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NEW ORLEANS

Meeting God in Our Home

Family Day 2017 – Sunday, September 24

The purpose of Family Day is to promote and strengthen all families and the parish family. The Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - gives us the strength and graces to know that our family is sacred, especially in the details of our ordinary lives. We **are the Body of Christ, the Family of God**, but it is often difficult to understand the giftedness and importance of family life without guidance in how to experience and grow in the grace and beauty that God makes available in each family.

The **enclosed sheets** are aids to assist your parish in planning for Family Day:

- Introduction to ***“Meeting God In Our Home”****
- Liturgical Helps for Family Day Celebration/Suggestion for Prayers of the Faithful
- Family Blessing*
- Family Help Handouts/Bulletin Inserts*

* These handouts can be copied or downloaded from our website and distributed to parishioners via the parish bulletin and school newsletter, in classrooms and at organizational meetings.

Let us know what you are planning! (504)861-6247 with your plans for Family Day or to learn more about how to enrich your Family Day celebration!



Meeting God in Our Home

Family Day: September 24, 2017

We encounter God at Church on Sunday. We encounter Him in the Adoration chapel, on mission trips, and on retreats, but do we encounter God in our homes?

A question many may ask is *can we* encounter God in our homes, and are we even supposed to? It might feel like we can, but that is exactly what God's plan for marriage and family is. We spend a lot of time in our homes, much more time than we spend in Church or the chapel. We spend far more time with our spouses and children than with our priests and fellow parishioners, the people with which we think we are supposed to "typically" encounter God.

Our homes are places where natural opportunities for acts of virtue and service abound. If we simply look in the next room, we are likely to find someone in need of our help. All too often, this is where the "life of faith" *inside* the home tends to stop because it is too easy to get caught up in the tasks at hand to recognize the opportunities for grace in everyday family life.

As the Psalmist says, "The Lord is near to all who call upon him." It is truly great to find a family who rely on one another when in need, to find siblings who nurture one another, and to find children who are not afraid to seek out their parents' help. It is even greater to find a family rooted in prayer: prayer as individuals, prayer as a married couple, and prayer as a family.

In the daily and weekly routines of a household, it is easy to assume and even truly believe that there is not time for something like prayer. We, as Catholics and people of faith, must challenge that assumption. We must choose to make deliberate time throughout our days for prayer by ourselves, with our spouses, and with our families as a whole, especially because God has great gifts in store for those who ask Him. Our Lord offers irreplaceable guidance to couples and families to navigate a secularized society. His gifts and His guidance are found through prayer, and in families, prayer *with one another*. Family life naturally provides us with close, intimate companions on the journey of faith.

This year's Family Day Packet points us toward the active practice of our faith *within* our homes and *with* our families. Our hope is to give families the encouragement needed to live as a domestic church, calling upon God on a daily basis with one another.



Homily Suggestions and Intercessions for Family Day, Sunday, September 24, 2017

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: *Isaiah 55:6-9*

“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call him while he is near.”

There is an assumption among most of us that because God is “everywhere,” He should know our thoughts, our needs, and our current situation and therefore act accordingly. So, when He doesn’t seem to do much even though He is “near to us,” we doubt whether He has our best interest in mind or whether He’s actually able to do really do anything for us. What Isaiah reminds us of is that our actively seeking and calling on Him is a necessary part of the equation. God is not just a divine power at work in the world, but a Person who created us specifically for a *relationship with* Him. So, He makes Himself available at all times and in all places, but He allows our freedom to be fully functional in whether or not we look to Him to receive what He desires to give us.

Our level of faith in His presence and in His ability to respond when we call to Him is most clear in the choices we make at home with our families. If we are able to seek Him there, and find Him in the most mundane and real details of our lives, where we are our most real and intimate selves, we will have very little problem taking advantage of His active presence in every other aspect of our lives. However, it’s the choice to take the time to seek Him at home, where we have no one to impress, where no one is paying attention to how pious we are, where the only structure for prayer time is the one we create in secret that is the most important. That choice is truly the hardest, and it is the one that requires the most conviction despite the fact that it seems very simple.

Psalm 145: 2-3, 8-9, 17-18

“The Lord is near to all who call upon Him”

Again, the focus here is on the need to actually call upon the Lord, which requires a level of spiritual maturity that most of us assume we have, and yet we struggle to actually do it when no one is around but our families. We need help to recognize our lack of faith in God’s promises to be near to all who call upon Him and to face our doubts and our disappointments. Only when we see our doubts for what they are can we begin to sincerely offer them to God and allow Him to respond. Hearing His response will then give us the courage to take the risk and make the time to call upon Him knowing that He *will* answer.

