Pray the intercessions at home with your kids

By Jerry Windley-Daoust

When I was a little kid at Mass, my distracted mind would come into focus when we prayed the universal prayer, more commonly known as the prayer of the faithful or general intercessions. My favorite part was when the priest concluded the prayer and requested special intercession for all the personal intentions in our hearts. I recall feeling as though the priest had dialed into God just for me at that moment, and all of our prayers were lifted in unison to heaven.

Fast forward to present day. I can tell my children are sometimes (oftentimes) in outer space when we say formal prayers together. So we decided to table saying grace before meals. Instead, we prayed the prayer of the faithful together before dinner, concluding them with our own special intentions. It has been a hit in my home, and igniting those special intentions in my children's hearts has reinvigorated our dinner prayer time routine.

Intercessions before concessions

The prayer of the faithful during Mass follows this general guideline and sequence: "for the needs of the Church; for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world; for those burdened by any kind of difficulty; for the local community." But we personalize it for our family. Here is our routine.

- Before we begin, my littlest one calls us to prayer, using the Children's Call to Prayer from the "Catholic Family Book of Prayers."
- Then I tell our children how to pray the intercessions together, reminding them to say "we pray to the Lord"

individually when it is their turn before we lift our prayers up together in unison saying “Lord, hear our prayer.”

- Our family begins by using prewritten intercessions provided by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The internet has an endless supply of ideas for intercessions, some of which I included below.
- I begin: “May we show by our words and actions that every human life is cherished and chosen, we pray to the Lord.” They respond, engaged now, “Lord, hear our prayer.”
- Then, we ask for prayers for those in our family who have died and who are sick. “For those who have died in our family, especially _____. And for those who are sick in our family, especially _____.”
- Next, we take turns picking out a name from our intercession name bag. (We use a simple plastic bag with strips of paper with the names of people needing special prayers written on them. We have quite a pile of names now since we started this a year ago.) Another idea you can try for this are writing names on Popsicle sticks and keeping them in a jar.
- Lastly, the magical part: We pray for those special intentions in our heart. Predictably, this is our children’s favorite time. And we have found they are so excited to pray for others, they simply can’t keep the intentions in their hearts, so we go around the table, one by one, giving the children a chance to pray their special intention out loud if they wish (which they always do).

Some options for the Liturgical

Year

Ordinary Time

“For a bountiful harvest during this autumn season, that its yield may be enjoyed by all, we pray to the Lord.”

Advent

“For believers everywhere who wait for the Lord’s coming, that this Advent may help them prepare, we pray to the Lord.”

Christmas

“For all the people who look forward to the celebration of Christmas, that Christ’s words and values may find a place in their hearts, we pray to the Lord.”

“For the Church throughout the world, that as she celebrates the birth of Christ, she may grow in holiness, we pray to the Lord.”

“For all those who do not yet believe in Christ, that they may know that today a savior is born for them, we pray to the Lord.”

Lent

“For all the members of the Church, as we continue on our Lenten journey, we pray to the Lord.”

“For those preparing to become members of the Christian community at Easter time, we pray to the Lord.”

Easter

“For the unity of Christians at the altar of the Lamb; for our Jewish brothers and sisters at Passover; for the preservation and exercise of religious liberty, let us pray to the Lord.”

Catholic Social Teaching

The bishops' conference offers intercessions to help guide prayers for social justice. For example, these are for faithful citizenship and these offer suggestions of prayers for the poor and marginalized.

Intercessions for Leaders and Teachers

"For the leaders of nations, that they may be committed to justice for all peoples and dedicated to building a world at peace, let us pray to the Lord."

"For our teachers, that they may be filled with the Spirit and guide us in his wisdom, we pray to the Lord."

Intercessions for Children

These are beautiful intercessions for life, all of which speak particularly about children. (I have observed that when children hear they are praying for children, their little ears perk up.)

"For orphaned children throughout the world, and especially those who are abused or neglected, that we might work to save them, we pray to the Lord."

"For children who are unwanted by their parents, that God's grace might send others to love and care for them, we pray to the Lord."

"For the children of our country, especially those who are forgotten or neglected, that their presence might remind us of the infinite value of human life, we pray to the Lord."

"For every little child: that we might accept and preserve each one as a sign of the infinite love of God for us, we pray to the Lord."

"For all unborn children: that our love for them may keep them safe until the joyous day of their birth, we pray to the

Lord.”

“For every little child and especially for those who live in their mother’s womb, that they might grow in the image and likeness of the God who made them, we pray to the Lord.”

“For little children, who await the birth of a brother or sister: that they may learn to cherish the child in her mother’s womb, we pray to the Lord.”

Why Intercessions are Important

Intercessions are part of your family’s daily prayer diet! Just like we need a plate of colorful and nutritious food, we need different forms of prayer to liven things up from time to time and to help build our relationship with God. Prayers for intercessions also remind that with God’s help and guidance from the Holy Spirit, we can as a community of the faithful (and as families!) work to help others who need our prayers. Intercessions remind us that as a community of faithful, we need to not only pray for ourselves but for others: those across the world and right in our own homes.

Lastly, the hidden bonus: Our family’s intercession time has lead to fruitful discussions about what is going on inside our lives by revealing what we are praying for in our hearts. I am so grateful to God that through our conversations with him through this form of prayer I know a little bit more about my children’s day.

“For all of your families, that you find family prayer time a way to grow closer to God and each other, we pray to the Lord.”