Family Prayer in the Time of Lent

One of the real challenges that we too often find in our contemporary, busy lives is finding time to be together as a family. It is especially difficult to find opportunities to pray together. And, if prayer, other than going to church on Sunday, hasn't been a family tradition, it can seem very "unnatural" to introduce it as something we might do together as family. Here are a few possibilities - call them dreams - for ways we might pray as a family, during Lent, or at any time of the year.

Prayer Before Meals

One of the most natural times to pray, is as we sit down to eat. We can begin, or "break the ice," by simply saying, Let's pray or Let's just pause for a minute to give thanks. One of the challenges of doing this prayer well, is that we don't want our food to get cold. This leads us to do the prayer quickly. Brief prayer doesn't have to be without substance or power. And, it doesn't always have to be after the food is on the table. For a change of pattern, we could gather everyone to the table for prayer, and then bring the food to the table.

We begin with a prayer of thanksgiving:

Lord, we thank you for the blessings of this day and for this time together as family. Bless us as a family. Help us to grow in love and care for each other.

OR

We thank you for this wonderful meal and for this time in which we can share it. Help us to remember those who have so much less than we do.

OR

Bless us O Lord and these, your gifts, which of your goodness we are about to receive through Christ our Lord. Amen.
We always begin with thanksgiving. The "reasons" we give for our gratitude can be very specific, and draw us into this prayer from our "real" place we are in this day. So, we can say that we are grateful for this Lenten journey, which offers us renewal and prepares us to celebrate Easter with greater freedom. We might say, We thank you for being with us each of us today, while we were apart, and for being with us tonight.

Perhaps we will thank God for some special grace that has occurred today. We may want to take time to let each person name one or two things for which he or she is grateful.

Prayer at Other Times

There are many other times or occasions when we can develop the habit of praying together. These examples might inspire our own creative or spontaneous prayer.

In the Morning:
It can be quite transformative of our family bonds, in faith, to pause very briefly to pray together.

This might be a spontaneous prayer, while we are laying in bed with our spouse,

Lord, be with us in every moment of today.

OR

N........, I ask the Lord to give you strength and peace today at your meeting.

Perhaps we are rushing around each other in the kitchen, grabbing breakfast. It can be wonderful to pause to pray, simply asking the Lord to be with each of us in what we are about to do.

Jesus, be with us and guide us during this day. Amen.

Jesus, thank you for another day. Help me to show your love to others. Amen.

Jesus, today will be a challenging day for me. Please give me your comfort and love always. Amen
In the Car:
So many of us spend a fair amount of time in the car, often with other members of our family. These can be nice times to begin or end the trip, with a very brief prayer.

*Bless our shopping tonight. Help us be grateful for the gifts you give us. May this food/these clothes help us be mindful of those who have so much less than we do.*

OR
*Bless N......... at practice today. Give him/her gratitude and delight in the gifts you give him/her. Help N......... to do his/her best, to encourage others, and to learn what you offer him/her today.*

OR
*Lord, as we go to our friends for dinner, we thank you for our friendship with them, and we ask you to bless this night with all the graces you might offer us in the care we have for one another. Amen.*

OR
*Lord, as we drive to church, we thank you for our faith and for this chance to be together with our parish community; please allow us to hear your Word, to give you thanks and praise, and to be messengers of your good news to those we meet in the coming week.*

Praying for Each Other:

The most important part of family prayer is perhaps the easiest to overlook - how we hold each other up to the Lord. Even when we are not physically together, as a praying family, we want to pray for each other. In reality this means that I have a pattern of talking with the Lord about the people I love most dearly, each and every day. They become part of my very relationship with God. Whether we are a married couple with young children, or I am a single parent, or if my children have grown up and begun lives of their own, this aspect of family prayer is so important. My spouse and I may not share our faith; perhaps my spouse doesn't pray at all; but I can talk with the Lord about my spouse every day - sometimes asking for help, sometimes just expressing my gratitude, sometimes begging for the gift of faith for my spouse. May our Lord bless our praying, in the community of our family, these days of Lent.

Adapted from Lenten Family Prayer
http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent/familyprayer.html
Symbols in Our Home

We need to choose to let our homes be a place full of the holy – things that help raise our minds and hearts to God. Our world is full of so many images that lure our minds and hearts elsewhere. Here are some symbols that will carry the ongoing meaning we give them, for us and for our families and loved ones.

A Crucifix
We probably all have a crucifix in our home. If not, Lent might be a wonderful time to buy one and place it in a central place. Even a child’s drawing of Jesus’ death for us can be a powerful, stirring reminder of God’s love.

A Candle
Imagine having a candle in a central place in our home. Imagine praying over it together as we begin Lent. “Lord thank you for the gift of your Light in the midst of all darkness. Let this candle be a symbol of our faith in your presence among us.” And imagine if we light this candle whenever we feel tempted away from the Light of Jesus, when we are experiencing tensions in our home, whenever we need special graces. Imagine how powerful experiencing the lighting of the New Fire will be at the Easter Vigil.

Perhaps we have Baptismal candles that were given to us or our children at Baptism. It might be very meaningful to bring them out and lay them near our central candle. We can remember the words that were spoken when we received this candle: "Receive the Light of Christ. ... Keep this flame burning brightly."

A Bible
The Word of God is so important for us during Lent. Perhaps the prominent presence of a Bible in our home can represent for us our desire for God’s Word in our lives. Imagine the experience that could be ours if - when we feel a new inspiration or a softening of our heart, or just a sense of God’s love – we pick up that Bible and simply, reverently kiss it.

Water
A simple bowl of water, in a central place, can be transformed into an ongoing reminder of our journey to the font of baptism for the renewal of commitment and life in Christ. Perhaps we can pray over it. “Lord, may this water remind us of our baptism and be a blessing for our home, where our dying and rising in you is lived each day. Bless us, as we sign ourselves with it each day.”
Sand
Perhaps a bowl of sand can help us remember our journey. God led the people in their journey in the desert. Jesus himself re-enacted that journey to face his own temptations. The desert can be a place of retreat, where there is a freedom from distractions. It can be a good place to be led and to face our temptations.

A Symbol for Lenten Giving
Many of us grew up with a simple box for contributions to the poor around the world on our kitchen table. The key is to give a focus to our sacrifices as a family - eating or living more simply during Lent - in a way which directly connects those sacrifices with the needs of others. Project Compassion, from Caritas Australia is our Catholic response to standing in solidarity with those who are vulnerable, poor and needy. Each parish promotes giving through Project Compassion during Lent.

Pick up your Project Compassion box from church or school.

For prayers, video clips and more, go to http://www.caritas.org.au/projectcompassion

For more Family Prayer ideas for Lent, go to:
http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent/siteindex.html
Lenten Resource adapted from
Collaborative Ministries Creighton Catholic University, USA.
http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent/siteindex.html

Prepared for the 2013-2014 Diocesan Year of Family Prayer

Catholic Diocese of Sale

For more resources and information

Diocesan Pastoral Office

P: +61 3 5622 6600
E: smorley@sale.catholic.org.au
W: www.sale.catholic.org.au