

## Devotion Rediscovered: Meal Prayer

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Our family's restaurant manners are impeccable: Those of us with our food sit patiently, avoiding the temptation to dig in until everyone is served. At home, however, the appearance of food is immediately followed by its consumption, usually because someone has inconveniently chosen this moment to disappear and we have Places To Be after dinner.

What is lost, aside from proper digestion, is that pause before lifting forks, a moment to acknowledge our togetherness. This time is precious in unifying our family and bringing an awareness of God's presence to our table. It's our moment to pray.

We might always say the traditional prayer. In doing so, we are also unified with our larger family, the Catholic Church, whose members have uttered the same or similar phrases for years upon years. Said thoughtfully, it resonates. Even on those days when we zip to the finish, it makes a point—God is with us, and we thank him.

But if you find prayer becoming habit over heart, there are ways to be more mindful at mealtime:

- Sing the traditional prayer—let your child improvise the melody.
- Say a prayer chain: Let one family member begin with something he is thankful for, then continue with prayers of thanks around the table. You might start with a petition, praise to God—whatever the leader chooses.
- Read a poem or Scripture passage that gives thanks to God. Perhaps you can even find positive lyrics in a song from pop culture to engage your children.
- Instead of—or in addition to—a prayer before meals, try a prayer after meals.
- Institute a moment of silence. St. Thérèse of Lisieux described prayer as “a simple look turned toward heaven.” This gesture can reframe our focus: on each other, and on Jesus who offers us the greatest nourishment, his Body and Blood.

