

A Way of Life: Spiritual Atmosphere



Spiritual Atmosphere

The[♂]ology
of the BO[♀]dy for families
& single people
plus Family Chastity Formation in Virtue & Purity of Heart

Universal Truths about Human Sexuality for People of All Ages

With extensive references to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church

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Chapter Six

Daily Family Prayer: The Spiritual Atmosphere of the Home

Family Prayer in the Home: The Domestic Church

Hence, with parents leading the way by example and family prayer, their children – indeed all within the family circle – will find it easier to make progress in natural virtues, in salvation and in holiness. Husband and wife, raised to the dignity and the responsibility of parenthood, will be zealous in fulfilling their task as educators, especially in the sphere of religious education, a task that is primarily their own.²³¹

276 The above quote from Vatican II is from a document type called a “pastoral constitution” and therefore defines an absolute truth as to what “constitutes” a healthy and complete family according to God’s design for life. Like a tree that consists of three essential elements, roots, trunk, and branches, there are three interrelated elements necessary for a family to become what it is. If one, two, or all three constitutive elements are missing or underdeveloped, the family will suffer from a lack of what is essential for life and will wither or even die.

277 The three elements that constitute a family in the above quote include: (1) the parents living a chaste, exclusive, indissoluble, and holy marriage in which their love is always open to life in obedience to the Catholic truth; (2) parents leading the way in establishing daily family prayer which creates a pure and holy home atmosphere; and (3) parents zealously fulfilling their vocation as the primary educators of their children so they can fulfill their vocation to love in chastity. The elements of a holy marriage and parents as primary educators have been covered previously. This section will focus on establishing daily family prayer in order to create a pure atmosphere in which chastity formation can be carried out:

In this atmosphere of prayer and awareness of the presence and fatherhood of God, the truths of faith and morals should be taught, understood and deeply studied with reverence, and the Word of God should be read and lived with love. In this way Christ’s truth will build up a family community based on the example and guidance of parents who “penetrate the innermost depths of their children’s hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface.”²³²

²³¹ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n.48; translation from *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Volume 4, (New York, NY: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1976), 1563.

²³² TMHS, 63.

278 God created the family to be a domestic church, a church of the home, and like a church, without prayer, the family would cease to be what it is. Vatican II said: “This mission—to be the first and vital cell of society—the family has received from God. It will fulfill this mission if it appears as the domestic sanctuary of the Church by reason of the mutual affection of its members and the prayer that they offer to God in common, if the whole family makes itself a part of the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need.”²³³ However, if the “element of common prayer were missing, the family would lack its very character as a domestic church.”²³⁴

279 A family begins with marriage, and marriage begins on bended knee in prayer, at the altar, in the presence of God who is Love. Family prayer flows from and returns back to its source and summit, which is the married couple’s prayer together in the presence of Jesus, especially in the Eucharist. Only through prayer will the married couple understand God’s truth concerning the “great mystery” of their sexuality and mutual love, and only through prayer will they obtain the grace to be faithful forever in the procreation and education of their children. A couple’s prayer unites their hearts to the heart of Jesus, and from this union will flow a pure stream of love and affection between spouses, parents and children, brothers

and sisters. So, with “parents leading the way by example and family prayer, their children—indeed all within the family circle—will find it easier to make progress in natural virtues, in salvation and in holiness.”²³⁵

280 The Catechism explains that the family is a domestic church, and the Church is essentially one large family of smaller families of God the Father, whole households being converted ²³⁶ and transformed into little churches:

Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than “the family of God.” From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers “together with all [their] household.”²³⁷ ...These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*.²³⁸ It is in the bosom of the family that parents are “by word and example...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation.”²³⁹

²³³ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Nov. 18, 1965), 11.

²³⁴ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (Feb. 2, 1974), 52.

²³⁵ GS, 48.

²³⁶ Cf. Acts 16:31; Acts 11:14.

²³⁷ Cf. Ibid., 18:8.

²³⁸ LG 11; cf. FC 21.

