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BLESS US, O LORD

Prayers for Meals and Family Experiences





✦ SOUTH DINING HALL ✦

“We sittin’ right-right or left-left?” To onlookers, this might have sounded like a tired political debate, but to many Notre Dame undergrads, it meant the difference between a good meal at South Dining Hall and a lonely one. Sure, we went there for our favorite stir-fry dish, latest panini creation, or the unlimited cereal buffet, but we also went with a hunger decidedly deeper and more insatiable than that for which our taste buds longed. We need only recall the anxiety we felt when we lost our friends amidst the vast sea of diners to recognize that we craved much more than our abundantly filled trays could satisfy.

Oh, if those faithful troops of ready tables and chairs, wise and weathered witnesses to years of human hunger, could tell their tales of all we brought to their ranks . . . heaping helpings of heartbreaks and breakthroughs; last-minute cramming and endless laughing fits; fall break insights and spring break slip-ups; weekend anecdotes and daily dining-hall crushes; generous sides of fear and goodness, topped with ripe insecurity, and finished with refreshing hints of faith and hope; all hold the rich vulnerability and unpalatable trust.

Every Sunday brunch, I sat right-right with the other members of the Folk Choir at the raised head table, under the gaze of the Last Supper mural. What did that sacred table above have to do with our messy one below? Absolutely everything, if only we could have taken it in, the way we did our “Yo Cream” with sprinkles.

Colleen Moore, '97, '04 MDiv
Center for Catechetical Initiatives

❖ FATHER, SON, SPIRIT, HOLY ❖

Dinner hour, and I sit down to table with my wife and three small children, ready to talk turkey. Today it is my youngest son's turn for grace, and he starts us off with the Sign of the Cross. He has a unique take on this act, as in so many other aspects of his life: not unlike a third-base coach, he makes a flurry of motions, touching forehead, belly, shoulders, nose, temples, ears, and (finally) tongue, all the while chanting, at a terrific pace, Father, Son, Spirit, Holy.

As usual, he sends his family into stitches, and after a while we bring him around to a slightly more orthodox Sign of the Cross, but as his mother and sister and brother recover from the giggles and set to work eating their meals, his father's mind, as usual, rambles. Whence came this unusual motion of the hand, and incantation? Why do we mark moments great and small, holy and horrendous, with this gentle hand-made echo of the crucifix? Father, Son, Holy Ghost, I whispered as a boy, and Father, Son, Holy Spirit, I whisper as a man, in moments of joy and fear, prayer and penitence, before a meal, during the Mass, after a death. I make the Sign of the Cross in wonder, when my children do or say something that slaps me into remembering they came to me from the hand of the Lord. I make the sign in gratitude when they finally fall asleep. I make it in desperate prayer when they are wan and weak and sick. I make it before meals, during Masses, after funerals, after baptisms; I make it in awe and epiphany and tragedy.

Scholars trace the practice as far back as the year 110, by which time it was already established as a common gesture among



Christians. Those early Christians honored, in a simple physical gesture, the geometric shape on which Christ gave his life for us. It is a small miracle, perhaps, that this gesture has persisted unchanged throughout many nations and centuries; but then again miracles are not unusual, are they?

Such a simple act, our hands cutting the air like the wings of birds, fingers alighting gently on our bodies in memory of the body broken for us.

Father, we say, touching our heads, the seats of our cerebrations, and we think of the Maker, that vast incomprehensible coherence stitching everything together, and

Son, touching our hearts, and feeling the ache and exhaustion of the Father's Son, the God-made-man, the gaunt, dusty, tireless fellow who walked and talked endlessly through the hills of Judea, who knew what would happen to him, who accepted it with amazing grace, who died crying out that we might live past death, and

Holy, touching the left shoulder, on which we carry hope, and

Spirit, touching the right shoulder, on which we carry love.

And the gesture is done, hanging in the air like a memory, its line traced on my body as if printed there by the thousands of times my hand has marked it.

Simple, powerful, poignant, the Sign of the Cross is a mnemonic device like the Mass, in which we sit down to table with each other and remember the Last Supper, or a baptism, where we remember John the Baptist's brawny arm pouring some of the Jordan River over Christ. So we remember the central miracle and paradox of the faith that binds us each to each: that we believe, against all evidence and sense, in life and love and light, in the victory of those things over death and evil and darkness. Such a ferocious and brave notion, to be hinted at by such a simple motion, and the gesture itself lasting perhaps all of four seconds.

Simple as the Sign of the Cross is, it carries a brave weight: it names the Trinity, celebrates the Creator, and brings home all the





power of faith to the brush of fingers on skin and bone. So do we, sometimes well and sometimes ill, labor to bring home our belief in God's love to the stuff of our daily lives, the skin and bone of this world—and the Sign of the Cross helps us to remember that we have a Companion on the road.

