

A SHORT GUIDE TO
PRAYING AS A FAMILY
GROWING TOGETHER
IN FAITH AND LOVE EACH DAY



DOMINICAN SISTERS OF SAINT CECILIA CONGREGATION

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A Short Guide to

PRAYING AS A FAMILY

GROWING TOGETHER IN FAITH AND LOVE EACH DAY

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TO OUR BLESSED MOTHER MARY,
QUEEN OF FAMILIES,



HELP OF THE WEAK,
AND STAR OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword by the Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput.....	9
Acknowledgments	11
Introduction: How to Use This Book.....	13

PHASE ONE: Basic Vocal Prayers..... 19

The Sign of the Cross	21
The Our Father	25
The Hail Mary	29
The Glory Be	33

PHASE TWO: Making Your Home a Sacred Place..... 37

Creating Sacred Spaces in Your Home	38
Morning Offering	43
Grace at Meals	47
Family Bedtime Prayers.....	53
Monthly Family Meeting.....	59
Praying with Your Spouse	65
The Family Rosary.....	69

PHASE THREE: Advancing in the Life of Prayer 79

Prayer Outside the Home

Angel of God.....	81
Prayer to St. Michael.....	85
Prayer Before Sporting Events.....	89

PHASE THREE (continued):

Preparing for the Sacraments

Preparing for Mass as a Family..... 93
Going to Confession as a Family..... 103
Thanksgiving After Holy Communion 109
Using Holy Water and Other Sacramentals..... 113

PHASE FOUR: The Power of Prayer 117

Intercessory Prayer..... 119
Offering Sacrifices 123
The Divine Mercy Chaplet 127
Eucharistic Adoration as a Family 133

PHASE FIVE: Making Your Life a Prayer..... 139

Living the Virtues..... 141
Aspirations 149
More Ways to Pray 155

Appendix: The Stained Glass Tradition..... 160
Image Credits..... 162
About the Photographer..... 173
About the Authors..... 174





LET HIM ENTER, THE KING OF GLORY!

FOREWORD

Archimedes, the ancient Greek scientist, once said that if he had a fulcrum and a long enough lever, one small man could move the world. Children and families are not levers. They're human beings. They're persons, not objects. But Archimedes' words are still useful. The formation that spouses give to each other and to their children—if it's done with love, courage, tenderness, and persistence—can move the world and change society.

This is why the greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother. And of course the same applies to mothers loving their husbands. Personal example is the most powerful teacher in the world. Children see everything, and they understand far more than adults often think. If parents love each other, children see and learn love. They learn *fidelity* instead of broken promises; *patience* instead of restlessness; *simplicity* in place of confusion; *humility* instead of pride; *courage* in place of cowardice; *honesty* instead of excuses; *forgiveness* in place of revenge; *a hunger for justice* in place of apathy.

And if parents love God, children see and learn faith. Parents who pray together teach by the way they live that God is real; that He

is present, listening, and eager to be part of our lives. Helping children learn the habit of prayer thus becomes one of the most important lessons a family can share. A life of prayer makes us fully human because it makes us real; it brings us out of ourselves, again and again, into conversation with the Author of life Himself—the God who made and loves us, and created everything we know.

It's no secret that I've admired the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia for many years. The reason is simple. In the larger family of God we call the Church, the Sisters embody by their daily example every virtue that makes a family beautiful and filled with life. But they also teach by what they speak and write, edit and publish—and this volume, *A Short Guide to Praying as a Family*, is wonderful and very practical proof.

Archimedes never found the lever he needed. The Sisters remind us that Christian families already have one. Family prayer can move the world.

**The Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput,
Archbishop of Philadelphia**



TO THE GLORY OF GOD

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She saith unto

him, Rabboni, which is

to say, Master

INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Prayer is as simple and natural as friendship. It is loving conversation with the Lord, with Him whom we know loves us.¹ It is raising our hearts and our minds to Him. Prayer is our relationship with the living and present God.²

Beginning to pray as a family can genuinely transform your life, enriching not only your relationship with the Lord but also your relationships with one another. Prayer can change the way you see the ordinary circumstances of your daily life. You begin to see disappointments as perhaps God's way of leading you to new and better opportunities, joys as a share in the life of heaven, and sufferings as a way to enter into the mystery of Jesus' own suffering for us on the Cross. The closer we are to the Lord in prayer, the more we realize that He is present with us, walks with us, in our daily lives. We begin to see as He sees and to love as He loves. Thank you for your faith. Thank you for picking up this book, for desiring to draw your whole family closer to God. "[T]he Lord takes pleasure in those . . . who put their hope in his mercy" (cf. Ps 147:11), and "[t]he

Lord is good . . . to the one that seeks him" (cf. Lam 3:25).

