

## Activities and Prayers

### Unit 1 - Prayers

#### Family Prayer:

Gratitude is a basic attitude for the followers of Jesus. Set aside a time each day this week for the family to give thanks to God. Invite each family member to write down three things he or she is grateful for, such as "I got a B in reading; I met a deadline at work." Younger children can dictate their thanks. Take turns reading aloud the written items. After each item is read, the whole family can respond: "Thank you Lord, for this and for all good gifts."

#### Individual Prayer:

For centuries, the rosary has been a great tradition for individual and family prayer. Follow this link <http://www.usccb.org/advent/rosary.shtml> for a handout on how to pray the rosary, including the prayers to say as one touches each bead: The Apostles Creed, The Our Father, The Hail Mary and The Glory Be.

### Unit 1 - Activities

#### Make it Last

Small children learn very quickly that this is a disposable society. Take your children aside and present them with an inexpensive new toy or new piece of clothing. Tell them how Jesus wanted people to be careful with the things of the world, to make them last, and not to destroy these gifts. Then, challenge your child to make this gift last. Use it as a focal point of discussion if you see it lying about or if it starts to look shabby.

#### Clean Space

Justice and for peace issues can seem so vast that it is hard to get a handle on them. But you can take simple and constructive action at home to show how followers of Jesus never give up hope, never stop trying to bring his justice to the world. Choose an afternoon when every family member can be available to participate in a neighborhood cleanup activity. If there are enough people, work in pairs. Using biodegradable trash bags, pick up any litter or debris that is found in a reasonable area around your home. Set a time limit for this activity. Following the event, talk about the experience, the work you did, and why you did it. End the day by holding hands and praying for a deeper sense of responsibility for the earth and all of God's creation. Be sure to dispose of the trash properly

### Unit Two - Prayers

#### Family Prayer:

Here's an easy outline for planning prayer. It takes a little bit of preparation but will help you to prepare a longer prayer service for your family to share.

- Gather around a table and light a candle
- Sing a simple and familiar hymn—the refrain will do
- Read a short passage or story from the New Testament
- Give each family member time to talk about the story and share their thoughts and prayers spontaneously
- The leader of prayer blesses everyone (May the Lord bless you and keep you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.)
- Sing the hymn again

**Individual Prayer:**

Open your Bible to Matthew 22:34-40 and open your heart to the Holy Spirit. Get comfortable, and relax. Read Matthew 22:34-40 and then complete this exercise:

- Describe in some detail a person you know who is a living advertisement for these two commandments.
- Is this person aware of his or her value?
- How can you express your admiration for the example they give?

**Unit Two - Activities****God's Footprints**

Go to a local wilderness area, formal garden, or nature trail. Spend an hour or two finding God's footprints – natural signs of life and of God's creative love. You might see fallen leaves, acorns, animal tracks, new growth, etc. Don't overlook the people you bump into on your search.

**Carry a Meal**

Some afternoon after school and work, pack a supper that can be carried by the family without too much trouble and walk to a place you can eat together. Or, if walking is not an option, plan a short drive. Figure about how long you want to be on your journey, and then head out. If you plan a half hour for eating and resting, you will know when to begin looking for a place to have your supper. After eating, talk about the walk (or drive) and the search for a place to eat. How did it feel? Were there any scary moments? Talk about God's People wandering in the desert or about your own wandering through life. Remind one another that God is always with you.

**Visiting Hours**

Every family and every parish has people who live by themselves as "shut ins." Often, these parishioners are sick, disabled, or elderly. As a family, set aside time to visit these shut-ins. There is no need for any special agenda; just visit, chat, and share time with this person. (Be careful not to overstay your welcome or to stay so long that young children start to get antsy.) Contact your parish for a list of names of people in the parish who might appreciate a visit. Your parish may offer training for how to make your visits more effective. If so, do take advantage of this training.

**Unit Three - Prayers****Family Prayer:**

Take the family prayer outdoors one evening. Make a ceremony of it. Gather in the kitchen or the living room, and head outside as a family. Begin the prayer with a moment of silence, then say a few words of prayer. Mention that Jesus often spent the night praying with his friends. Next, have each person say a prayer in his or her own words. Finally, pray for the needs of the family, the community, and the world. End with the Lord's Prayer and hugs.

**Individual Prayer:**

Spend ten or fifteen minutes thinking of a story of forgiveness from your life or the life of another family member or friend. If you need to ask for forgiveness because of your actions or omissions, pray for the strength to seek forgiveness. Then call or visit the offended person to make amends or, at least, write a note of regret, even if you never send it. Check to see when your parish holds a communal celebration of the Rite of Penance and plan to attend.

**Unit Three - Activities****Hold My Hand**

This is a bedtime activity for younger children. Just before tucking your child into bed, ask the

youngster to hold your hand. Holding hands gently, tell the child that you will always love him or her. Make the sign of the cross on the child's head with your thumb, and give a big good-night kiss and hug.

### **Share a Special Meal**

This activity requires advanced preparation. About a week prior to doing this activity, read or watch the news, making note of a story about a country where the people are suffering because of famine, flood, or economic poverty. Then, find a recipe for one dish that is served in that country, and prepare the dish as a family. As you share the food, talk about the trials these people face each day and how we are called to find ways to ease their suffering through prayer, donations, and other acts of kindness. Conclude the meal with a prayer for the needs of the people and for any special needs your family may have.

