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Meals Have Meaning

Jesus ate and drank with others: The gospels often describe meals that Jesus shared with other people:

- *Sinners.* When he was accused of eating with sinners and outcasts, he replied that he came to save sinners.
- *Feeding large crowds.* Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes to feed the crowds who listened to him.
- *Last Supper.* On the night before he died, Jesus held a final meal with his apostles, and gave us his body and blood to be our spiritual food in the Eucharist.
- *After rising from the dead,* Jesus ate with his close followers, who recognized him as their risen Lord.

Our family meals should be joyful moments when we relax with the ones we love most. Mealtime should not be a period for complaining, arguing, correcting or scolding, but rather a time of joy and peace.

- Sign of God's love. Each meal is a further sign that God loves us. He shares the enjoyable things of his creation with us, his beloved children.
- Source of strength. We are nourished by our meals so that we may continue to build God's kingdom and work for his glory.
- Jesus is with us when we sit down for our meal. He is both our guest and our host. Some families light a candle — on Sundays and special occasions or at every meal — as a reminder that Jesus is present.
- Special meaning. Christians continue to see the deeper meaning of their meals together. They are a reminder of our sharing with Jesus and with one another in the Eucharist, and of our faith that we will share one day in the heavenly messianic banquet.

Grace Before a Meal

Praise and thanks: The word "grace" means thanks.

- *Praising God.* We praise him and thank him for creation, for our life, and for our family and friends.
- *Blessing food.* We praise God over this food, asking him to bless it for our use. We also pray for ourselves, for our families and for others, especially for people who are without enough food.

Some forms of grace

*Heavenly Father,
we praise you for your kindness to us.
Bless + this food,*

and bless + us in your service.

*Father, we ask this blessing
through Jesus our Lord. Amen!*

or:

*Lord Jesus, our brother,
we praise you for saving us.
Bless + us in your love
as we gather in your name,
and bless + this meal that we share.*

Jesus, we praise you for ever. Amen!

or:

*Father of us all,
this meal is a sign of your love for us:
bless + us and bless + our food,
and help us to give you glory each day
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!*

Variations: We can sing a verse of a hymn of praise or all may say the prayer together. We can pray simply in silence. All may make the sign of the cross on themselves or over the food. We may take turns in leading the prayer and in preparing prayers in our own words.

Grace After a Meal

Giving thanks: We end our meal by praising and thanking God our Father.

- *For food.* God has given us this food and enjoyment because he loves us.
- *For friendship.* God has given us family and friends to share his love with us. We thank him for giving us as his gifts to one another.
- *For all other gifts.* We thank our holy Father for making us, for loving us, for sending us Jesus as our brother, and for all the gifts he has shared with us today.

Some examples:

*Loving Father, we praise you
for all the gifts you give us:
for life and health,
for faith and love,
and for this meal we have shared together.*

Father, we thank you through Christ our Lord.

Amen!

or:

*Thank you, Father, for your gifts:
help us to love you more. Amen!*

or:

*Father, we thank you for your love,
and for giving us food and drink.
Help us to praise you today
in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen!*

Variety: We may vary our way of praying after meals, adapting it to the occasion, as described for grace before eating.

A reminder: St. Paul reminds us:

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

(1 Corinthians 10.31)

Special Times

Some days are special in our religious calendar. We may adapt our meal prayers on these occasions.

Sunday is the Lord's day, when we praise the Father for raising Jesus and making him our king. In a prayer to the Father, we could praise him for raising Jesus from the dead and ask for help to live up to our baptismal promises. Some families may read the Sunday gospel passage and base their form of grace on it. We can also make our Lord's day meal prayer special by praying a psalm of praise, such as Psalm 8 or Psalm 117.

Friday: On this day we remember that Jesus freely gave up his life to save us from sin and to give us a share in God's own life. Our meal prayers may include thanks to the Father for sending his Son to save us, or to Jesus for obeying to the point of death in order to open eternal life to us. We may also show our gratitude to Jesus by doing an act of penance or mercy this day, or by giving alms to the needy.

Liturgical year: Our meal prayers may also reflect the spirit of each season.

- *Advent.* Waiting in joy and hope, and making a straight path for the Lord Jesus in our lives.

- *Christmas*. Rejoicing that Jesus our saviour is always with us.
- *Lent and Holy Week*. Working with Jesus to overcome sin in our lives.
- *Easter season*. Rejoicing that Jesus has conquered sin and helps us to share this victory.

- *Ordinary time*. Asking that we may always eat and drink and do everything for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10.31).

Family Celebrations

We may also use a special form of grace at meals when our family is celebrating special days.

- *Birthday*. We thank God for the person who is celebrating this day.
- *Anniversaries* of baptism, of marriage or of other special events. We thank God for his gifts to us.
- *Patron saints*. On the feast of patrons of family members, of our parish, diocese or country, we may add a prayer to our patron.
- *Family reunions*, picnics, barbecues. As we rejoice together, we thank God for sharing his love with our family.
- *Other days*. We may include a special petition in our meal prayers on other days: the beginning of vacation, the start of the school year, on civil holidays and other special times.

Guests: When guests are present for a meal in your home, say grace as you usually do. They will respect you for your devotion and for allowing them to share in it and may even be moved by your example to begin or return to meal prayers in their own home.

Family tradition: Each family may develop its own way of offering meal prayers. If you do not say grace, use this leaflet to help you begin now. If you do pray grace, see if there are ways in which you may develop and personalize this prayer in your home.

Does your family pray at mealtimes? Can you together improve and grow in your prayer?

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