space could be a simple table with a nice cloth over it, a Bible, religious images and statues, rosaries, candles, prayer cards, a family prayer intention book, a vase for flowers, etc. Make the corner unique to your family and have each family member contribute one religious item to the prayer corner. For further ideas, see the following resource: *The Little Oratory: The Beginner's Guide to Praying in the Home* by David Clayton and Leila Marie Lawler.