Through prayer we nourish our personal relationship with God, much as fertilizer and weeding, water and sunshine, nourish a garden. Thus, it is not surprising that Christian writers have often compared the soul to a garden. Beautiful gardens are a delight. The brilliance of the palette of colors, the sweet scents, the restful shade, the tranquil silence, all make a garden the perfect place to rest, to be still. Your hearts (the hearts of the members of your family) are that garden in which you can rest with the Lord and He can rest with you. However, gardens require a great deal of constant care: planning, tilling, planting, weeding, watering, pruning, and fertilizing. That's where this book comes in. The types of prayer in this book contain each of these components. Some are like flowering or fruit-bearing plants; others are like bushes or groundcover; still others are the water, the pruning, or the fertilizing. For instance, *Going to Confession as a Family* (page 103) is the equivalent of weeding your garden. You don't want weeds to take over, so you won't want to neglect that crucial component of family prayer! Confession also brings

¹ cf. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*.

² cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2558.



marvelous new graces and gifts to your family. God is the Master Gardener; we simply need to cooperate with His grace, and allow Him to prune and water the garden of our souls. He will give us new growth.

As you'll notice from the Table of Contents, this book is organized according to phases. Phase One contains the Basic Vocal Prayers: the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be. These are the staples, the plants you want to have all over your garden. Phase Two guides you in Making Your Home a Sacred Place, unifying your family in the desire to have the Lord as the center and goal of your family.

The remaining phases allow you to continue your growth in prayer. Take a moment to look at the progression of the phases in the Table of Contents. Remember, as you do so, that your family does not need to do everything that is listed. You can customize the phases according to your family's needs and preferences. If you do begin to try one type of prayer (for instance, Preparing for Mass as a Family), try it several times before deciding whether or not that prayer is a "fit" for your family. Prayer takes practice, so give yourselves a chance to become comfortable with a particular form of prayer before you give up on it.

Please remember that merely *saying* the prayers is not the goal. The goal is *praying*: personally encountering the Lord, listening to Him, and giving Him your heart. Formal prayers and methods of prayer are intended as a *means* to help us in our own personal conversation with the Lord: to come to know Him and to speak to Him in our own words, as one speaks with a friend. By praying, we learn how to listen to Him—how to be docile to His promptings and attentive to His way of seeing reality. He is always with us. Through prayer we learn more and more how to be with Him. The words of the prayers help to form our hearts and minds, so when we pray them as a family, they express our shared life with one another and with the Lord—a unity and a desire for greater unity with and in Him.

Many of the prayers in this book are handed down to us through tradition; Christians have been praying them for hundreds of years. Just as these formal prayers have helped them to begin praying, showing them how to speak to the Lord, they do the same for us, drawing us into a deeper and deeper relationship with the Lord. Thus, when we come together for communal prayer (such as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass), the prayers in our tradition give us the words to pray as a community and as a Church. If we have a deep relationship with

the Lord, these prayers are more than mere words—they become communal conversations with the Lord, who is the center of our community, our families, and our Church. Ultimately, what is important is that we talk with the Lord, listen to Him, and allow Him to speak to us through the Scriptures and to pour out His graces upon us through the sacraments.

Each prayer in this book is followed by pages that explain the prayer (how it forms our minds and hearts) and suggest appropriate times or other ideas for that particular prayer. You can use the explanations to help your children understand the meaning and purpose of each prayer. Each phase builds on the phases that go before it. Hopefully, your family will look forward to entering each new phase as your prayer life develops and you grow closer to the Lord.

May the garden of your family's hearts remain always in bloom, inviting and pleasing to Our Lord. May your family be the garden where Christ Himself is always welcome, where He always delights, and where He always rests. May He, the Master-Gardener, be the One who applies His gentle artistry to water (to bless), to prune (to purify), and to give new growth to your whole family. He longs for you. He longs to be welcome in your family, to rest

in the garden of your souls, a place of peace and beauty within. As this begins to happen in your own family, may you bring the precious gift of praying as a family to other families.

A FEW PRACTICAL NOTES

Family life is so busy these days, and many demands are made on our time, yet this is precisely what makes praying together so important. When God is at the center of our family life, all our other priorities fall into place. We put God first, and our spouse and children next. Extended family and work follow after these. Children learn to put their brothers and sisters before their friends, and to put attending Mass before other activities. When your family prays together, you are not only putting God at the center of your family, but also showing your children how to enter into a personal relationship with Him so that He becomes a companion and friend throughout life.

The most effective way to begin implementing family prayer is to build it into your schedule, that is, to pray in the course of things you already do. For example, you already get in the car to go somewhere, so you can easily add saying the Angel of God prayer (page 81) shortly after you get in the car. You also already eat meals together, so you can easily add praying

Grace Before and After Meals (page 47). Filling your day with prayer fills your day with awareness of the Lord's presence, goodness, and love.