²³⁹ Ibid., 11.

It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the *priesthood of the baptized* in a privileged way “by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.”²⁴⁰ Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and “a school for human enrichment.”²⁴¹ Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous—even repeated—forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life.²⁴²

281 In a local church, the bishop and priest are called, as a father, to teach, govern, and sanctify the family of God. So also, in a domestic church, the father is the “priest of the home” whose primary purpose is to spiritually guide his family, as a good shepherd cares for his sheep, by offering his entire life as a sacrifice of love. A father is responsible for teaching, governing, and sanctifying his family, leading them in a daily sacrifice of prayer, and into a deeper and more active participation in the sacramental, devotional, and liturgical prayer life of the Church. Following Christ, bishops, priests, husbands, and fathers are called to unceasing prayer and total self-sacrifice in order to attain the goal of holiness for their family.

Family Prayer in the Church

282 All prayer in the Church is essentially family prayer. The Catholic Church is the spouse of Jesus and a mother whose children form one family of God the Father. Mary is the model of the Church as a mother. The mother encourages her children to pray to and talk with our Father, not only in our rooms individually, but together as a family within His house. When the followers of Jesus asked how they should pray, He taught them to pray together as a family and begin with the words, “Our Father...” As one family and children of one mother, the Church, we are related by spiritual ties that bind us together closer than blood relations. Jesus said, “whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”²⁴³

283 Family prayer leads us to acts of familial and affectionate love towards one another with great reverence and purity, as befits the relations of parents and children and brothers and sisters. In his First Letter to Timothy,²⁴⁴ St. Paul wrote that we must respect an older man and “appeal to him as a father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters with complete purity”²⁴⁵ and “greet one another with a holy kiss,”²⁴⁶ or a holy

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

²⁴¹ GS 52 § 1.

²⁴² CCC, 1655-1657.

²⁴³ Mk 3:35.

²⁴⁴ [1-16] After a few words of general advice based on common sense (1 Tim 5:1-2), the letter takes up, in its several aspects, the subject of widows. The first responsibility for their care belongs to the family circle, not to the Christian community as such (1 Tim 5:3-4, 16). The widow left without the aid of relatives may benefit the community by her prayer, and the community should consider her material sustenance its responsibility (1 Tim 5:5-8). Widows who wish to work directly for the Christian community should not be accepted unless they are well beyond the probability of marriage, i.e., 60 years of age, married only once, and with a reputation for good works (1 Tim 5:9-10). Younger widows are apt to be troublesome and should be encouraged to remarry (1 Tim 5:11-15).

²⁴⁵ 1 Tm. 5:1-2.

²⁴⁶ Rom. 16:16.

embrace, which manifests the chaste affection proper to a family.

284 Daily family prayer creates deep bonds of pure love and affection on the spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical level. But the opposite is also true. If a family does not pray daily from the heart and does not embrace one another with pure and affectionate love, its members are deprived of the deep spiritual and emotional bonds of chaste love. Starved for affection, family members can become insecure, emotionally needy, and vulnerable to attachments that are physically addictive, abusive, sinful, and erode respect for self and others.

285 The Holy Family is the ultimate model for family prayer. In addition, the daily family prayer of the early Church is given as an ideal model that each domestic church family can follow. Always in communion with Mary and St. Peter, the Book of Acts says of the Catholic family of God that every day: “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers,” and they “had all things in common,”²⁴⁷ and “devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart.”²⁴⁸

286 This model can apply to the daily life of the domestic church as well. With mother Mary present in the heart of each home, the family’s “devotion to the teaching of the apostles” means daily obedience to the official teachings of the Pope and Bishops united with him. The “communal life” is the family’s unconditional sharing of spiritual and material goods; “the breaking of the bread” is the family’s daily participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass; “the prayers” are the family’s daily participation in liturgical and devotional prayer throughout the hours of the day; “meeting in the Temple area” is the family’s daily study of the Scripture and the Catechism; and eating “their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart” is the family’s daily meal together.

