

Family Prayer

Getting the children, the rest of the family, and even ourselves to Sunday Mass can sometimes be such an effort that the idea of adding other times of prayer to our weekly routine might seem like utter madness!

Yet if we can do that it helps give a context to the place of Sunday Mass in our lives. It can help to show that prayer is something we do, rather than something others do and we go to - which is how Mass can sometimes seem to people, and not only the very young. It can help familiarise us with some of the things we do at Mass, so that when we do them there they are more meaningful. It can also help us to deepen our awareness of the spiritual dimension of our lives as a family — that even parents have things to say sorry about and to thank God for; that we all have need to listen to God's word and learn again and again of how we are to live faithful lives.

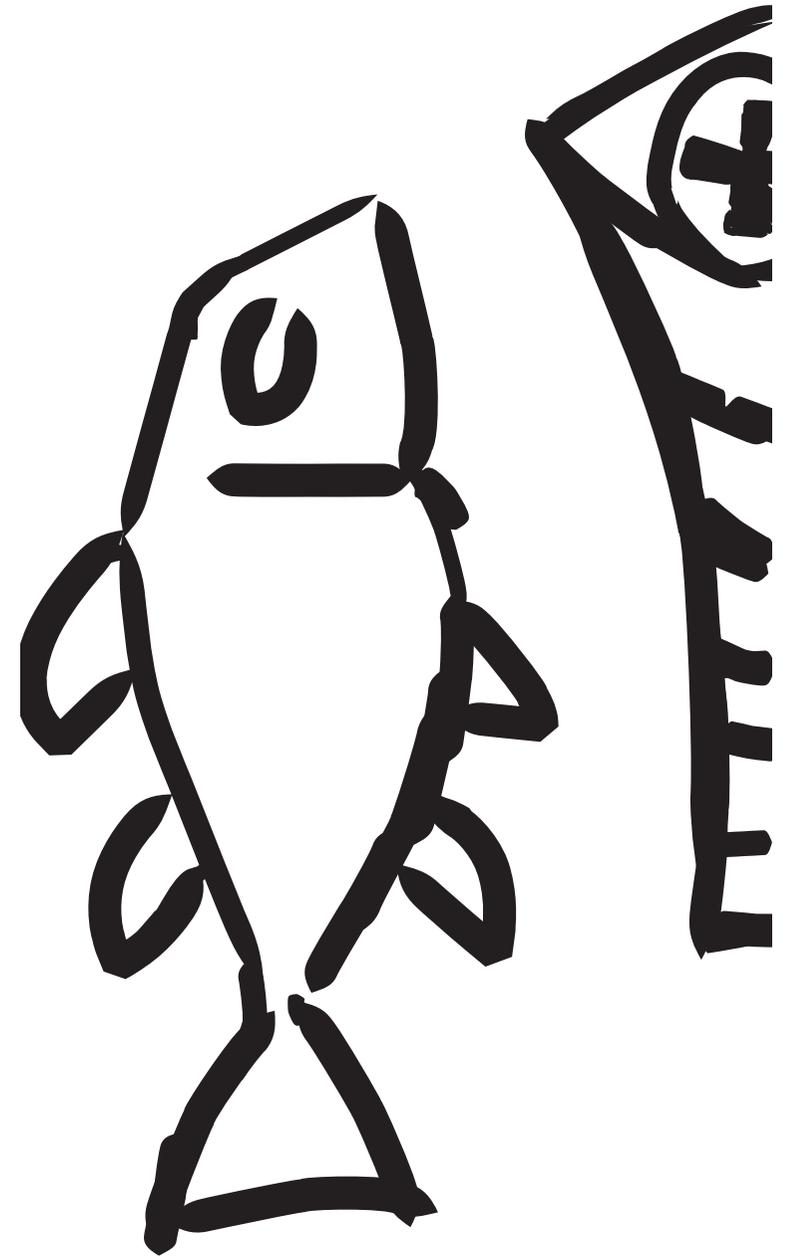
This will be something some families already do, and do it well. Others will find the weekly suggestions offered in these leaflets find a ready place in the life of the family. Still others will find it awkward and quite a challenge — one or other member of the family might object; it may all feel strange and awkward. Give it a go — and what proves helpful stay with, what does not prove helpful let go of. Nothing should be forced, prayer should always be something we choose to take part in.

