12 Thanksgiving prayer ideas

1. Attend Mass before the meal

Did you know that the word *Eucharist* literally means “gratitude” or “thanksgiving”? Giving God thanks is at the heart of what we do whenever we go to Mass, so there’s no more appropriate way to incorporate thanks into your day than to start by giving thanks at the table of the Lord.

2. Read the day’s Scripture readings at your meal

The Scripture readings for Thanksgiving in the United States offer a beautiful text to read before your meal. You can find the full readings here.

3. Pray a big blessing over your food

An improvised meal blessing is always nice, but if you don’t like being put on the spot, try one of these formal Thanksgiving blessings instead. You might consider printing out copies for all of your guests, too.

In Thanksgiving for Blessings Unknown
A beautiful printable Thanksgiving prayer from Catholic Relief Services.

A Thanksgiving Table Blessing
A short Thanksgiving service that can be adapted for home use.

4. A thankful table runner

Purchase a white table runner and encourage your guests to write notes about what they’re most thankful for from the past

year on it; provide multi-colored Sharpie markers for that purpose.

You can read the notes as part of your table blessing prayer. Save the runner so you can add more notes next year, or write the year on it and store it away as a keepsake that can be displayed at future Thanksgivings.

If you don't like the idea of marking up an expensive table runner, consider purchasing one at a dollar store, or use inexpensive place mats, or substitute paper for cloth.

5. Read a presidential Thanksgiving proclamation

Every year, the president of the United States issues a Thanksgiving proclamation. You can read this year's proclamation (posted at the White House website), or one from years past:

- Thanksgiving Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln
- Thanksgiving Proclamations: This last link, from the Pilgrim Hall Museum, includes every formal Thanksgiving proclamation in the history of the United States.

6. Thankful for You Place Mats

Put each guest's name on an inexpensive paper place mat at his or her place. Encourage family members or guests to write brief notes on each place mat about why they are thankful for that particular person. Young children can be encouraged to draw pictures, too.

Your kids (and cantankerous adults) might need some gentle guidance to ensure that everyone gets a nice note.

7. Keep a family gratitude journal to read at Thanksgiving

This idea takes some advance planning. Keep a list or journal of all that your family is thankful for, incorporating the process into your family meal or prayer time. ("What are we thankful for today?") If your kids have trouble coming up with new things to be thankful for, try doing talking about the highs and lows of their day first. Then incorporate the list into your Thanksgiving meal prayer.

8. Make a gratitude mural

There are many ways to make a gratitude mural that can double as decoration for your Thanksgiving meal:

- Throw some large pieces of poster board on a wall, provide washable crayons, and encourage the kids to write and draw what they are thankful for. For better results, put the poster board up a few days early so they have more time to work on it.
- Using colored construction paper, cut out leaves for guests to write what they're thankful for, then tape the leaves to a "tree."
- Use dry erase markers to write messages of thanks on a large window or mirror.
- Use sidewalk chalk to write notes of gratitude all over the sidewalk and street outside of your house.

9. Try a litany of Thanksgiving

Do we make giving thanks to the Lord a regular part of our routine? Check out Gretchen R. Crowe's litany of Thanksgiving.

10. Invite the poor to your meal

The *Book of Blessings* offers this interesting instruction on the table blessing:

As they gather at table and see in the food they share a sign of God's blessings on them, Christians should be mindful of the poor, who lack even the bare minimum of food that those at table may have in abundance. By their moderation they will therefore try to provide help for the hungry and as a sign of Christ's love will on occasion invite the poor to their own table, in keeping with the words of Christ recorded in the Gospel (see Luke 14:13-14). Book of Blessings #1034

Christ taught that care of the poor was essential to Christian life—in fact, essential for entering the Kingdom of Heaven (Luke 16:19-31; Matthew 25:31-46), and countless saints have made care of the poor the center of their ministry. Since Jesus made meals with the poor and marginalized a regular part of his proclamation of the Kingdom, it makes sense that we would imitate him by doing the same in our own homes.

Think, too, of Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving before blessing the bread that he multiplied and shared with the crowd (John 6).

Since it is so pleasing to God that we share our bounty with those in need, extending Thanksgiving hospitality to others is a great way to give him thanks for all we have.

You may not feel comfortable inviting someone from the street to your table for Thanksgiving dinner (although someday it would be worth a try), but you might invite a friend or neighbor who may not have any other place to celebrate Thanksgiving. Alternatively, volunteer to serve a Thanksgiving meal at your local church or charity (watch local media for locations and times of free Thanksgiving dinners)…or just show up and join the crowd. Your kids can provide a wonderful ministry of hospitality just by being themselves.

11. Tell about the role of Catholics in the first Thanksgiving

Tell your kids the story of the role of Catholics in the first American Thanksgiving. Did you know, for instance, that the first Thanksgiving on American soil was celebrated not by the Pilgrims, but by Spanish Catholics? (Also the second Thanksgiving.) Or that it was a Catholic (Squanto) who orchestrated the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving—despite the fact that the Calvinist Pilgrims were anti-Catholic? You can learn all about it from Taylor Marshall.

12. Let kids lead

Double bonus, and maybe the most important item on this list, in terms of family faith formation: Let your kids lead part of your family ritual for giving thanks.

The more they have a role, the more likely they are to take ownership of it…so let them lead a prayer, design a place mat, or say the blessing. You might just get a little preview of happy Thanksgivings to come!