

TO THANK AND BLESS

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PRAYERS AT MEALS

Second Edition

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LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Cover design by Ann Blattner. The illustration on the cover is a roundel in Beuronese style added to a wall in the Saint John's Abbey refectory in 1995, as is the roundel at the head of the Easter Season I prayers in this book. The other roundels reproduced here were part of Br. Clement Frischauf, O.S.B.'s 1932 design for the Abbey refectory. Photos by Alan Reed, O.S.B.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Reinhart, Dietrich.

To thank and bless : prayers at meals / Dietrich Reinhart, Michael Kwatera. — 2nd ed.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8146-3170-6 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8146-3170-3 (alk. paper)

1. Church year—Prayer-books and devotions—English. 2. Grace at meals—Christianity. I. Kwatera, Michael. II. Title.

BV30.R45 2007

242'.8—dc22

2006006565

*Dedicated to our parents
in whose homes we first learned to pray at meals,
and to our monastic family at Saint John's Abbey,
who still teach and encourage us to pray.*

CONTENTS

Foreword	8
Preface to the Second Edition	10
Advent	11
Christmas	17
Ordinary Time I	25
Lent	31
Easter Triduum	37
Easter Season I	43
Easter Season II	49
Ordinary Time II	57
Ordinary Time III	63
Response Sheets	71
Solemnities and Feasts	77

FOREWORD

Good Italian patriarch that he was, Saint Benedict (c. 480–c. 547) knew that the dinner table is a sacred place for families to gather. That is why he included many helpful directions for community meals in his Rule for monks; for example, he insisted that everyone “come to table before the verse so that all may say the verse and pray and sit down at table together” (43:12, *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict* [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981] 245). Benedict knew that it isn’t always easy to get the family rounded up before the food gets cold (even if they are hungry), and he believed that prayer should nourish the spirit before food nourishes the body.

Prayers before and after meals are part of the ancient tradition of Jewish and Christian worship that each generation of believers must make its own. They help dedicate the day to God just as morning and evening prayers do; indeed, busy families may find that meals provide the best (or only) opportunities for prayer together.

The prayers in this book were written a decade ago and, after falling on the ears of our brethren at Saint John’s Abbey for a good long while, have been revised to reflect a deepening experience of the church’s liturgical year. The heart of each season’s prayers is a common introduction and response, drawn from Scripture, expressive of that season’s central meaning and, thus, proclaimed from day to day. A variety of opening words, blessings and thanksgivings—based on Scripture as well—surround each season’s core and disclose the richness hidden in these all too familiar words. Those who use these prayers will hear echoes of the Scripture readings proclaimed at the Sunday and weekday Eucharist and thereby continue to be formed by the Word of God.

In several prayers, the leader is invited to include the names of particular persons (those who prepared the meal, family members who are ill), but this might be done whenever the sense of the text

encourages it. The inclusion of the names of loved ones will make these prayers more personal.

Blessings upon your table and upon all who taste there the Lord's spiritual and bodily nourishment!

Dietrich Reinhart, O.S.B.

Michael Kwatera, O.S.B.

June 1, 1983

PREFACE

to the Second Edition

After enjoying a welcome place alongside condiments and napkins, *Prayers at Meals* has been out of print for many years. Continued requests for copies of this booklet have prompted us to prepare a second, expanded edition.

The Saint John's Abbey table prayers presented here had already undergone a revision with an eye to some simplifying of expression and to eliminating some masculine language for God. We have made a few similar changes for this edition.

Historically, the commitment to devoting a significant amount of time each day to liturgical and private prayer has whet the monastic appetite for variety in such prayer. Thus, a third set of prayers for Ordinary Time III has been added to celebrate the harvest season's gifts to our tables. Also, special prayers have been prepared for the solemnities and some feasts of the liturgical year. In this new section, prayers for the solemnity of the passing [death] of Saint Benedict (March 21) and for the feast of Benedict, Patriarch of Western Monasticism (July 11) have been included, especially for use in Benedictine monasteries.