Brian Doyle, '78



PRAYERS FOR MEALS AND FAMILY EXPERIENCES



So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,
do everything for the glory of God.

—1 Corinthians 10:31

Our first prayers are learned not in church, but in the home. The family—whatever shape it may take—is, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, the “domestic church,” where children learn to pray. Before meals and before bedtime, we teach children to thank God for blessings bestowed and to ask for God’s presence during the good times and bad. There are so many special—and ordinary—times during everyday family life when adults can model prayerfulness for their children. But sometimes they are the ones teaching us.





Traditional Prayers before Meals

Bless us, O Lord,
and these thy gifts,
which we are about to receive
from thy bounty.
Through Christ our Lord.

* * *

Thank you for the food we eat,
Thank you for the world so sweet,
Thank you for the birds that sing,
Thank you God for everything.

* * *

God is great, God is good.
Let us thank him for our food.
By his hands, we are fed.
Let us thank him for our bread.

* * *

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest,
Let this food to us be blessed.

Children's Grace

Dear God,
I gratefully bow my head
to thank you for my daily bread,
And may there be a goodly share
on every table everywhere.

Simple Prayers of Love and Delight



Irish Grace

May this food restore our strength,
giving new energy to tired limbs,
new thoughts to weary minds.

May this drink restore our souls,
giving vision to dry spirits,
new warmth to cold hearts.

And once refreshed,
may we give new pleasure to you,
who gives us all.

Graces with a Celtic Flavor

*The most important thing a father
can do for his children is to love their mother.*

Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President Emeritus of the University of Notre Dame

Latin American Grace

O God, to those who have hunger give bread,
to those who have bread give the hunger for justice.

Bread Blessing

Lord Jesus Christ, you live and are king forever.
Bread of angels, Bread of everlasting life,
be so kind as to bless this bread
as you blessed the five loaves in the desert,





that all who taste of it may through it
receive health of body and soul.

Roman Ritual

Remembering the Hungry

For food in a world where many walk in hunger;
for faith in a world where many walk in fear;
for friends in a world where many walk alone;
we give you thanks, O Lord.

Huron Hunger Fund

*The family is the “domestic church” where
God’s children learn to pray “as the church”
and to persevere in prayer.*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Grace after Meals

We give you thanks, almighty God,
for these and all your blessings;
you live and reign for ever and ever.

Birthday Blessing for an Adult

Loving God, source of all life,
we give you thanks for the gift of life you have given us.
Hear the prayers of [name]
who today celebrates the day of his/her birth
and the gift of life that he/she shares
with family and friends.





Surrounded with your loving presence,
may he/she enjoy many more years
to praise you
and to share your love with others.
Grant us this through Christ our Lord.

A Prayer Book for Catholic Families

Birthday Blessing for a Child

Loving God,
you have created each of us
and enfold us in your love.
You have called us each by name
and constantly care for us.
Look with favor on your child, [name],
who begins another year of life.
Bless him/her with the joy of your love and friendship.
Give him/her the strength of your grace
that he/she may share your love with family and friends
throughout the coming year.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

A Prayer Book for Catholic Families

Prayer for Anniversary of Adoption Day

Today we remember with gratitude
the day [name] joined our family,
even though it seems like you have been with us forever.

Today we remember with gratitude
those who cared for you before we did,
who kept you safe and healthy and ready for your new family.





Today we remember with gratitude
the agencies and government workers
who assisted us in the long process of becoming a family.

Today we remember with gratitude
your first parents, your birthmother and birthfather,
who gave you the gift of life.

Today we remember with gratitude
the loving God who brought us together
and who continues to bless this family.

Heidi Schlumpf, '88

*As our body cannot live without nourishment, so our soul
cannot spiritually be kept alive without prayer.*

St. Augustine

Prayer for Families

Dear Lord, keep our family in your divine protection.
Increase our compassion for one another;
give us hearts full of mercy and forgiveness.
Let us speak from a place of love when we share our concerns
with our parents, brothers, and sisters.
Never let a day pass by that we fail to say “I love you.”
Increase our gratitude for our gifts and talents
and never let jealousy or a diminished self-esteem
cause us to negatively compare ourselves with family members.
Help our family be your presence to the underserved
and grant us your life-sustaining peace.