In the course of implementing the prayers you choose, we encourage you to be careful and gentle, because you don't want your children or your spouse to develop a distaste for prayer. You want family prayer to be a positive experience. Also remember that everything doesn't have to be perfect. Little ones are going to squirm. Teens may act as if they don't care. Others may be experiencing withdrawal from hyper-connectivity (to the television, computer games, electronic devices, cell phones, etc.). Be at peace yourself and keep peace in the family. Don't be discouraged. Be forgiving of yourself and your family if you get off track. Life can also seem to take you off track. So, when there is a change in the routine, simply adjust your prayer. Ask the Lord how to do it. For instance, if you are traveling in the car, and it is time for Family Bedtime Prayers, you may want to pray them in the car and shorten them for the sake of the exhausted members of your family. A simple movement of the heart toward the Lord in gratitude and love is a thousand times better than many words spoken only from a sense of duty.

Try your best to pray together, "[f]or where two or three are gathered together in my name,

there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). Discuss the prayers you are choosing to pray together. Get your children involved, especially the older ones, asking their advice and their ideas. Everyone likes to be included. If you believe you may experience resistance from your teens, speak to them privately first and ask them what they think about beginning to pray together as a family. Listen to them. You might even want to ask them to lead some of the prayers. Or, in other cases, you may want to give them the option to come or not to come, but let them know you would like for them to come since they are important members of the family. When your family makes the time and the effort to pray, you will be blessed by the Lord. He meets our weakness with His mercy and love. He will reward your generosity with His infinite generosity.

Finally, remember the power of community. You are not alone. There are over one billion Catholics in the world! There is another family in your neighborhood or in your parish that would also like to start praying together. Why not find two or more friends who have this same desire, and support one another in working together to implement praying with your families? You might even start a small parish group for this purpose. You can be a

source of encouragement for one another, and you can share your experiences and concerns, receiving advice and reassurance from one another.

We hope these pages will help your family to grow in love for God and one another, for your faith and for your life of prayer. We hope they will help you to teach your children about the beauty and meaning of life, about how to love and be loved, by God and by each other. As you journey along and deepen your relationship with the Lord, may the treasured Catholic prayers in this book accompany you, so that your family—a domestic church—will always be united to God in love.



PHASE ONE



BASIC VOCAL PRAYERS

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

THE OUR FATHER

THE HAIL MARY

THE GLORY BE





THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Making the Sign of the Cross is a prayer. The Cross is the symbol of Christianity, for it is on the Cross that Christ shows His love for us by dying for us, saving us from sin and death. Moreover, through the Sign of the Cross, we invoke the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, two of the greatest mysteries of our faith—the Holy Trinity and our redemption by Christ on the Cross—are encompassed by this one prayer. Even as early as the 5th Century, Christians began making a large Sign of the Cross over themselves¹ in a way very similar to the way we Christians do today. Because of its intense store of meaning, the Sign of the Cross has traditionally been used to begin and end every prayer, including the greatest prayer, the Holy Mass.

Traditionally, the Sign of the Cross is made in this manner: at the words, “In the name of the Father,” the Christian touches the fingers of the right hand to the forehead; at the words, “and of the Son,” the hand is moved downwards (drawing, in effect, the vertical crossbeam); at the words, “and of the Holy” the fingers touch the left shoulder; at the word, “Spirit,” the right shoulder (drawing the horizontal crossbeam).

¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Sign of the Cross.”

Finally, the hands are joined together with the word “Amen” (which means, “truly it is so” or “so be it”).

Children can easily be taught to understand the meaning of these gestures as saying to God: “Take my mind” (when we put our fingers to our foreheads); “Take my heart” (when we move our fingers over our hearts); and, “Take my whole self” (when we touch our fingers to each shoulder).

Teach your children to make the Sign of the Cross with reverence, attention, and love, for this prayer is a beautiful proclamation of our faith in Jesus Christ and all He has done for us. Sometimes we feel rushed or do not want to hold others up by taking the time to wait for our children, particularly small children, to make the Sign of the Cross, and we can assume that eventually they’ll catch on. However, waiting and modeling the Sign of the Cross, even with toddlers, is worth all the time in the world. Allowing the smallest children to participate in our family prayers by sharing in this gesture of faith is a powerful way to include them in the family prayer. It is perhaps easiest to show young children how to make the Sign of the Cross by standing or kneeling behind them and moving the child’s hand slowly through the steps of the Sign of



the Cross as you recite the words aloud. Or, one parent can demonstrate in mirror-image fashion (that is using the opposite hand and doing the opposite gesture that the child mirrors in making the Sign of the Cross) in front of the child while the other parent helps the child from behind. Older children can also help the younger ones to make the Sign of the Cross.

A valuable practice is making the Sign of the Cross right after you wake up in the morning. With this simple prayer, you give your entire day to the Lord and ask Him to be your shield, your protector. Children very easily understand this concept: the Sign of the Cross is like putting on your holy armor for the day.