Elements of Daily Family Prayer

287 Daily family prayer in the home is designed to foster a deeper participation in the daily liturgical, devotional, and sacramental prayer life of the Church in order to open our hearts to our heavenly Father: “An important purpose of the prayer of the domestic church is to serve as the natural introduction for the children to the liturgical prayer of the whole Church, both in the sense of preparing for it and of extending it into personal, family and social

²⁴⁷ [42-47] The first of three summary passages (along with Acts 4:32-37; 5:12-16) that outline, somewhat idyllically, the chief characteristics of the Jerusalem community: adherence to the teachings of the Twelve and the centering of its religious life in the eucharistic liturgy (Acts 2:42); a system of distribution of goods that led wealthier Christians to sell their possessions when the needs of the community’s poor required it (Acts 2:44 and the note in Acts 4:32-37); and continued attendance at the temple, since in this initial stage there was little or no thought of any dividing line between Christianity and Judaism (Acts 2:46).

²⁴⁸ Cf. Acts 2:42-46.

life.”²⁴⁹ And “in family prayer the basic notions of the faith are communicated and hearts are opened to the Fatherhood of God.”²⁵⁰

Liturgical Prayer

288 The most efficacious and highest form of daily family prayer is participation in the liturgical worship of the Eucharist, which begins with the Sacrifice of the Mass and continues throughout the day in the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office)²⁵¹ and Eucharistic Adoration. If a family is not able to participate in daily Mass, they could visit and adore Our Lord in the Eucharist, make an act of spiritual communion, or recite the Morning and/or Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Participation in the liturgy allows families to share in the infinite fruits of the Sacrifice of Christ and, at the same time, helps parents and children practice making sacrifices in order to share the fruits.

289 After daily Mass, the early Catholic Church family shared a meal together “with exultation and sincerity of heart” and this meal was considered a sacred event which extended the fruits of the Mass into the family’s social life. Families today need to envision their daily dinner together as a sacred event. Like the daily Mass in a church, the family dinner is the key

to the physical, spiritual, and emotional health of family members because it creates a deep communion of hearts. Opening and closing with prayer, the family dinner binds everyone together in love and joy uniting the family at an increasingly deeper level physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Recent secular studies on chastity among young people reveal one common factor that predicted the ability to remain chaste or not, and that was whether or not they ate a daily family meal together.²⁵²

Devotional Prayer

290 Daily family prayer also includes the devotional prayer life of the Church, and some practices are expressly recommended such as: “reading and meditation of the Word of God, preparation for the reception of the Sacraments, devotion and consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the various forms of veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, grace before and after meals and observance of popular devotions.”²⁵³

291 The time-honored tradition of praying the family Rosary after dinner is especially recommended as “there is no doubt that, after the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, the high point which family prayer can reach, the Rosary should be considered as one of the

²⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *On the Family* (Nov. 22, 1981), 61.

²⁵⁰ Pontifical Council for the Family, Symposium of the College of Cardinals, Intervention by Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, *The Family in the Pontificate of John Paul II* (October 18, 2003), 1.

²⁵¹ CCCC, 243. The Liturgy of the Hours, which is the public and common prayer of the Church, is the prayer of Christ with his body, the Church. Through the Liturgy of the Hours, the mystery of Christ, which we celebrate in the Eucharist, sanctifies and transforms the whole of each day. It is composed mainly of psalms, other biblical texts, and readings from the Fathers and spiritual masters.

²⁵² The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University Study, *The Importance of Family Dinners II*; Time Magazine, *The Magic of the Family Meal* (June 4, 2006).