Second Reading: *Philippians 1:20C-24, 27A*

Most of us live with a deep rooted dualism, a belief that the material things of this world, including our bodies and the demands of our spouses, children, homes, and jobs, are inherently an obstacle to the spiritual life, which is the only thing God really cares about. This is usually a subconscious belief, but it often causes us to think that the only way to achieve any kind of growth in our relationship with Christ is to somehow escape the things that drag us down to the earth so we can focus on what's really important

St. Paul tells us in this passage, as well as in his other letters, that he is both in Christ ("to live is Christ") and tied up in worldly things (he continues his tent-making profession to support himself). In Ephesians 5 he explains what holiness in marriage looks like, and it's not spouses ignoring each other in order to spend more time with God. There must be a union of our spiritual lives with our bodily experience—God created us as a body/soul unity, and what God has joined, no human being must put asunder!

If we are to love our spouses "as Christ loved the Church," or if we are to experience what St. Paul describes in this passage, "for me to live is Christ," we must experience spiritual realities in the midst of our worldly mess. Taking the time to pray at home as an individual, as a couple, and as a family, may seem too simple, but it is absolutely necessary in order to experience the reality that Christ, God incarnate, is able to be present and active in the most messy and seemingly meaningless aspects of our lives.

Gospel: *Matthew 20:1-16A*

This gospel passage obviously highlights God's generous response to anyone who works in His vineyard, but more importantly it points to the fact that our ability to be involved in His life and work is, itself, His gift. In this parable, God seeks out those who are standing idly by, and allows them to participate in something truly human, and then gives them more than they deserve, making it clear that it is a gift rather than something earned.

Often, in our spiritual lives, we think of our time spent in prayer as "putting in the hours" that will hopefully result in some kind of response from God. This typically leads to one of two results: either we are disappointed that God doesn't respond to the extent that we think we've earned, or we don't expect to receive anything from God because we haven't put in enough "work" to earn it. Both are a dead end.

However, if we recognize that God is not waiting for us to pray "well" or "enough" to earn His response, we will begin to see that in His generosity, *He* is seeking *us*. He is already near, and He is ready to offer His gifts and His presence to us. We just have to accept His invitation, even if we feel like we don't have much to offer or we have already wasted too much time. Our

experience of His generosity then makes coming to prayer feel a lot less like work, and we become less likely to “stand by idle” because we know how freely He gives.

Prayers of Intercession:

1. For all families, that they may truly be schools of prayer, where both adults and children are able to learn who God is and how to take advantage of His presence.
2. For all married couples, that they may be united in their experience of God’s providence and mercy.
3. For all families who are suffering because of brokenness or loss, that they may receive the comfort, strength, and healing promised by Christ.



FAMILY BLESSING

*We bless your name, O Lord,
for sending your own incarnate Son
to become part of a family,
so that, as he lived within its sufferings and its joys,
he would be present and provide newness of life
to all families.*

*We ask you, Lord,
to protect and watch over these families,
so that in the strength of your grace
and in the depth of your mercy
their members may enjoy prosperity,
possess the priceless gift of your peace,
and as the Church alive in the home,
bear witness in this world to your glory.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen*

[adapted from the Book of Blessings]

Meeting God in Our Home

Can we really encounter God in our homes?

God wants to meet us where we are, though we often only expect or even look for that encounter with Him at Sunday Mass or maybe on a retreat. It can be difficult to take those encounters and apply them to our lives at home in our marriages and families. It is easy to overlook the fact that we have daily opportunities to encounter Him in a *very real* way in the midst of our messiness and humanness at home. There are three ways in particular to take advantage of God's presence, and though they are certainly not new, most of us struggle with them: individual prayer, married couples' prayer, and family prayer.

Individual Prayer

We all know we need to pray, and we may have great ideas about how this could benefit us. If we are honest, it is often not how we envision it leading us to give up or subconsciously choose to avoid it.

Why is it so difficult?

- We want to find the "perfect time," but somehow that never comes! If we wait for a time each day when nothing is going on or we are not busy, we will never pray.
- If we are honest with ourselves, we usually do not want to pray—we are not really sure how to do it, though we feel like we should. On top of that, we spend lots of time and energy on something that, in our memory, without great results!