### **Window Shopping**

Store windows and displays are loaded with lessons for the followers of Jesus. As a family, make a visit to a local shopping area or neighborhood mall. Don't enter any stores, just window shop. When people see things they want, talk about why they want them. Discuss the difference between wanting and needing. Talk about what the stores do to make the products look great and entice people to buy more. Finally, talk together about starting a new family practice: Whenever anything new is purchased (clothing, shoes, toys, accessories, etc.), something has to be given away.

## **Unit Four - Prayers**

### **Family Prayer:**

Praying at the outset of a journey is an ancient Christian tradition. Say a short prayer each time your family enters the car, asking God to keep you safe. For longer trips, use this traditional journey prayer:

All-powerful and merciful God, you led the children of Israel on dry land, parting the waters of the sea;

You guided the Magi to your Son by a star. Help us and give us a safe trip. Under your protection, let us reach our destination and enjoy our time together.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(If your travel is in stages, say a prayer like this as you start each stage.)

### **Individual Prayer:**

Open your Bible and read Matthew 5:13-16. Jesus says that if talents or faith are not shared, they become worthless.

- What are your talents?
- What are the talents of your spouse, children, extended family, and close friends?

Take a moment to thank God for your talents and those of the people you love. As you meet with each of the people you thought about during your prayer time, let them know that you recognize these talents and tell them how much they are appreciated and loved.

## **Unit Four - Activities**

### **Cookies and Hugs**

Cookies are an almost universal treat. Some weekend morning or one day during a school break, gather the younger children (your own and any others you might care to round up) in the kitchen and bake cookies. While you are baking, share stories about making cookies and what it means to be part of a loving family—the Church. Talk too, about how lucky you are to have Jesus as your friend and brother. When you are finished, share cookies and hugs. You might also take a plate of cookies to one of your neighbors.

### **At-Home Movie Night**

There are many wonderful family films available to view at home. Schedule a weekly family film night. Make it as special as you can—you might want to work with your children to select the films to watch, have them make posters to advertise the event, perhaps even have pop corn and other “movie theater” treats available. When the film is over, take time to talk about what you have viewed together. What was the message of the film? What did you learn? How does this learning help you to follow Jesus better? What Christian values does the film support? How can the film help your family grow in faith? Ask family members to name one thing they will change in their lives because of what they learned.

### **Saint Search**

Saints are people who lived heroic Christian lives. They provide wonderful examples of hope, faith and how we can better follow Jesus. Search the Internet or visit [www.RCLBenziger.com](http://www.RCLBenziger.com) Resource Center and click on “Saints.” Set aside some time to share saint stories as a family. Each person in the family should choose a saint as a special “friend,” and learn as much about his or her saint as possible. Then, have each family member introduce his or her saint to the rest of the family, describing who the saint was, when the saint lived, and what the saint did that was considered holy. What inspiration does the saint provide for living as a Christian today?

## **Unit Five - Prayers**

### **Family Prayer:**

The Blessed Virgin, Mary, is the first among the saints. She is God’s Mother and your mother, too. Put up a picture or statue of Mary in a special place in your home. Decorate the space with flowers. Set aside time each day to talk with God’s Mother and pray this ancient prayer to Mary. You may want to memorize it as a family. We turn to you for protection, holy Mother of God. Listen to our prayers, and help us in our needs.

Save us from every danger, glorious and blessed Mary.

### **Individual Prayer:**

Jesus gave us two great commandments: Love God with your whole heart and soul and love your neighbor as you love yourself. One of the biggest enemies of the second great commandment is holding a grudge. People hold grudges easily, often for very silly reasons. Set aside 10 minutes of quiet time to think about any grudges you may have. What happened to cause the grudge? How important was the event? How did it make you feel then? Why didn’t you seek to resolve the grudge previously? What reasons do you have for continuing to hold the grudge? Think openly and honestly about any grudges you may hold, then write down ways you can begin to forgive the other person. Remember, Jesus also instructed us to forgive others seventy times seven times.

## **Unit Five -Activities**

### **Cemetery Trip**

Take a family trip to a cemetery where family members or friends are buried. Find the graves of these loved ones, and gather around the grave site as a family. Talk about the people buried there: who they were, what they did, how important they were in the life of the family, how their deaths affected the people who loved them. Talk about the resurrection of the body and that death is not the end. Then, pray for those whose bodies rest in the cemetery.

### **God’s Glory**

Plan a trip to the local mall or shopping area. The purpose of this trip is to see people of all walks of life mingled together. Point out that all people in this place give witness to God’s glory. Looking at these people should remind us of God’s love for us. We should see the marvel of God’s creation in people as much as we see it in beautiful sunsets, cascading waterfalls, or rugged mountain ranges. Say a special prayer for all the people you have seen. (Be careful not to focus on “strange” people or to be critical of people.)

### **“I Was Homeless, I Was Hungry”**

How many people in your city or town go hungry each day or sleep on the streets? Contact your parish or diocesan Catholic Charities office to find out. (You can also do an Internet search for this information.) Set aside some time as a family to talk about the people in your community who are hungry or homeless. Give everybody a chance to participate in the conversation. Talk about one action your family can take to help these people in need. For example, you can volunteer as a family to work in a shelter, take food to the homeless, or participate in another program available through your parish or larger community. The big lesson here is to see the hungry and the homeless as real people and to recognize our obligation to provide assistance as we can.