²⁵³ *On the Family*, 61.

best and most efficacious prayers in common that the Christian family is invited to recite.”²⁵⁴ The hour after dinner is often prime time for television in many families, and many families are devoted to their favorite programs. But if a family is serious about becoming chaste and holy, then this prime time should be devoted to contemplation of the mysteries of the Rosary rather than absorbing irreverent and unholy images from the television:

Many of the problems facing contemporary families, especially in economically developed societies, result from their increasing difficulty in communicating. Families seldom manage to come together, and the rare occasions when they do are often taken up with watching television. To return to the recitation of the family Rosary means filling daily life with very different images, images of the mystery of salvation: the image of the Redeemer, the image of his most Blessed Mother. The family that recites the Rosary together reproduces something of the atmosphere of the household of Nazareth: its members place Jesus at the centre, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on.²⁵⁵

292 Another element of family devotional prayer involves transforming the home into a sacred place conducive to prayer. A home altar with a crucifix, Bible, vigil candles, statues, or blessed images is a great help. Playing music

and singing together; blessing and praying for one another; using holy water; consecration to the hearts of Jesus and Mary; wearing a scapular; praying with the saints and for the souls in purgatory; reflections and sharing of personal memories of the spouses, grandparents, ancestors, and children; and praying for future spouses and children, yet to be born, all create a holy atmosphere. Devotions like the Angelus, the Way of the Cross, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and others, which reflect the various hours of the day, holy days, and seasons of the Church year, all bring the real presence of God into the hearts of all within the family home.

The Sacramental Life and Prayer

293 Marriage is a sacrament, not just on the wedding day, but is a prayerful offering of every moment of every day in the life of the couple and their family. And parents are the irreplaceable primary educators, on a daily basis, with regard to preparing their children for the reception of all the sacraments: Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders, and the Anointing of the Sick.

294 Family preparation for, and frequent participation in, the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist are the two most important elements of daily family prayer. “There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its

²⁵⁴ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Feb. 2, 1974), 54.

²⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (October 16, 2002), 41.

own communion: Hence there arises the many and varied forms of division in family life. But, at the same time, every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of ‘reconciliation,’ that is communion re-established.”²⁵⁶

295 Pope John Paul II also said that the “family is in fact a community of generations” and that everyone should be present during prayer: “the living and those who have died, and also those yet to come into the world.” In this communion of saints, families should pray for the good of each person and the family as a whole and thus strengthen and fortify their common good.²⁵⁷

296 Christ spent only three years of his earthly mission in active public service, but 30 years within the family home at Nazareth, teaching us by example that every hidden event of sacramental marriage and daily family life can be sanctified and an occasion for formation and prayer:

This life of faith and “Family prayer has for its very own object *family life itself*, which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to his call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and home-comings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc. — all of these mark God’s

loving intervention in the family’s history. They should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven.”²⁵⁸

Overcoming Obstacles to Family Prayer

297 Often, it is precisely over parents requiring daily participation in family prayer and the family dinner that conflicts arise. As Pope Paul VI observed, “We are well aware that the changed conditions of life today do not make family gatherings easy, and that even when such a gathering is possible many circumstances make it difficult to turn it in to an occasion of prayer. There is no doubt of the difficulty. But it is characteristic of the Christian in his manner of life not to give in to circumstances but to overcome them, not to succumb but to make an effort. Families which want to live in full measure the vocation and spirituality proper to the Christian family must therefore devote all their energies to overcoming the pressures that hinder family gatherings and prayer in common.”²⁵⁹

The Deep Need to Communicate

298 Creating a holy atmosphere of prayer that permeates the daily events of family life will make the home a sanctuary and a safe and loving environment in which the personal dialogue of love between parent and child can

²⁵⁶ On the Family, 21.

²⁵⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Letter to Families (Feb. 2, 1994), 10.

²⁵⁸ TMHS, 62.

²⁵⁹ Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, 54.

be carried out after the pattern of a heart-to-heart conversation between our Father and His children. Children yearn for the love, affection, blessing, attention, and communication from their father and mother, and many conflicts can be traced to this need not being filled. Family prayer fills the need for both natural and supernatural love and communication.