How can I get better?

- Be deliberate: Make prayer part of your daily routine. Set a time each day when you *will* pray for at least 15 minutes. Even if you miss that appointed time, decide that you will not go to bed without praying!
- Keep it simple: Do not get bogged down with structures or methods of prayer.

Remember, God just wants to hear from us, and He already understands us.

Couple Prayer

We desire intimacy with our spouse, and we often feel the desire to be on the same page spiritually, but praying with another person, one-on-one, can be difficult and awkward, even if it is the person we love the most. Why is that? The answer lies in the fact that entering into prayer together, before God, is the single most intimate thing a married couple can do!

Why is it so difficult?

- We are not used to praying with another person. Getting started is difficult because, more than anything, we may not know what to do, and even if we try to fake it, our spouses usually know better!
- Once we finally do consider getting started, we can be surprised that by praying together as spouses we experience the *most* intimate thing to do together, and we are uncomfortable with the new level of vulnerability.

“How precious is the family as the privileged place for transmitting the faith!” – Pope Francis

How can we get better?

- Start simple: There is no perfect “method” or structure of prayer. Just pray! Take turns thanking God for gifts in your lives, pray for the desires of your hearts, reflect on Scripture together and share your insights.
- Recommit to one another each day: The most important thing is that you pray together. Be faithful to the commitment and God will do the rest!

Family Prayer

We have all heard the saying “the family that prays together, stays together.” This is generally found to be true, but it can be much easier said than done.

Why is it so difficult?

- Spiritual leader or disciplinarian? With younger children, we may end up trying to keep them still the whole time making it feel pointless. With older kids, it may feel like a fight to keep them engaged.
- Schedules make finding time a challenge. There is homework, sports, band, ballet, not to mention dinner and bath time. Families today are rarely all in the same place at the same time.

How can we get better?

- Be perfectly imperfect: Little ones will bounce around. Try including them by giving them a role. Let them “lead” whatever part they know best, or ask them what they’re thankful for or who they want God to bless, etc.
- Be open: Ask everyone in the family, especially older children, to offer some thought on a

Scripture passage, or just to offer any spontaneous prayer they desire.

- Church as Guide: Keep family prayer time moving with the life of the Church. Include ritual prayers or songs, but try to gear it towards the appropriate liturgical season. Advent and Lent are great times to get started!



Looking for more inspiration?

The Church in the Home is a weekly radio program heard in New Orleans and Baton Rouge on Catholic Community Radio (690am New Orleans, 1380am Baton Rouge).

David Dawson, Chris O’Neill, and Timmy McCaffery of the Archdiocese of New Orleans Family Life Apostolate discuss the often exasperating yet exhilarating experience of marriage and family and the effort to take advantage of God’s gifts and presence within the home. Great guests, intense topics, and hilarious stories make *The Church in the Home* something to look forward to every week.

Listen live Thursdays at 3:30 pm on WQNO AM 690 in New Orleans and access the archived shows at <http://churchinthehome.podbean.com/>.





Celebrating Family Day as a Parish Family

At Sunday Mass:

- Homily focused on family (suggestions included in packet)
- Prayers of the Faithful (suggestions included in packet)
- Blessing of Families at the end (example included in packet)
- Have families involved in liturgical ministry together (lectors, servers, gift bearers, ushers)
- Announcements specifically about marriage and family programming available at the parish (include those for enriching families and those to provide healing for broken families).
- Highlight landmark marriage anniversaries at all Masses.

With a parish event between or after Masses on Sunday:

- Food:
 - Picnic, grilled hamburgers and hot dogs, chili cook-off
- Activities:
 - games for kids, bounce houses, family competitions (relay races, etc.) for prizes, Bingo, karaoke, horseback riding, raffles, Face painting, crafts
- Booths for marriage and family ministries, programs in the parish for those who are interested.

Helpful materials:

- Articles in the parish bulletin and on the website focused on marriage and family either the week before or the week after.
- Utilize bulletin insert (included) not only in the bulletin, but in online resources and with other forms of communication such as in the folders of Catholic school and PSR students.

Please let us know what parish plans for Family Day 2017 by emailing familylife@arch-no.org or by calling (504) 861-6243. Additionally, remember to share photos of your events in your parish bulletin, on your website and through social media. If you share your photos on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, use #NOLACatholicFamilyDay17 to share the good news!