

Easter Mealtimes Prayers for the Family

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Introduction

And if Christ has not been raised,
then empty is our preaching;
empty, too, your faith.
(1 Cor 15:14)

The foundation of our Christian faith is the fact that Jesus rose again. Because of it, we have reason to hope. Without it, all that we believe falls apart. Thus, if the resurrection is the most important truth of our faith, then it follows that Easter is the most important season of the liturgical year.

Unfortunately, this blessed season is not always given due importance, not only in parishes but also in homes, unlike Christmas, which is very popular. Even the seasons of Advent and Lent seem to be given much more emphasis over Easter. Oftentimes, our parish and prayer life tend to be particularly busy, colorful, and intense during the Lenten season with all of the special traditions and rituals associated with it rising in a crescendo that peaks during the solemn Paschal Triduum. Sadly, however, after the Easter Sunday Mass, we seem to go back to Ordinary Time and miss the entire fifty-day celebration of what is in fact our greatest reason to celebrate. Even in our homes, there is little to remind us that it is in fact Easter, compared to Christmas when there are decorations all around.

Perhaps one of the main reasons is the lack of devotional practices connected to its celebration. These are very important not only because they prolong the liturgy and let it permeate the daily rhythm of life, but because they also bring the mystery to the level that ordinary people can easily understand and relate to, endearing it to them and making it truly “popular.”

I remember a story related by a friend who visited the Holy Land. In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, an Orthodox companion of theirs asked him, “Why do you Catholics go all the way from very far places to visit this church?” He readily answered, “Why, of course! Because this is the place where Jesus was crucified and died.” His friend answered him: “We go here because this is where Jesus had risen!” It is a story both telling and humbling, which, at the same time, invites us to a deeper appreciation of the resurrection. As Saint John Paul II reminds us, “We are an Easter people and *Alleluia* is our song!” (*Angelus*, November 30, 1986).

This is the rationale behind this simple prayer book that aims to bring Easter from the altar table to the family table, which should always be connected. It takes us back to the cherished tradition of our Jewish forebears that was continued by the early Christians: of gathering in their homes to pray, led by the parents as the first teachers of the faith to their children. It also takes inspiration from the beautiful practice already being done nowadays by some families of praying around the wreath during Advent or around the crèche at Christmas.

In this way, this book hopes to help fill a lacuna in our Easter celebration, from the heart of the family. Thanks to the reform of the liturgy, there has been some significant progress in this area in terms of our communal celebration of the Easter season, although as we said, there is still not quite enough to give it the prominence that it deserves. Hence, we aim to complement and extend the liturgical celebration of this most important season into our homes, which we pray will not only emphasize its importance but also help uncover its meaning. By bringing Easter into our homes, most especially to our family table, we hope to allow the joy of the resurrection to overflow in our life as a family and in the totality of our lives, making our celebration authentic and holistic. We cannot underestimate the simple habit of saying grace before and after meals. For many of us, this is one of the very first prayers we ever learned as well as one of the religious practices that stay with us all the rest of our lives. In the same way, it is also an opportune moment to hand on the faith to the next generations.

The practice of praying together at table is also especially appropriate during Easter time. If we are to look into the Gospel

accounts, mealtimes were privileged places of encounter with the risen Lord. We recall the story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus and how Jesus “was made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:35). We also remember the appearances in the Upper Room, which had served as a dining place for the Last Supper. In fact, in one of these apparitions, the risen Lord asked the disciples, “Have you anything here to eat?” and he ate the broiled fish that they served him in front of them (Luke 24:41-42). Who would forget that moving episode from the Gospel of John where the disciples experienced anew the miraculous catch of fish and recognized the Lord? On this particular occasion, the Lord himself prepared some bread and fish and invited them to “Come, have breakfast” (John 21:12). In light of these, we hope that our family meals can also be meaningful occasions not only to be together but also to be with the Lord, especially during Easter.

As an added suggestion, it would be good to have an Easter candle on the table as a fitting symbol of the risen Christ that will be lit for the prayer or perhaps throughout the meal. A simple white candle big enough to last throughout the fifty days of Easter will do. More decorations are optional but will fittingly reflect the joy of the season. Also, albeit there is no provision for the use of music (to keep things short, simple, and unthreatening for most families), there is nothing that prevents those who are able to do so from adding an appropriate hymn or two, perhaps at the beginning or end of the meal (especially on Sundays), or to chant the verse “Christ our light” and the response “Thanks be to God,” as done during the Easter Vigil.

The Grace before meals given for each day follow the readings in the Lectionary, where one curiously finds even more references related to food than in the long “Bread of Life Discourse” that occupies the Third Week of Easter. On weekdays, they are kept brief, with just one or two Scripture verses, in keeping with the busy rhythm of life of many families today. On Sundays, a longer excerpt from the readings is proclaimed, followed by some intercessions and the final prayer. Only one prayer is provided for each day, which can be said during the meal when most of the family members are usually present. For Grace after meals, a weekly cycle is provided in a separate section. The *Regina Caeli* is also added

as an appendix, which may be recited at the end of the Grace before meals in place of the usual *Angelus* if it is done at around six in the morning, twelve noon, or six in the evening.



My heartfelt gratitude goes to my mother, Alice, and to my family and friends, most especially Fr. Victor C. de Jesus, SJ, for being the very first to go over the manuscript of this book with his keen eye and insightful mind. I would also like to thank Liturgical Press and their wonderful people for helping to make this available to a wider audience.