299 Family prayer in the home is united to family prayer in the parish because it brings about a union of hearts around the home altar and table as an extension of the union of hearts in the Eucharist around the parish altar and table of the Lord. To unite our hearts in the Eucharist is “to communicate,” and this “communication” establishes the deepest physical, emotional, and spiritual bond that we can experience. Therefore, around the family table and home altar, in sharing a meal and prayer, family members “communicate” and unite their hearts and souls as one in the deepest bonds of love and affection. Families that pray and eat together stay together, if they truly “communicate” with one another from the heart and build up bonds of trust, affection, joy, and laughter that unite the family emotionally, spiritually, and physically with one another and with God the Father.

300 Many times, opposition to daily family prayer is presented in the form of another pastime or more profitable activity that parents and children could be doing, like sports, spending time with friends, work, and charitable activities

or service. Martha “had a sister named Mary (who) sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak.²⁶⁰ Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.’ The Lord said to her in reply, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing.²⁶¹ Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.’”²⁶² Prayerful communication with and adoration of Jesus is truly the one and only thing that every family member needs on a daily basis, and all other things are secondary.

The Need to Make Sacrifices

301 Today, it seems as if our world has lost its moral compass. Immorality permeates our world culture undermining the virtue of chastity. Yet, even with constant vigilance, exposure to various forms of immorality throughout the day is impossible to avoid because it is so pervasive and accessible, always threatening to violate the innocence of children and destroy families.

302 The only sure way to protect families from this evil, is first and foremost, to pursue a life of holiness every day by truly living our Catholic faith, participating in the sacramental life of the Church, and praying together as a family. In fact, daily family prayer, along with authentic chastity formation, is so important that together they constitute the antidote for the

²⁶⁰ [39] Sat beside the Lord at his feet: it is remarkable for first-century Palestinian Judaism that a woman would assume the posture of a disciple at the master’s feet (see also Luke 8:35; Acts 22:3), and it reveals a characteristic attitude of Jesus toward women in this gospel (see Luke 8:2-3).

²⁶¹ [42] There is need of only one thing: some ancient versions read, “there is need of few things”; another important, although probably inferior, reading found in some manuscripts is, “there is need of few things, or of one.”

²⁶² Lk 10:38-42.

free-fall destruction of the family and are *the* two primary building blocks for the universal healing and restoration of families and the *new springtime* in the Catholic Church.

303 Daily family prayer in the home does require sacrifice. Some things will have to be given up, not just the bad, but even what are considered good things, and it will require time and effort. The decision to pray together every day as family does require an initial sacrifice that may appear insurmountable at first, but, with perseverance, the sacrifice will bear fruit in great joy upon seeing your family grow in virtue, holiness, and love.

Dispelling the Argument, "I Just Don't Have Time"

304 Some people will argue that there is not enough time or that there are too many activities going on to pray together daily as family. *Not true.* A simple example can clear up this misunderstanding or way of reasoning. Think about a day that was so demanding you could not have done one more thing. Now, revisit that day, only this time picture your husband, wife, mother, father, or child being hit by a car. Would you clear your schedule to help them? Certainly. So it really is not about having enough time, or having too many activities; it is about priorities. If *something* is important to you, you will make time to do it – if *someone* is important to you, you will make time to be with them.

Daily Family Prayer: Creating an Atmosphere for Family Chastity Formation

305 Hopefully, you were brought up in a family that prayed together every day. If so, you likely continued this tradition with your special friend during courtship, engagement, and the early years of marriage. Your children would automatically see this daily prayer routine as normal, and, hopefully when they were ready to leave home, they would carry on this tradition with their children.

Start Today Not Tomorrow!

306 If that is not the case, the next best time to start daily family prayer is *right now!* It makes no difference whether you are young or old, single or married. Make daily family prayer the norm within your home, with your special friend during courtship and engagement, and pray together as a couple and family throughout your married life.

307 Parents who place a high value on daily family prayer will train their children to respect family prayer as a sacred time by being on time and properly disposed to pray. Eventually, children will come to know why it is so important to pray together every day; together, parents and children will learn to protect family prayer time from outside pressures by making it their highest mutual priority. Decisions about participating in outside sports and extracurricular activities will then be easier to make because everyone

will find ways to protect family prayer time from outside distractions and influences.

