Family prayer: Getting back in the swing of things

There are seven members in our family: me; my beautiful, devout wife; and our five kids. With our 1-year-old sleeping peacefully in her crib, the rest of us take our customary places around the living room: me and my wife on one end of the couch, with our 3-year-old on his mom's lap; our 9-year-old is splayed out on the other end; his brother, 13, laying on the floor (or on top of the dog); and our oldest, 15, tucked into the recliner, feet up.

Every night, we go around the room with our prayer intentions. When prompted, Grant, the 13-year-old, says the same thing: "I want to pray for everybody in the world except bad guys, all pets and animals, amen." When told he should be praying for even the bad guys, he amends his prayer to "especially bad guys," but the rest remains unchanged.

As parents, after a long day, we are striving for two things and two things only: peace and quiet. So, instead of properly honoring God through prayer, we parents hurry prayer along like we do everything else. We can approach prayer as another task to accomplish, like when the kids slowly tie their shoes, straggle getting into the car or linger at the dinner table, pushing peas around their plate. But God deserves more from us, and so do our families.

Back-to-School Prayer Tips

During this time of year, when we're getting back into the swing of packing lunches and unpacking book bags, we are also forming our daily routines and habits. Here are some ideas on how to spend quality time with God in prayer during hectic days and nights.

Mark it Down: While we fill the calendars on refrigerators

with volleyball practices, Scout meetings and PTA events, pencil in a Rosary once or twice a week and explain why we as Catholics need to keep Mary front and center in our lives. (Hint: Because Jesus did.)

Mix it Up: We all can get in a rut with our prayer life, but there are thousands of books and websites to help inspire you. From daily devotionals to family prayer books, find them and read (or pray) them as a family.

Give Thanks: Too often our prayers consist of a simple list of intentions – the sick and dying, vocations, our families, etc. While these are tremendously important, we need to teach our kids that prayer is more than a litany of wants. So thank Jesus, every day, and be specific in your gratitude.

On the Go: Praying in the car can be the easiest and most convenient way to fit prayer into a busy schedule. Find a CD or download an MP3 of the Divine Mercy Chaplet and pray along with it. Not only is it a beautiful prayer, it takes less than 10 minutes.

Bedtime Q & A: Let the kids pray for their individual intentions on their own once they climb into bed. Instead, pray the Our Father as a family and, afterward, have a short, nightly discussion on Church teaching. Your kids will have questions on why we believe what we believe. If you don’t know the answer, be honest, and then find it. Go through the Catechism of the Catholic Church together.