The patterns of prayer provided over these weeks are intended to be simple and straightforward. But for anyone it may take a while to feel at home with them. Don't be afraid to change them where you think it would be helpful.

The following prayer is offered for your own use, asking for God to help you in your ministry as parent. You might like also to use it to pray for other parents in your parish. It is based on a prayer of blessing for parents used at the celebration of Baptism:

God our Father,
you are the giver of all life, human and divine.
Pour out your blessing on me and my family.
May we grow strong together in the ways of faith.
May your Spirit lead us into the ways of faith,
helping us to help each other
by the way we live our lives together,
in the things we do and the things we say.
We ask this through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

In Communion with Christ 1. Introduction



Looking at the Mass

This is the first of a series of six leaflets prepared for parents of young families. It is a complementary series of leaflets to those provided for the rest of the parish, as it takes part in the *In Communion With Christ* programme. That programme is intended to help the whole parish reflect on the Mass we celebrate together week after week: how it is structured, how we take part in each of the parts of the Mass, and how the various parts of the Mass connect with our daily lives.

This additional series of leaflets has been prepared especially for parents of young families to assist you with the often challenging responsibility of introducing your children to the ways of faith.

Each week there will be a section which describes the particular part of the Mass which is focused on by *In Communion with Christ*. You will find this description in these middle pages of the leaflet, in the two outside columns. The middle section of the page will offer some reflections on two symbols or aspects of the celebration of Mass, and how they relate to life. The back page of the leaflet

In Communion with Christ

Sunday

Sunday is the first day of the week. It is the day when Jesus rose from the dead. The Church has always come together on Sunday to remember and celebrate that he died for us and rose again so that we can share in his new life.

The idea that Sunday is the first day of the week is something we share with our Jewish ancestors – though for many of us Monday feels more like the beginning of the week. The Church also retains the Jewish understanding of the day beginning at the previous nightfall. Hence why some parishes have Sunday Mass on a Saturday evening.

It is a challenge for many of us to make something of Sunday — to set it apart from the rest of the week. For families getting everyone ready to go to church can be quite an effort. The experience of that effort and stress may be not always the best preparation for our own participation at Mass. The efforts families have to make may often not be understood by those without families.

It is worth reflecting on the ways in which Sunday is different to the rest of week.

This leaflet for parents of young families is one of a series of resources produced by the Liturgy Office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to assist parishes reflect on their celebration of the Eucharist in the light of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Celebrating the Mass and Leaflet © 2005 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Other resources are available from www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources

It maybe a day when parents don't go to work and everyone is together, or a day for visiting relatives and friends. A day, obviously, for going to Mass but also a day for a walk in the country or the park. The Sunday roast and the Sunday newspapers. There is a danger in our contemporary society it can seem a day like any other.

In his letter *Dies Domini—On keeping the Lord's Day holy* Pope John Paul wrote that keeping Sunday holy cannot be reduced to sharing in the Eucharist. We are invited to shape the whole day 'in such a way that the peace and joy of the Risen Lord will emerge in the ordinary events of life. For example, the relaxed gathering of parents and children can be an opportunity to listen to one another but also to share a few formative and reflective moments.' (DD 52)

What moments do we find to relax together?

Is there a place for family prayer at the start or end of Sunday?

**Liturgy
Office**
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offers a simple pattern of prayer that you might use at home as a family. Some are suitable for use each week as preparation or follow-up to the family's taking part in Sunday Mass. Others might be used daily as prayer before meals or at night, at bed-time.

Because this series of leaflets is very much focused on family prayer and helping you engage younger children, you might also like to take a copy of the regular leaflet for your own benefit as an adult member of the parish.

It is not always easy as a parent bringing younger children to Mass. Perhaps you sometimes feel you have had more than your fair share of tuts and disapproving looks from others if the children have made noise during Mass. Sometimes it might seem easier not to bother. But it is good that you continue to do all that you can to introduce your children to the prayer of the Church. Learning to pray the Mass is a tremendous benefit for the Catholic Christian. It is the foundation for our life in Christ.

It is our hope that these leaflets will support you in all that you try to do.