Kathleen M. Sullivan, '82 MA, '87 PhD





A Prayer for Parents on Challenging Days

All knowing God,
Help me to stop and breathe when a tough moment arises with
my child.
Bless me with more patience and awareness when I'm being
impatient.
Remind me that my temporary bad mood and harsh words
could create a permanent bad memory for my child.
Forgive me when I get it wrong, and help me to do better.
Also, help me to forgive myself.
Give me the knowledge that taking a little time out for myself
will make me a better parent,
and that laughter truly is the best medicine.
Most of all, thank you for giving me the wonderful gift of a
child,
even on those challenging days.

Paula J. Biedenharn, '89 MA, '94 PhD

Prayer for Parenting a Special-Needs Child

Dear Lord,
My heart is so tender before you.
At times, the challenges can feel so heavy,
the constant care can be emotionally exhausting and lonely.
Help me to see [*name's*] limitations as limitless opportunities
for me to find strength and courage in you.
Help [*name's*] disability to become my ability
to serve you in such a profound way.
Help me to see through your eyes
the incredible blessing
that you have created him/her to be.

Penny Hanlon

Notre Dame Alumni Association





Searching for a Life Partner

Divine Lover,
you created me to love and be loved.
I desire this love intensely and search for it eternally.
Bless my search for this love as I date.
May I always remember that only you
can fulfill my every desire,
and that love is an active decision.

I ask you to be present and central in my relationships.
Keep my focus on growing closer to you
by growing to love another.
May my love for another mirror your love for me.
Guide me away from the temptations of the flesh
and towards purity.
Allow me to trust,
and help me to always remain trustworthy.

Lead me to desire what is best for those I date
over anything I want from them
and from our relationship.
Remind me always that you have a plan for me,
greater than I could ever imagine.
In your name I pray.

John Sengenberger, '04

Prayer for Loved Ones

The winter will lose its cold,
as the snow will be without whiteness,
the night without darkness,
the heavens without stars,
the day without light.





The flower will lose its beauty,
all fountains their water,
the sea its fish,
the tree its birds,
the forest its beasts,
the earth its harvest—
all these things will pass before
anyone breaks the bonds of our love,
and before I cease caring for you in my heart.
May your days be happy in number as flakes of snow,
may your nights be peaceful,
and may you be without troubles.

Matthew of Rievaulx

A Biblical Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you!
The Lord let his face shine upon you,
and be gracious to you!
The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!

Numbers 6:24–26

Parenting Prayer

Gracious God,
you have honored me with the gift and responsibility of children.
At times I feel inadequate to the task—
unprepared to manage the challenges that spring up at every
stage.
I am in awe of my children,
and of you for entrusting them to me,
and I desire to be the best parent I can be to them.





Fill me with patience and wisdom,
and give me delight and wonder at the miracle that is before me.
Help me to always remember that despite my own shortcomings
or the trials that parenting can bring,
my greatest gift is my steadfast love,
and my strongest ally is you.
I ask this for the sake of your love.

Renee Miller

Single Parent's Prayer

Lord, grant me
time enough
to do all the chores,
join in the games,
help with the lessons,
and say the night prayers,
and still have a few moments left over for me.

Lord, grant me
energy enough
to be bread-baker and breadwinner,
knee-patcher and peacemaker,
ball player and bill juggler.

Lord, grant me
hands enough
to wipe away the tears,
to reach out when I'm needed,
to hug and to hold,
to tickle and touch.

Lord, grant me
heart enough





to share and to care,
to listen and to understand,
and to make a loving home for my family.

Home Blessing

At the entrance:

O God, protect our going out and our coming in;
Let us share the hospitality of this home
with all who visit us,
that those who enter here may know your love and peace.

In the living room:

O God, give your blessings to all who share this room,
that we may be knit together in companionship.

In the kitchen:

O God, you fill the hungry with good things.
Send your blessing on us, as we work in this kitchen,
and make us ever thankful for our daily bread.

In the dining room:

Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth,
for you give us food and drink to sustain our lives
and make our hearts glad.
Help us to be grateful for all your mercies,
and mindful of the needs of others.

In the bedrooms:

Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake;
watch over us as we sleep,
that awake we may keep watch with Christ,
and asleep, we may rest in his peace.



In the bathroom:

Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth.
You formed us in wisdom and love.
Refresh us in body and in spirit,
and keep us in good health that we might serve you.

Be our shelter, Lord, when we are at home,
our companion when we are away,
and our welcome guest when we return.
And at last receive us into the dwelling place
you have prepared for us in your Father's house,
where you live for ever and ever.

Adapted from *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*

Blessing of Children

May the Lord keep you
and make you grow in his love,
so that you may live worthy of the calling he has given you,
now and forever.

