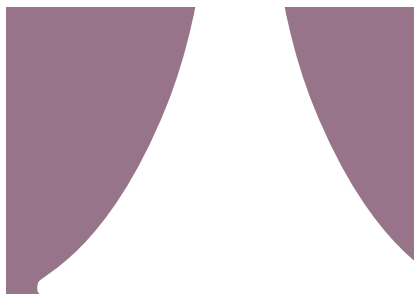




*Family
Activity
Booklet*



*Living
the Eucharist®*

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Welcome to Living the Eucharist

Mealtimes are perhaps the most important part of children's experience of family. In sharing food, time, and news of the day, we deepen our relationships with one another and shape our family identity. The altar at church is the place where the family of God gathers to share its meal, deepen relationships with God and the parish community, and shape its Christian identity.

Our parish meal includes almost fifty prayers (songs, readings, and gestures) in a very short time. This booklet will help the family to: focus on prayers that illuminate the meaning of Eucharist; reflect on the Gospel for the following Sunday; and consider ways to live the Eucharist throughout the week. A family begins its Lenten gatherings during the week before the First Sunday of Lent and ends the week before Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. The family gathers for a total of six times. If your family is accustomed to praying together, be sure to include the habits of prayer already comfortable for you. If this is a new family activity, use our suggestions to help you get started, choosing those that seem to fit your family best.

Here are some guidelines to assist your gatherings:

- 1 ■ *Choose a time and place.* All together, choose a day and time to gather weekly for about thirty minutes. Then decide where to gather. In the space you choose, prepare a small table (or part of a dining table) for gathering. Cover this with a purple cloth, for the season of Lent. Add a candle, a Bible, a small crucifix, and any additional articles needed for each week's gathering. If there is no Bible in the home, this would be a good opportunity to present a Bible to the family to keep on the prayer table during Lent and in a special place thereafter. Keep handy matches, a snuffer, songs and prayers the family likes, and this booklet. Leave your prayer table up during the entire season of Lent. Finally, talk a bit about the courtesies needed for the gathering. The children can generate ideas such as not interrupting, taking turns, and using a quiet voice. Make a short list of agreed-upon expectations. Let the whole family participate in these decisions so they will all be committed to them.

- 2 ■ Children under six are significantly different from older children and adults in several important ways.
 - *Young children need to move, to touch, or to experience the topic in some way to assist their understanding.* Suggestions for creating this experience are offered, and these will support the abstract reasoning of older children as well.
 - *Young children do not have moral concerns, and are not capable of moral judgments.* Their understanding of right and wrong is "borrowed" from adults, rather than internal. Free from consideration of right and wrong, children are exceptionally capable of relishing the gifts and presence of God. In this way they model for adults the true purpose of spirituality: to enjoy our relationship with God.
 - *Young children are "metaphorical" and "metaphysical."* The signs of our Eucharist, such as the bread and wine, embody a greater reality. Young children are quite able to break open the signs and stories for their spiritual meaning.

For this reason some open-ended questions are suggested for each reflection. Use them to invite the family deeper into the meaning of the sign or story. Allow a little time to consider the question. Each response offered, while different, may in some way be part of the answer. Don't end the consideration by saying, "Right!" and implying that the matter is closed. Rather, keep an attitude of ongoing reflection, expecting insight to continue to develop long after the session ends.

■ *Young children do not have the kind of imagination that allows them to grasp the experience of a time or place they have never experienced.* The nomadic life of Abraham, the tribal life of ancient Israel, life in first-century Israel: these are very hard for them to perceive. This limits their ability to explore texts that require some understanding of the cultural context. For this reason the family gatherings focus on the Gospels rather than the Old Testament readings we hear at Mass. And at times even these will be difficult.

In acknowledgement of these characteristics, any questions or suggestions that are not appropriate for children under six will be followed by (6+), to indicate not to expect too much of the littlest ones. If all your children are under six, you may omit these ideas altogether.

3 ■ The family gathering will include a short prayer at the beginning, at the end, and during the transition from consideration of the Eucharist to consideration of the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday. A variety of ways to pray together are listed on page 5. Choose one or two that suit your children and introduce them if necessary. Each week before the gathering, invite each child to choose a prayer, and to lead that prayer when the time comes. This ensures that the prayer will be appropriate for the children, and will actively involve them in the gathering.

■ *Song.* Singing unites a group and is an easy way to pray together. Appropriate music can be found at the website www.LivingtheEucharist.org/family. If children are not reading, make sure you introduce simpler songs that change only one or two words in each verse, or sing only the chorus.

■ *Silence.* Help children to get comfortable and still. It may help them if you strike a lovely chime and turn over a timer for one, two, or three minutes.

■ *Prayers of intercession or thanksgiving.* Choose a small crucifix to pass around the circle. As each one holds it, he or she can share a prayer, ending with an agreed-upon formula, such as "Let us pray to the Lord," to which all respond, "Lord, hear our prayer."

■ *Formula prayers or blessings.* Prayers such as the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be to the Father, or a decade of the Rosary are most appropriate for older children. You can make a small binder to collect these longer prayers and blessings. Also, pay attention to the prayers offered by your children; write them down and include them in the binder. All these prayers can be read by a child or recited together by everyone. If you want to add more prayers in the binder, do a search on the Internet using the key words "Catholic Prayers."

4 ■ Read the material well ahead of time to think about the themes of the gathering. The "Notes for Parents" at the end of each session will help you prepare for your weekly family gatherings. You can tailor the sessions to your children by including songs, family stories, and examples familiar to them. This will deepen their grasp of the material. Take a few minutes as well to gather the simple materials needed, enlisting the help of the children when appropriate. Think about sharing the tasks of the gathering. Perhaps one parent can lead the reflection on the Eucharist, and the other the reflection on the Gospel and the section titled "Living the Eucharist." Each child can take a prayer to prepare, or do something simple such as snuffing the candle when you are finished.

