# Teach your kids to pray for the sick

What's the ritual in your family when someone gets sick? Breaking out the thermometer, giving medicine, making soup or tea, and setting up a humidifier might be part of that routine.

But what about prayer? After all, healing was a centerpiece of Jesus' ministry, and he commanded the apostles to heal the sick as well (Mark 16:17-18). In doing so, he was continuing a long tradition of petitioning God for healing from sickness. "My son, when you are ill, delay not, but pray to God, who will heal you," Sirach advises (Sirach 38:9).

So, don't hesitate to pray for kids when they're sick…or to encourage them to pray for other sick family members. Prepare ahead of time by keeping holy water in your medicine cabinet, along with a prayer for sickness. You can find numerous prayers for and blessings of the sick in Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, and you'll find two more prayers for the sick below.

Or say your own spontaneous prayer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Lay hands on the sick person, and consider blessing him or her with holy water.

And if a family member is seriously ill, about to have surgery, or in danger of death, check with your parish about having them receive the Sacrament of Anointing. Once popularly referred to as "Last Rites," the Sacrament of Anointing isn't just for people on the point of death (*Catechism* 1514).

## Talking points: Praying for healing

If you make praying for the sick a regular habit, sooner or later your kids will probably ask some questions about the practice. Here are some talking points to share with them:

- **Why does God allow sickness?** Sickness is part of the mystery of evil. It wasn't part of God's original plan for humanity, but is one of the consequences of original sin.
- **Why do we pray for healing?** Because God wants us to, because God wants what is good for us, and because God wants to be in a loving relationship with us. Although illness is an evil, God can use it to bring about something good when we turn to him in our time of need. That good might involve physical healing, but it also might simply be a strengthening of our relationship with God.
- **Why doesn't God always answer our prayers by healing the sick person?** Why God doesn't heal everyone who asks for healing is a mystery. The Book of Job spends pages and pages wrestling with this question, and we know that Jesus didn't heal everyone in Israel. His healing miracles were an announcement of the coming of the Kingdom of God, which is present in the Church but not yet fully realized. When it is, there will be no more sickness and no more death (Isaiah 35:5-6; 65: 19-20).
- **What good can God bring from sickness?** If we stick with God in prayer when we are sick, even if we aren't immediately healed, God can still bring about something good. It may confirm the faithfulness of the just, repair sin, or lead to a deeper conversion of the sick person. Also, by their union with Christ, Christians may unite their suffering to Christ's suffering on the cross. "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church," Paul writes (Colossians 1:24). In this way,

Christians can participate in Christ’s redemptive suffering.

- **Should we still go to the doctor?** Yes. The Church has long taught that part of God’s plan is that we fight against all forms of evil, including sickness, using the gifts God gives us. This is why Catholics have founded so many hospitals and health care facilities!