

Meditative prayer for Catholic kids: 10 ways to get started

This article is adapted from 77 Ways to Pray for Your Kids.

Meditation is one of the three “expressions of prayer” described by the *Catechism* (the others are vocal prayer and [Contemplative Prayer](#)).

Vocal prayer is usually the first way kids learn to pray as they begin to imitate and repeat the meal prayer, prayers during Mass, or prayers they memorize. As they grow older, kids (hopefully) learn to express their thoughts and feelings, hopes and desires in spontaneous prayers to God.

But too many kids are never introduced to meditative or contemplative forms of prayer, which is too bad, because then they miss out on the many fruits of those prayer forms. When those kids grow up, they may seek a deeper spirituality in other religious traditions without realizing that their Catholic faith has its own ancient tradition of meditation, contemplation, and mystical prayer.

Meditation is a prayerful quest for God “engaging thought, imagination, emotion, and desire” (Catechism #2723). We go out and seek God, usually by focusing our thoughts on some object: a Scripture text (as in *lectio divina* and imaginative prayer), a mystery of faith (as in the rosary), sacred art (such as a sacred icon), or even the natural world. Prayerful meditation is different from intellectual study or analysis of the Scripture, artwork, mystery of faith, or whatever the object of meditation might be. It is different because its goal is not to understand, grasp, or intellectually “possess” the object, but to use it as a sort of doorway through which one passes in order to meet God.

[Contemplative prayer](#) sometimes flows out of meditative prayer. If meditative prayer is about actively seeking God by meditating on something holy, then contemplative prayer might be described as letting God seek us. In contemplative prayer, we quiet our thoughts and become open and receptive to God's presence.

Parents are sometimes daunted by the prospect of teaching their kids meditative and contemplative prayer. For starters, both forms of prayer usually involve being still and quiet, which isn't most kids' strong point. Also, parents can easily evaluate the quality of their kids' vocal prayers; not so with meditative and contemplative prayer.

The good news is that it is possible for kids to learn these "quieter" forms of prayer. The Catholic Diocese of Townsville, Australia, offers a comprehensive website on teaching meditation and contemplation to children; check it out at cominghome.org.au. It offers ample evidence that it is possible to teach kids these important forms of prayer.

It's also possible to evaluate your kids' meditation experience by processing with them afterward. During this processing you can share your experience and invite your child to share his or hers. You can also coach your child. Don't expect overnight proficiency, and don't worry about "off" days. For the first few months or years (depending on the child), you may have more "strikes" than "hits." Just remember that even if your child's meditative prayer looks fruitless, you are planting seeds that may sprout down the road in their life.

A Simple Process for Meditation

The meditation that follows is a method that has been practiced by Christian masters of prayer throughout the history of the Church. For other methods of meditation, see

our articles on [Lectio Divina](#), [Imaginative Prayer](#), and [Meditation on Sacred Art](#), as well as the [Rosary](#).

Plan on meditating for about five minutes with younger children (beginning about age five) and fifteen minutes with older children and teens.

1. If your family is new to Christian meditation, briefly describe it and preview these steps.
2. Invite your family to choose an invocation, or a holy word or phrase, to silently repeat throughout the meditation (see [Invocations: Super-short Prayers for When Life Gets Crazy](#)). Or suggest the invocation: "Come, Lord Jesus."
3. Invite your family to assume a comfortable (but respectful) posture, and to relax their bodies and minds.
4. Begin with a Call to Prayer such as [thirty seconds of silence](#), a bell, the sign of the cross, or the Lasallian prayer of presence.
5. Use these or similar words to begin the period of meditation.

Let's close our eyes and begin our meditation.

Silently repeat the invocation in your heart. It may help to picture God, or Jesus.

If you realize that you have stopped saying your invocation because your mind has wandered from your prayer, don't worry. Simply begin saying the invocation again.

If you feel engulfed in the presence of God, you may feel prompted to stop saying your invocation. That's okay; just give yourself over to God's presence.

We'll meditate for about __ minutes; I will let you know when our time of prayer is finished.

6. At the end of your period of prayer, close with a short prayer of thanksgiving and the Sign of the Cross.

9 more ways to do meditative prayer

There are many different ways to do meditative prayer, and you might want to introduce your child to several different forms. With older kids and teens, offer a short explanation of meditative prayer each time you try it, so that over time they begin to get a deep understanding of what they're aiming for. More spiritually mature kids might also benefit from hearing short readings from the saints and mystics about meditative prayer.

Here are a few strategies for meditative prayer that you can try with kids of any age; click through to the article (if available) for ways to adapt the method for children.

[Daily examen](#). The daily examen is a prayerful meditation that focuses on how God was present in the events of the day—and how we responded to God's presence. It's a hugely valuable prayer for spiritual growth. ["Highs and Lows"](#) is a family-friendly way of adapting the daily examen to the dinner table.

[Imaginative prayer](#). In Ignatian imaginative prayer, you prayerfully "enter" a particular scene from the Bible, using your imagination to interact with the people and environment and in many cases, entering into conversation with God or someone who speaks for God. It's a powerful form of meditation especially suited for children.

[Eucharistic adoration](#). Eucharistic adoration is a form of meditative prayer in itself, and many people spend part of their time during Eucharistic adoration meditating on sacred reading as well. Yes, you can take kids to Eucharistic adoration! In addition to reading about [strategies for doing Eucharistic adoration with kids](#), you might want to also read about Heidi Indahl's experience [doing Eucharistic adoration with an infant](#) and Becky Arganbright's experience of [praying for a home within biking distance to Eucharistic](#)

[adoration](#).

[Lectio divina](#). Lectio divina is an ancient way of praying with sacred reading, especially Scripture. In addition to the main lectio divina article, you may be interested in reading about [bite-sized biblical prayers](#), [sacred story time](#), and [answering the questions Jesus asks](#).

[Meditate on sacred art](#). Meditating on sacred art is an especially good introduction to imaginative meditation for children.

[Meditate in nature](#). Sometimes Christians are wary of nature-related prayer because of the connection to New Age practices as well as the well-worn trope that “nature is my Church.” However, many, many saints extol the natural world as another “book” that reveals God to us. Click through to the article for ways to place this type of meditation within a Catholic context.

[Rosary](#). The rosary is probably the single most familiar way of doing meditative prayer. However, in order for it to be a fruitful form of meditation for your kids, you will need to emphasize contemplation of the mysteries. Praying a Scriptural rosary can help in this regard, as can praying the rosary with sacred art (see [The Illuminated Rosary](#) for an excellent resource).

[Stations of the cross](#). The stations of the cross are yet another form of meditative prayer familiar to most Catholic families. Click through to the article for ideas about how to adapt it for children.

[Sung prayer](#). Song can be a form of meditation, depending on the music and the attitude of the singers. “Silly Songs with Larry” is not exactly meditative; instead, look for simple, repetitive liturgical music or praise and worship music. You might also explore Taize.

Learn More

Check out what the Church says about meditative prayer in [Catechism 2705–2708](#)