Making Time for Prayer

308 A good first step is to turn the television OFF and devote a half-hour or hour to prayer. Most television programs, including commercials, promote immorality and sinful living, which directly undermines parental efforts to foster purity and holiness in their children. Permitting this immorality to violate the home will destroy family values, erode the opportunities for quality family time, increase the breakdown in communications between parents and children, and completely undermine the entire process of chastity formation. If there are quality programs that you feel would be of value to the children, but they interfere with family prayer, simply record the show for viewing at another time.

309 The next step is to prioritize and organize all other activities around prayer time. A parent has the duty to train their children to live chastely and consequently has to make the final decision to either honor God's plan for life by developing chastity and holiness, or permit other activities, as positive as many of them are, to rule and affect the life of the family. Even necessary activities, like homework or chores, can be rescheduled so as not to interfere with daily prayer.

310 Getting the whole family involved in the planning process and in leading prayer means

children and young people will take ownership of and interest in prayer time, and they will grow in virtue by choosing to sacrifice other good things for the sake of the family and for God. Expect every member of the family to be there on time and be prepared to pray. In the simple daily exercise of commitment to family prayer, all seven pillars essential to chastity formation are developed: obedient faith, the formation of conscience, sacrificial love, an apprenticeship in self-mastery, acquiring virtues, the vocation to holiness, and the goal of eternal life.

Creating a Space for Prayer

311 Creating a center of prayer within the home can be quite easy. Simply choose an area that reflects an attitude of prayerfulness: a room in the house or a small table in a room where blessed objects called "sacramentals"²⁶³ can be displayed such as a crucifix, statues, holy pictures, or candles. Once adorned, the area takes on a special significance as being a place of honor in the home that will become synonymous with prayer and holiness and can be a place where family members go to pray during times of difficulty.

Choosing the Prayers

312 You decide what daily family prayers to use and what the allotted time will be. The Church recommended possibilities are almost limitless. Praying the family Rosary is highly recommended and is the easiest and one of the most powerful prayers for families to pray.

²⁶³ Blessed by a priest, items become sacramentals which are "sacred signs" (CCC, 1667) that provide grace and "sanctify different circumstances of life" (CCC, 1677) such as doing good and avoiding evil; remitting venial sins; and providing spiritual and physical protection. Some examples of sacramentals are holy water, oil, salt, medals, candles, holy pictures, crucifixes, religious statues, the Rosary, and veneration of relics of saints. (Cf. CCC, 1674).

Each mystery provides a visual image and teaching opportunity on matters of the Faith and living the Gospel. Pope John Paul II said of the Rosary, “The Holy Rosary, by age-old tradition, has shown itself particularly effective as a prayer which brings the family together. Individual family members, in turning their eyes towards Jesus, also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Spirit of God.”²⁶⁴

313 Other options for daily family prayer in the home could include the many other forms mentioned previously: praying either the Morning or Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, reading the Bible, praying for one another, singing favorite hymns, learning about the lives of the saints, teaching children the Catechism, or just taking time to talk about faith matters that are important to you and your children and arise in daily life. With the Rosary as an anchor, you can vary other forms of prayer each day and according to the Church calendar, in order to help keep it more interesting over the long run.

Praying Together With Other Families

314 Families need daily prayer together in the home and also need to pray together with other families. Family prayer supports chastity

formation, and praying together with other families at home and at the parish provides mutual support in building up a chaste culture of life. Because the family is at the center of a universal and supernatural battle between *good and evil, life and death, love and all that is opposed to love*, there is an urgent need to join together in prayer to protect and defend God’s plan for holiness in marriage and family life.

315 Pope John Paul II said that, because of the “enormous disparity between the powerful resources available to the forces promoting the ‘culture of death’ and the means at the disposal of those working for a ‘culture of life and love,’”²⁶⁵ prayer must become a dominant element in the Church, “prayer by the family, prayer for the family, and prayer with the family.”²⁶⁶

316 An easy way to support families praying together would be to form a weekly *Family Prayer Night Devotion*.²⁶⁷ You can begin by inviting friends, family, and parish members to form a core group of volunteers to help organize and start *Family Prayer Night* at your parish. The simple beauty of praying the Rosary as a family during Eucharistic Adoration also makes it very easy to start.

317 The form of *Family Prayer Night* can be modified to include cultural customs, local family traditions and forms of Eucharistic worship, Marian devotion, and family prayer that are ap-

²⁶⁴ *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 41.

²⁶⁵ *Evangelium Vitae*, 100.

²⁶⁶ Letter to Families, 4.

²⁶⁷ For more information on this devotion see www.FamilyPrayerNight.org

proved by the Church. The aim is to be united as one universal family in our devotion and heart-felt love for Jesus in the Eucharist and Mary in the Rosary, while manifesting this love in many beautiful and unique ways, which express the particular cultural traditions of families, races, and nations. At the parish level, *Family Prayer Night* then desires to foster and support daily prayer in the heart of every family home.

Rebuilding the Domestic Church

318 The future of the world depends upon the family, and the family depends upon parents being supported by the larger Church family so each family can fulfill its mission and vocation as the vital cell of society. Having witnessed the sufferings of so many families, we believe that Jesus is calling to us from the cross as he did to St. Francis, but, in our time, the mission and the mandate is to “*Rebuild My domestic church, for it is falling into ruins.*” This mission begins with family prayer.

319 Pope John Paul II devoted his life and pontificate to proclaiming God’s plan for marriage and the family founded upon family prayer and chastity. He recognized the forces aligned against the family and confidently pointed out the way to victory in the battle for the family and a culture of life. Formation in chastity and daily family prayer are the means to transform the spiritual atmosphere of every home and to bring about the victory of life over the culture of death:

Unfortunately various programmes backed by very powerful resources nowadays seem to aim at the breakdown of the family. At times it appears that concerted efforts are being made to present as “normal” and attractive, and even to glamorize, situations which are in fact “irregular.” Indeed, they contradict “the truth and love” which should inspire and guide relationships between men and women, thus causing tensions and divisions in families, with grave consequences particularly for children. The moral conscience becomes darkened; what is true, good and beautiful is deformed; and freedom is replaced by what is actually enslavement.

It is apparent then...how indispensable is the *witness of all families* who live their vocation day by day; how urgent it is *for families to pray* and for that prayer to increase and to spread throughout the world.... What Christ tells us, in this particular moment of history, constitutes a forceful call to a great prayer with families and for families. The Virgin Mother invites us to unite ourselves through this prayer to the sentiments of her Son, who loves each and every family.²⁶⁸

Summary Points

320 An indispensable element of a parent’s mission is to lead daily family prayer and create a healthy, spiritual atmosphere within the home.

321 Every family home is a domestic church, and all members carry out the *priesthood of the baptized* in a daily offering of spiritual

²⁶⁸ *Letter to Families*, 5.

sacrifices, charitable acts, family prayer, and active participation in the liturgical worship and sacramental life of the Church.

322 Daily family prayer creates deep bonds of pure love and affection on the spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical level, strengthening chaste, holy love relationships.

323 The Holy Family and the early Church are models of daily family prayer.

324 The highest form of daily family prayer is participation in the liturgical worship of the Eucharist in the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Family prayer leads to and flows from the Eucharist.

325 Of the great variety of Church-approved devotional prayers, the most highly recommended and efficacious devotional prayer is the daily family Rosary.

326 To live in full measure the vocation and spirituality of the family, all energy must be devoted to overcoming the societal pressures that hinder family gatherings and prayer.

327 Family members must make sacrifices for the common good of daily family prayer which establishes a deeper communion of love within the family and with God.

328 Families praying together with other families during the Sacrifice of the Mass and by praying the Rosary together during Eucharistic Adoration at the parish level will restore, build up, and renew in holy love every member of the Catholic Church family worldwide.