It is our hope that this will be yet another meaningful way of living out the identity of the Christian family as the “domestic church,” where the living faith is handed on to the children and cherished together by young and old. May it become a cherished and meaningful tradition in your family, and hopefully something that you would want to share with other families as well.

“We are an Easter people and *Alleluia* is our song!”

GRACE BEFORE MEALS

EASTER SUNDAY

All begin by making the Sign of the Cross.

BLESSING OF THE CANDLE

Leader: Loving Father, we praise and thank you for raising up Jesus from the dead. As we gather each day during this joyful season, let this candle always remind us of his presence in our midst.

While the candle is lit for the first time:

May the light of Christ, rising in glory,
Dispel the darkness of our minds and hearts.

Christ our light.

All respond: **Thanks be to God.**

SCRIPTURE READING (Mark 16:5-7)

One of the family members reads the passage.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed. He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'"

INTERCESSIONS

Leader: Like the disciples who went to the tomb, we also seek Jesus, and now we find him here among us as we pray together and love one another. With joy in our hearts, let us lift our prayers to the Father.

Father, hear our prayer.

We pray for **N.**, our pope; **N.**, our bishop; and all the members of the church: may we be faithful witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus in word and deed.

We pray for all families: may we all experience the presence of the risen Christ each day in our love and concern for one another.

We pray for the poor and those who are suffering in any way: may they find comfort and relief through the kindness and generosity of people around them.

Other intentions may be added before the last intention.

We pray for our loved ones and friends who have gone ahead of us: may they come to enjoy the eternal banquet prepared for them by Christ.

PRAYER

One of the family members leads the prayer.

Father of life, who raised Jesus from the dead, you gladden this holiest of days with the light of your Son rising in glory. Let your Spirit fill our home and our hearts with joy as we celebrate his victory with this meal that we are about to enjoy from your goodness, through the same Christ our Lord.

All respond: **Amen. Alleluia!**

All make the Sign of the Cross.

EASTER MONDAY

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

All make the Sign of the Cross. The prayer leader says while the candle is lit:

Christ our light.

All respond: **Thanks be to God.**

SCRIPTURE READING (Matt 28:8-9)

One of the family members reads the passage.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce the news to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them.

PRAYER

One of the family members leads the prayer.

Our faithful Companion in life, like the women who were running from the empty tomb with fear and joy, we come to this table with different emotions and different experiences. May the presence of your risen Son bless the food that we are about to eat and the stories that we are about to share with one another, through the same Christ our Lord.

All respond: **Amen. Alleluia!**

All make the Sign of the Cross.

EASTER TUESDAY

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

All make the Sign of the Cross. The prayer leader says while the candle is lit:

Christ our light.

All respond: **Thanks be to God.**

SCRIPTURE READING (John 20:11-13)

One of the family members reads the passage.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him."

PRAYER

One of the family members leads the prayer.

Consoler of those who weep, teach us to be like the angels who were quick to see Mary's tears and feel her pain. As we eat together each day around this table, help us to develop empathy for one another and listen to one another in love, through the same Christ our Lord.

All respond: **Amen. Alleluia!**

All make the Sign of the Cross.

EASTER WEDNESDAY

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

All make the Sign of the Cross. The prayer leader says while the candle is lit:

Christ our light.

All respond: **Thanks be to God.**

SCRIPTURE READING (Luke 24:30-31)

One of the family members reads the passage.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

PRAYER

One of the family members leads the prayer.

Loving Lord and Father of this family, your risen Son revealed himself to the disciples in the breaking of the bread. Open our eyes to recognize his presence in one another as we share this food with love, through the same Christ our Lord.

All respond: **Amen. Alleluia!**

All make the Sign of the Cross.

EASTER THURSDAY

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

All make the Sign of the Cross. The prayer leader says while the candle is lit:

Christ our light.

All respond: **Thanks be to God.**

SCRIPTURE READING (Luke 24:40-43)

One of the family members reads the passage.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them.

PRAYER

One of the family members leads the prayer.

Almighty and ever-living God, your risen Son proved that he was really alive by eating in front of his disciples. Help us to be really alive and fully present in our family meal as we enjoy our food and our time together, through the same Christ our Lord.

All respond: **Amen. Alleluia!**

All make the Sign of the Cross.

EASTER FRIDAY

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

All make the Sign of the Cross. The prayer leader says while the candle is lit:

Christ our light.

All respond: **Thanks be to God.**

SCRIPTURE READING (John 21:9-12)

One of the family members reads the passage.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.” So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come, have breakfast.” And none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they realized it was the Lord.

PRAYER

One of the family members leads the prayer.

Forgiving Father, with a simple meal of bread and fish, your risen Son chose to reconcile himself with his disciples who abandoned him in his time of need. Bless our meal and our table, and make it a place of healing and forgiveness, through the same Christ our Lord.

All respond: **Amen. Alleluia!**

All make the Sign of the Cross.

EASTER SATURDAY

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

All make the Sign of the Cross. The prayer leader says while the candle is lit:

Christ our light.

All respond: **Thanks be to God.**

SCRIPTURE READING (Mark 16:14)

One of the family members reads the passage.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

But later, as the Eleven were at table, he appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had been raised.

PRAYER

One of the family members leads the prayer.

Father most tender, your risen Son loved to appear to the disciples while they were having meals. Bless this food that we are about to partake of and help us to become his living and loving presence as we devote quality time to one another around this table, through the same Christ our Lord.

All respond: **Amen. Alleluia!**

All make the Sign of the Cross.