5 ■ In addition to parents and children ages three to twelve, your household may include babies, teens, grandparents, and other family members. Make every effort to include the whole family. Invite each person to make a contribution, such as preparing the space or an element of the prayer, and to participate in the reflections. The unique experience and insights of each person enriches the whole family.

The readings and prayers of this booklet are used by the whole Church. We do not outgrow them, but return to them again and again in the light of our own lives. For example, we begin with the temptation of Christ, the gospel reading for the First Sunday of Lent. But our understanding of living with temptation changes significantly as we move from childhood to adolescence and through adulthood. Ask family members to share what the reading or prayer from the Eucharist means for them.

During your gathering be aware of the presence of God among you, speaking in the Gospel, the children, the silence, and the song. Relax and enjoy your family and the blessings offered.

Note here the family decisions about when and where to gather during Lent, favorite family songs and prayers to use, and other suggestions from family members to incorporate into the gatherings.

Lined area for notes, consisting of 20 horizontal blue lines.

The Word of God

⊕ *Open with a prayer led by a child.*

PREPARING FOR THE EUCHARIST: THE WORD OF GOD

Introduction

Read or say the following in your own words:

"In our reading today we hear that Jesus speaks God's Word, and we hear God say, 'Listen to him.' Through the Bible, Jesus remains present with us, many, many years after he died and rose from the dead. Through the Bible, we hear his words again and we listen to him. He is with us as we read from the Bible at church. He is with us as we listen to the Bible here at home. He is with us any time we read from the Bible.

"Every week at Mass we listen to God speak to us in the readings from the Bible. We read from the Old Testament and the Psalms. These are words Jesus would have listened to as a child himself. We read from the letters and Gospels of the New Testament, which were written about Jesus after he died and

PREPARATION

- Invite your children to choose the three prayers, one to begin, one to use in the middle, and one to close. See no. 3 on pages 4–5 of this booklet for suggestions. (Don't try to use all the suggestions in one session.)
- Cover the prayer table with a purple cloth. Add a Bible, a small crucifix, and a candle (have matches and snuffer available).
- If family members have personal Bibles, ask them to bring them as well.
- Place a marker in the Bible at Mark 9:2–10.
- Have an index card and pen for each member of the family.

rose from the dead. We even stand to hear the Gospel, because in the Gospels we hear Jesus' own words."

Reflection

Ask family members who have personal Bibles to share a favorite verse, and recall any story about their Bible (when they got it, how they use it...). Take a moment to think of some words you love in the Bible. Share them with each other. How is God with you in these words?

⊕ *Prayer led by a child*

LISTENING TO THE GOSPEL

Introduction

Read or say the following in your own words:

"In the Bible, there are many meetings with God on a mountain. So as soon as we hear, 'Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain,' we are aware that this will be an encounter with God. Listen to what these three Apostles see and hear."

An older child or parent lights the candle and reads Mark 9:2–10, the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Lent.

Review what happened in the reading. What did the Apostles see? What did they hear?

Reflection

Before this happened, Jesus told the Apostles that he would suffer greatly and be killed. This would be hard for his friends. But seeing Jesus "dazzling white" could help them. What could it tell the Apostles about him? What does it tell us? Jesus is seen with Moses, who received the Ten Commandments from

God, and with Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of the Bible. Both lived many years before Jesus. What does this tell us about Jesus? Finally they hear the words, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Who is speaking? What do we learn about Jesus from these words? Let's listen again to all we learn about Jesus from this reading.

Reread Mark 9:2–10.

LIVING THE EUCHARIST

Have each family member choose his or her favorite words from the Gospel shared today. An older child or parent can write them down on a piece of paper or a card; keep each one on the prayer table or in a bedroom or some special place. Listen for these words on Sunday. As you hear them at Mass, or read them yourself at home, remember that Jesus is with you. "Listen to him."

⊕ *Close with a prayer led by a child.*

NOTES FOR PARENTS

Every sacramental celebration of the Church includes a Liturgy of the Word. We take time to listen to readings from God's Word and to reflect on what God is saying to us. The readings for Sunday Mass are arranged over a three-year cycle (Years A, B, and C), and, in the course of these three years, we hear all the key gospel stories. This booklet uses the Lenten readings of Year B.

The Liturgy of the Word on Sundays is composed of:

- First Reading: Taken from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season) and often chosen to correlate with the Gospel in some way
- Responsorial Psalm
- Second Reading: Taken from the New Testament (Acts of the Apostles, Letters, and Revelation)
- Gospel Acclamation
- Gospel
- Homily
- Creed

The structure of the Liturgy of the Word has roots in Jewish synagogue worship, where two readings from Scripture are proclaimed, followed by a reflection on the readings and the singing of psalms. The readings are also arranged in a cycle so that the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) is read fully.

As the people of God, we recognize that God speaks to us through the events and encounters recorded in the Bible, and this awareness keeps us attentive. "Hear, O Israel!" is the call in Deuteronomy 6:4, and Jesus ends a teaching with, "Whoever has ears ought to hear" in Matthew 11:15.

This week's focus is on the Liturgy of the Word. For many children this may be a tedious part of the Mass, but receiving and responding to the Word of God is an essential part of living the Eucharist. Help your children to focus on the Gospel by choosing a verse or two that is appropriate for them to listen for during the liturgy. Try to choose a word or phrase from the reading that they can "carry" with them during the week for encouragement or wisdom.

The Bible is a gift of God that speaks to people of all times. For this reason we encourage you to choose a good translation of the Bible rather than a paraphrased children's version.