As Saint John's Abbey celebrates its sesquicentennial during 2006–2007, we offer this revised edition of table prayers to gratefully commemorate 150 years of Benedictine prayer and work in central Minnesota. *In omnibus glorificetur Deus*—may God be glorified in all things.

Dietrich Reinhart, O.S.B.
Michael Kwatera, O.S.B.

June 24, 2006
Solemnity of the Birth of
Saint John the Baptist



Aptate vestras lampades

Trim your lamps.

ADVENT

*These prayers are used from the Saturday evening preceding
the First Sunday of Advent through Christmas Eve.
They could be included in the ceremony of
lighting the Advent wreath.*

PRAYER 1

Before the meal

Leader: Just as the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
giving seed for sowing and bread to eat,
so shall the word be
that goes forth from the mouth of God.
A voice cries:
“Prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord.
Clear a highway across the desert for our God.”

All: Every valley shall be lifted up,
every mountain and hill brought low.

Leader: Sow freely, Lord God, the seed of your blessing
upon our table and upon all of us.
May it strengthen us to serve you
and each other,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: Lord our God,
we thank you for this meal together
and for inviting us to accept your reign
like children taking bread
from the hand of their parents.
Let us live in your peace,
at home with you all the days of our lives.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

PRAYER 2

Before the meal

Leader: The victory of the Lord is near,
already it is close,
the day of salvation shall not be delayed.
A voice cries:
“Prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord.
Clear a highway across the desert for our God.”

All: Every valley shall be lifted up,
every mountain and hill brought low.

Leader: All-powerful God,
look kindly on us,
bless this table,
and unite us to all people everywhere
who wait for the coming of your Son,
Jesus Christ, the Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: We thank you, Giver of all good gifts,
for the grace of life renewed,
the strength of life together,
and the promise of life to come.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

PRAYER 3

Before the meal

Leader: The Savior does not call out
or lift his voice high,
nor does he make himself heard
in the open streets.
But a voice comes before him saying:
“Prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord.
Clear a highway across the desert for our God.”

All: Every valley shall be lifted up,
every mountain and hill brought low.

Leader: Lord, bless the food we are about to eat
and bless the cooks (*name them*)
who have labored to prepare it.
Make us all a sign of the One
whose coming we await,
Jesus Christ, the Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: Give us grateful hearts, our Father,
for all your mercies,
and grant us the grace to love others
as fully as you have loved us
in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

PRAYER 4

Before the meal

Leader: The Lord God is our refuge and strength,
a helper close at hand in times of distress.
A voice cries:
“Prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord.
Clear a highway across the desert for our God.”

All: Every valley shall be lifted up,
every mountain and hill brought low.

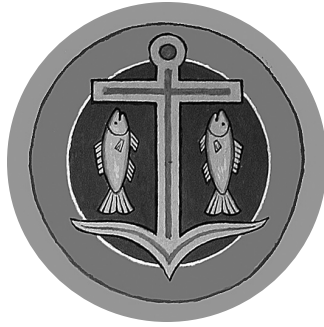
Leader: Lord God,
bless this table
and let the food we share
strengthen us in your service.
We ask this through the One
who comes in your name
and keeps us safe,
Jesus Christ, the Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: Ever-faithful God,
we thank you
for showing us your goodness
and loving-kindness at this meal.
We ask the same blessings
for all the members of your family,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.



Dne spes mea a ivventute

Lord, you are my hope from my youth.

CHRISTMAS

These prayers are used from Christmas Day through the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This section includes a proper prayer for Christmas Day (December 25), for the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1), and for the Epiphany (Sunday between January 2 and January 8).

December 25

CHRISTMAS DAY

Before the meal

Leader: Lord,
with angels and shepherds
we come in spirit to Bethlehem
and welcome our promised Savior, Christ the Lord.
Joyfully we name him:
Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

All: Unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given. Alleluia!

Leader: God of glory,
bless this food we share in your house.
Show to all people,
especially those who lack enough to eat,
your goodness and loving-kindness.
We ask this through the One who is born to us,
Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: Lord God,
we thank you for your nourishing gifts to us
on this festival day.
May the birth of your only-begotten Son
be a source of life for body, soul, and spirit.
Glory to you, O God,
in highest heaven and through all the earth,
both now and for ever.

All: Amen.

PRAYER 1

Before the meal

Leader: Lord,
you have made our gladness greater,
you have made our joy increase.
For you are called:
Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

All: Unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given. Alleluia!

Leader: Lord our God,
bless this food we are about to eat
and look kindly
upon those who have prepared it:
(*name them*).

We ask this through your Son, Jesus,
who out of the wonder of your love
lives in our midst,
now and for ever.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: We thank you, Lord God,
for the wonders you work—
for food and friendship in your house.
Above all,
we thank you for the gift of your Son,
who is one with us
both now and for ever.

All: Amen.

PRAYER 2

Before the meal

Leader: Dwellers in a land dark as death,
we have seen a great light.
The Lord in his radiance
shines upon us.
And this is the name we give him:
Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

All: Unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given. Alleluia!

Leader: Mighty God,
visit this table
and renew the strength and vision of us all.
Bless your gifts and our time together,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: God of power and might,
we thank you for looking upon us in our need.
Help us bend our strength day by day
toward serving your people,
through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

PRAYER 3

Before the meal

Leader: O God, we ponder your love
within your house.
Your praise, like your name,
reaches the ends of the earth.
For you are called:
Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

All: Unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given. Alleluia!

Leader: Eternal Father,
we praise and bless you
for the goodness you show us
at this meal and throughout this season.
Be with us as we celebrate
the fulfillment of your promise
in the coming of your Son,
Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: Eternal Father,
accept our thanksgiving
for bringing us together
to share this meal.
Keep us as faithful witnesses
to the joy which is ours
in the gift of your Son,
Jesus Christ, the Lord.

All: Amen.

PRAYER 4

Before the meal

Leader: Hear what the Lord God says—
a voice speaking peace
for God's people and God's friends.
He is called:
Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

All: Unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given. Alleluia!

Leader: God of harmony and peace,
bless us as we enjoy the gifts
you have given us.
May our eating together
be a sign of the peace and goodness
you give to all people
in your Son, Jesus Christ the Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace,
may the blessings we share
strengthen us to bless others
with your Christmas gift of peace.
We give thanks to you,
to the Father and the Spirit,
both now and for ever.

All: Amen.

January 1
MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Before the meal

Leader: God of glory,
all time and all the ages belong to your divine Son.
With the Blessed Virgin Mary
we rejoice to name him:
Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

All: Unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given. Alleluia!

Leader: Eternal God,
we ask you to bless this food,
those who have prepared it,
and those who share it at this table.
Strengthen us to live as your people
in the new year that you give us.
We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: Praise to you, Giver of blessings,
for nourishing us at this festive meal
as we begin the new year.
In company with Mary,
who sang of your abundant gifts to the hungry,
we glorify you and give you thanks,
both now and for ever.

All: Amen.

Sunday between January 2 and January 8 EPIPHANY

Before the meal

Leader: Begotten before the world or time began,
the Lord of all is revealed this day
for our salvation.

With those of every nation,
we adore him and name him:
Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

All: Unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given. Alleluia!

Leader: God of glory,
a blazing star made manifest
the mystery of your Word made flesh.
In his sacred name,
we ask you to bless this festive table,
and to make the brightness of your holiness
shine upon us,
both now and for ever.

All: Amen.

After the meal

Leader: Lord of all peoples,
we thank you for the abundant gifts
we have shared at this meal.
Grant that our lasting treasure
may be offering you humble praise
and giving generous service to others,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.