Book of Blessings

Parents' Prayer for a Hurting Child

Heavenly Father—Abba,
we praise you and glorify your name.
Thank you for the gift of your Spirit,
who strengthens us in this time of sorrow and pain.
Thank you for your son, Jesus,
who suffered even greater pain for us.
We ask you to protect our child.
Guide [name] while he/she is imprisoned





physically, psychologically, or emotionally.

Let [name] experience your love and your healing grace
so he/she can believe in his/her lovability and goodness.

Help [name] accept your son, Jesus, into his/her life.

We know you hear our prayers, Father,

for you have answered us previously in so many ways!

We ask you this in your Son's name.

Kathy and Kevin Misiewicz

Mendoza College of Business

The family that prays together stays together.

Patrick Peyton, C.S.C.

Chinese Prayer for Parents

When I behold the sacred *liao wo** my thoughts return
to those who begot me, raised me, and now are tired.

I would repay the bounty they have given me,
but it is as the sky: it can never be approached.

*a species of grass symbolizing parenthood

Prayer on a Wedding Anniversary

Lord, you worked your first sign,
a joyful one of abundant and good wine,
at a wedding feast,
to show how you delight in married life.

We thank you for the gift of this vocation,
this sacrament, this life together.

May the years be multiplied,
and their joys ever more so.





May this marital love be a true witness
to your love for us, your Church.
May the graces of this marriage help us to attain
the eternal nuptial feast in your Kingdom.

We praise and thank you,
with your Father and Holy Spirit,
this day and always.

The Abbey Prayer Book

Prayer for Mother's Day

I offer a prayer for Mother's Day today.
This is who it is for:

It is for all the mothers in this room, in this city,
across this continent, and in every land around this planet.

It is for the mothers whose homes resound with children's
laughter,
screeching toys, loud music, or the sullen teenage shrug.
It is for the mothers who gave birth in joy or in agony or in grief.

It is for the mothers who have adopted the motherless
and discovered how wide love can reach;
and it is for the mothers who have given over their children to
others.

This prayer is for all the women who have wished to be mothers
and are not.

It is for all the mothers whose children have ever gone off to war,
for the worry they endure and the tension they carry through
every hour of absence.





It is for the mothers whose children return whole and unscathed, or who return wounded in mind or body, or who do not return at all.

It is for all the mothers who grieve—
lost pregnancies, lost children, lost hopes, lost futures.

And this is my prayer:

May peace come to you.

Peace amid the noise and chaos of active children

Peace amid the silence and the absence.

Peace with the choices you have made,
the paths taken and the ones not taken.

Peace with the grief you have endured.

May peace come to you,

and may you greet it and welcome it,
and make a place for it to live within you.

May peace find a home in you,

and from that home, may peace venture widely over this earth.

Jill Ann Terwilliger

Prayer for Father's Day

Let us praise those fathers who have striven to balance the demands of work, marriage, and children with an honest awareness of both joy and sacrifice.

Let us praise those fathers who, lacking a good model for a father, have worked to become a good father.

Let us praise those fathers who by their own account were not always there for their children, but who continue to offer those children, now grown, their love and support.



Let us pray for those fathers who have been wounded by the neglect and hostility of their children.

Let us praise those fathers who, despite divorce, have remained in their children's lives.

Let us praise those fathers whose children are adopted, and whose love and support has offered healing.

Let us praise those fathers who, as stepfathers, freely chose the obligation of fatherhood and earned their stepchildren's love and respect.

Let us praise those fathers who have lost a child to death, and continue to hold the child in their heart.

Let us praise those men who have no children, but cherish the next generation as if they were their own.

Let us praise those men who have "fathered" us in their role as mentors and guides.

Let us praise those men who are about to become fathers; may they openly delight in their children.

And let us praise those fathers who have died, but live on in our memory and whose love continues to nurture us.

Kirk Loadman-Copeland





Prayer for Military Families

Almighty Father, watch over my family,
encourage them when we are separated during deployments,
and give them health of mind and body
that they may serve you with perfect love
until the day when we,
with all who have served you,
will rejoice in your presence for ever.

Armed with the Faith

Prayer for Grandparents Raising a Grandchild

Dear God,

We thank you for the gift and the challenge to parent our
grandchild.

We do not understand every experience in our lives
nor the full extent of your divine purpose.

What we do know, however, is your promise to remain always
faithful to us.

We pray for your continued guidance, patience, and strength
to do what you have called us to do.

And we pray that our efforts
in parenting this young life will be fruitful.

Janet and Pete Miller

Notre Dame Alumni Association



Prayer for Family Reunion

We bless your name, O Lord,
for sending your own incarnate Son,
to become part of a family,
so that, as he lived his life,
he would experience its worries and its joys.

We ask you, Lord,
to protect and watch over this family,
so that in the strength of your grace
its 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.

Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers

