



DONNA-MARIE COOPER O'BOYLE



FEEDING YOUR
FAMILY'S SOUL

DINNER TABLE SPIRITUALITY



PARACLETE PRESS
BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

2016 First printing

Feeding Your Family's Soul: Dinner Table Spirituality

Copyright © 2016 by Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle

ISBN 978-1-61261-835-7

Unless otherwise marked, Catechism references, designated throughout by CCC, are taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II, 2nd ed.*

Unless otherwise marked, Scripture references are taken from the The Revised Standard Version of the Bible: Catholic Edition, copyright © 1965, 1966 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked NRSV are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition, copyright 1989, 1993, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture texts marked NAB are taken from the *New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms* © 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

The Paraclete Press name and logo (dove on cross) are trademarks of Paraclete Press, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: O'Boyle, Donna-Marie Cooper, author.

Title: Feeding your family's soul : dinner table spirituality / Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle.

Description: Brewster MA : Paraclete Press Inc., 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016026457 | ISBN 9781612618357 (trade paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Families—Religious aspects—Catholic Church. | Dinners and dining—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Catholic Church—Doctrines.

Classification: LCC BX2351 .O225 2016 | DDC 249—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016026457>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in an electronic retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Paraclete Press

Brewster, Massachusetts

www.paracletepress.com

Printed in the United States of America

DEDICATION

This book is lovingly dedicated to my children: Justin, Chaldea, Jessica, Joseph, and Mary-Catherine, and my grandson, Shepherd.

This book is also dedicated in loving memory to my mother, Alexandra Mary Uzwiak Cooper, in thanksgiving for the loving importance she placed on regular dinner times and for the countless seeds of faith she planted and nourished in my heart. Additionally, it is dedicated to my spiritual mother and friend Mother Teresa, in gratitude for the lessons of love and guidance she imparted to my heart and soul.



Photo: Donna-Marie (pregnant with Joseph) with
Mother Teresa at the convent in New York.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD		ix
PREFACE		xii
INTRODUCTION		xv
PRAYERS		xix
RECIPES FOR MEALS AND LIFE!		xxii
ONE:	Learning to Love Our Neighbor from St. Teresa of Calcutta	1
TWO:	Living the Beatitudes	6
THREE:	Doing Small Things with Great Love	10
FOUR:	The Communion of Saints	14
FIVE:	Learning Humility from St. Catherine Labouré	18
SIX:	The Consecrated Life	21
SEVEN:	Learning Courage from St. Maximilian Kolbe	25
EIGHT:	Respect for the Human Person	30
NINE:	Learning Obedience from St. Joseph	33
TEN:	The Tradition of Prayer	37
ELEVEN:	Learning Mercy from St. Faustina Kowalska	42

TWELVE:	About Sin	46
THIRTEEN:	Learning to Love the Blessed Mother from St. John Paul II	50
FOURTEEN:	About Moral Conscience	54
FIFTEEN:	Learning Forgiveness from St. Maria Goretti	60
SIXTEEN:	Being Virtuous	63
SEVENTEEN:	Learning Perseverance from St. Monica	66
EIGHTEEN:	Social Justice	69
NINETEEN:	Learning to Trust God from St. Augustine	75
TWENTY:	Learning Steadfast Faith from St. Teresa of Ávila	79
TWENTY-ONE:	The Sacrament of Baptism	85
TWENTY-TWO:	The Sacrament of Confirmation	88
TWENTY-THREE:	The Sacrament of the Eucharist	94
TWENTY-FOUR:	The Sacrament of Penance	98
TWENTY-FIVE:	The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick	102
TWENTY-SIX:	The Sacrament of Holy Orders	106
TWENTY-SEVEN:	The Sacrament of Matrimony	111
TWENTY-EIGHT:	About the First Commandment	115
TWENTY-NINE:	About the Second Commandment	119
THIRTY:	About the Third Commandment	122
THIRTY-ONE:	About the Fourth Commandment	127

THIRTY-TWO:	About the Fifth Commandment	130
THIRTY-THREE:	About the Sixth Commandment	135
THIRTY-FOUR:	About the Seventh Commandment	140
THIRTY-FIVE:	About the Eighth Commandment	145
THIRTY-SIX:	About the Ninth Commandment	148
THIRTY-SEVEN:	About the Tenth Commandment	152
THIRTY-EIGHT:	Learning the Love of Family from Sts. Zélie and Louis Martin	156
THIRTY-NINE:	Learning about Prayer from the Saints	161
FORTY:	Learning to Pray from Jesus	164
FORTY-ONE:	Learning to Pray from the Blessed Mother	167
FORTY-TWO:	Learning to Pray from the Holy Spirit	171
FORTY-THREE:	Kinds of Prayer	176
FORTY-FOUR:	Favorable Places to Pray	180
FORTY-FIVE:	The Desire for God	185
FORTY-SIX:	Sacred Scripture	188
FORTY-SEVEN:	Why Catholics Honor the Blessed Mother	191
FORTY-EIGHT:	Learning About Our Duty to Be a Good Example from John A. Hardon, sj	196
FORTY-NINE:	The Gifts of the Holy Spirit	201
FIFTY:	The Cardinal Virtues	205
FIFTY-ONE:	The Theological Virtues	209

FIFTY-TWO:	Learning About Redemptive Suffering from St. John Paul II and the Saints	213
FIFTY-THREE:	(Extra Credit!) Angels	219
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		223
ABOUT THE AUTHOR		225
NOTES		227

FOREWORD

By the labor of your hands you shall eat. You will be happy and prosper; your wife like a fruitful vine in the heart of your house; your children like shoots of the olive around your table.

—Ps. 128:2–3 NAB

The Scriptures say if the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labor (see Ps. 127:1). When building a home, you simply don't purchase a piece of land and begin construction. You have to build a foundation—you have to dig deep into the ground and build a strong support structure upon which that house will stand firm. Family life is no different. Parents and children must build the foundation of their family on the covenant love of Jesus Christ. In 1 John 4, we see this love in action. John tells us, "If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12). God is inviting families to participate in a life of mutual self-gift built on the foundation of love, service, and sacrifice. The strength of covenant intimacy sustains and nurtures families throughout their life together. They learn to see each other through God's eyes, and they should never forget that, even in difficult moments, the Lord is the firm and strong foundation upon which their family is built.

Prayer is both the gift of grace and a response to God's invitation to covenant relationship in the family. Prayer allows families to walk humbly before God in the obedience of faith—to listen to the voice of God and allow that voice to change and shape their lives. Prayer draws them deeply

into God's heart so that every day they recommit themselves to a personal relationship of love and life with Him. Families desire communion with God, but they are not fully alive until they are *in* God. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:16).

With a little effort, parents can create and maintain a prayerful, Christ-centered atmosphere in the home. The domestic church is the ideal setting for starting faith traditions such as reading and discussing the Sunday Gospel, praying as a family before bedtime, or delivering food boxes to the poor during the holidays—all of which flows from a life of prayer.

The nexus between both covenant love and the life of prayer in the family is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. "At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1323). Each Sunday, the faithful receive our Lord in word and sacrament, and then live out that reality in the family, the church of the home. Just as the parish family gathers around the altar to be nourished by the Lord, the family at home gathers around the dinner table to be nourished physically and spiritually as they journey together toward heaven.

In this magnificent book, Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle shows how dinners are one of the ways in which families provide the setting for each member to discover his or her vocation and mission by following God's plan for his or her life. Through family meals, children will see the faith being lived out in the marriage covenant between their mom and dad, and they will begin to fall in love with Jesus.

Feeding Your Family's Soul will help to create a joy-filled family spirituality that flows from the marriage covenant. This book is an absolutely invaluable resource that will help parents avoid the mistake of outsourcing their responsibility for teaching their children the faith. While important, schools and parishes should not take the place of but rather support what parents are teaching their children at home. This book beautifully demonstrates that a parent's greatest hope for their children flows from their greatest gift to them: teaching their kids by personal witness and example what it means to be fully alive in the Catholic faith.

With so many challenges to family life today, *Feeding Your Family's Soul* gets to the heart of what is most important in the life of the family: keeping Christ as the centerpiece as each family member strives to be holy—to be all that God created and calls them to be. Donna-Marie reminds us that the Lord is the fountain from which families will receive the strength, power, and grace that they need to help each other get to heaven.

Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers
International speaker, author, and EWTN series host
Portland, Oregon

PREFACE

Having grown up in a large Catholic family, I have vivid memories of our family dinners, which consisted of a big bunch of sometimes rowdy kids circled around our modest kitchen table. My mother made sure we said our grace before we dove in to our meal. With eight kids, meals were unpretentious with no frills. What stands out in my mind is the regular dinner time, a valuable tradition my mother insisted on for her family. Because she did, we knew there was comfort in a familial routine; we experienced the stability found in coming together around the table to break bread and converse; and we grew as a family.

It has been my deep desire to write this book for families to encourage them to create their own special memories and form a beautiful tradition, not allowing the demands from the culture and relentless schedules to dictate to them what they should be doing instead of having dinner together—all the while enjoying one another's company.

In my own faith journey, I am very blessed to have shared a friendship with Mother Teresa of Calcutta for about ten years. I'll never forget meeting her for the first time. She looked so tiny! Yet I knew that looks could be very deceiving, and that the humble, unassuming woman—though small in stature and even frail looking—was an absolute powerhouse of faith, hope, and love! She was full of blessed wisdom. And I was a very fortunate and happy recipient of it.

Our very first conversation was all about the family. Mother Teresa told me that my children were very fortunate to live in a family. She

was accustomed to picking up abandoned children out of dustbins and taking care of them. Mother Teresa had seen all kinds of poverty and dealt with every sort of need. I told her I felt so blessed to have my children.

Throughout our conversations and times together, Mother Teresa impressed upon me the simple yet poignant fact that “love begins at home.” It absolutely must. She often spoke about the importance of being present to one’s family and of being sure that all of the needs are met there in the heart of the home before going off to serve God someplace else—whether it be on a committee, in a mission, or wherever.

Mother Teresa was convinced of the power of prayer and the need to pray together as a family. She often quoted Fr. Patrick Peyton: “A family that prays together stays together.” Mother Teresa said, “More and more people realize that unless we bring back prayer and love into the family we will never have peace.”¹

I can’t help but smile when thinking of a story my friend Fr. Peter told me. A group of seminarians were seated at table about to enjoy a meal together when Mother Teresa suddenly entered the room and saw that one of them had very little on his plate. Most likely, the young man was attempting to use good manners; perhaps he was holding back in a form of penance or mortification. Mother Teresa immediately lifted a nearby large serving platter and in a kind of dramatic motion proceeded to slide an extra-large portion of food onto the young man’s plate.

She then, with a sparkle in her eye, looked up at him and said, “You won’t be able to take care of the needs of those around you if you are worried about your hungry stomach.” Surely this message must have resounded with everyone present, not just the seminarian who had suddenly become the unwitting recipient of Mother Teresa’s wisdom and love.

In one of her letters to me, Mother Teresa spoke about becoming a “soul of prayer” and how we should work and pray together to strive to make each of our homes into “another Nazareth”:

Fidelity to growing into a soul of prayer is the beginning of great holiness. If we remember “what we do to Jesus—that we do to each other,” we would be real contemplatives in the heart of the world. Let us learn to pray and work as Jesus did for 30 years in Nazareth. The life and work; the prayer and sacrifice at Nazareth are so much like what our life should be. That peace, joy and unity that joined the Holy Family together in prayer and work is such a wonderful living example to us. They grew in holiness together. Let us learn from Mary to pray and ask Her to pray that your home will be another Nazareth.

I am very thankful to my mother for forming the tradition of family dinner times in our family. I am also very thankful to my “spiritual mother,” Mother Teresa, for encouraging and affirming me in my vocation as wife and mother.

It is my prayer that in using this guide to *feeding your family's soul*, you will endeavor to become souls of prayer, as Mother Teresa suggests, as you go deeper into the faith with your family and pray together in your own domestic church.



INTRODUCTION

Parents know without doubt that it is imperative to feed their family—to nourish them so they can grow healthy and strong. It’s our job, after all; we don’t need a handbook to tell us about our duty to feed our offspring. It’s innate. Parents are all too familiar with the adamant cries from their newborns asking as politely as they possibly can to be fed, and with older children who clamor for food or snacks if we are not quick enough with their meals. It’s a fact of life—we all need to eat. And when we’re too busy to pause to eat, our growling stomachs remind us to feed ourselves.

There’s another kind of hunger for food. Our souls yearn for the spiritual food that is necessary for our spiritual survival. Jesus preached, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (John 6:27 NAB). Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI stated in *Porta Fidei*: “We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples.”²

The Church instructs parents that the teaching and learning of faith should begin right in the heart of the home: “Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.”³ We need to feed our children’s bodies *and* their souls. “The home is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, from here on noted as CCC, 2224).

Additionally, we learn from the *Catechism*: “Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of

evangelizing their children” (CCC 2225). And, without doubt, the best possible time to do this evangelization, to help combat all of the ungodly things that come at children from the world, is as soon as possible—while they’re young. “Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the ‘first heralds’ for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church” (CCC 2225). A wholesome family life and early teaching in the faith can foster an interior disposition which will “remain a support for” a living faith throughout the child’s life (CCC 2225).

As Christians, we understand that God calls us to be shining witnesses of our faith, which will ultimately help others, too. In order to be salt and light to a hungry world—a living sign of the presence of the risen Lord and a credible witness capable of opening hearts and minds—there’s no question about it: we must start in our homes. The firm foundation established in a Christian home spills out into the world as the family grows and is involved in community life.

Yet, in the midst of crazy, hectic schedules, all the while feeling bombarded by the messages of the culture, too, sometimes parents can lose sight of, or even forget, the need somehow to carve out essential time to teach the faith to their children.

So many parents today feel stretched beyond measure; they have allowed their kids’ evening activities to take on a life of their own. Sometimes parents’ own schedules are packed too, and many evenings they find themselves running from place to place. Consequently, they grab far too much fast food and miss out on healthy meals and family togetherness in the heart of the home. Family dinners suffer.

It’s no secret that we live in a technology-driven age. Everyone wants to be *connected* and see the latest status updates—so much so that, sadly, people often fail to live in the present moments of family life. It’s important

to be countercultural in making sure everyone comes together regularly as a family to eat dinner.

It might seem daunting to figure out how to reclaim your family dinner times (if they've escaped you). And how can you possibly carve out time to teach the faith to your children? I believe we can nourish our family's bodies *and* souls on a regular basis, even in busy or chaotic households. Christian parents need to roll up their sleeves and really *be* what they are called by God to be: the first and foremost educators of the faith to their children.

Ready to roll up your sleeves?

Feeding Your Family's Soul provides tangible and creative answers to this challenge. This book can become a vital tool for parents, grandparents, and other guardians of elementary-school- to high-school-aged children, helping them to transform dinner into a distinct time to reconnect with the family, pray, converse, break bread, and share and learn our faith.

Each chapter offers a lesson for each week of the year, which can be read at the dinner table on Sunday (or whatever day works best for the family). The chapter opens with a very brief background for you to read to yourself, followed by a succinct lesson to share with the family. You can teach right at the dinner table. In about ten minutes, the family will have been educated in their Catholic faith while gathered together in the heart of the home. Then afterward, everyone can help with dinner cleanup!

Church teaching is offered in a variety of ways throughout the fifty-two lessons: through stories about the saints, excerpts from the *Catechism*, and real-life scenarios that illustrate the teachings. Each chapter has reflection questions you can ask the children. The family can carry the lesson theme throughout the week by using a very simple suggestion called a "theme extension," as well as by praying the suggested prayer together each day whenever it is convenient to do so. You'll find extracurricular activities and recipes, too.

Even amid the household pandemonium, you'll be relieved to have a sensible way to hold your children's attention and use your time together at the dinner table wisely.

I suspect you will thoroughly enjoy your faith discussions centered around the reflection questions at the end of each short lesson. My hope is that the lessons will stir everyone's hearts to desire deeply to know more about their faith. Lessons learned young will be nurtured more and more as the years unfold.

Allow this book to be the rumbly stomach reminding you to feed your children's souls. But, don't forget to have fun with it, too! You don't have to follow it in any sort of order. You can choose whatever theme you'd like for each week.

May this book be a blessed tool to bring your family together at the heart of the home while growing together as a family and growing closer to God!

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.

—*Lumen Gentium*⁴

PRAYERS

GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.



GRACE AFTER MEALS

Many people don't pray a prayer after dinner, although it is traditional after eating to thank God and to remember those who have died. Each evening, try to stay at the table together for the couple of extra minutes it takes to pray this prayer together.

We give Thee thanks, Almighty God, for all thy benefits, Who livest and reignest, world without end. Amen.

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to reward with eternal life all those who do us good for Thy name's sake. Amen.

℣. Let us bless the Lord.

℟. Thanks be to God.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR EVERY FAMILY ON EARTH

by St. John Paul II

Lord, from you every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. Father, you are Love and Life.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman, and through the Holy Spirit, the fountain of divine charity, grant that every family on earth may become for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.

Grant that your grace may guide the thoughts and actions of husbands and wives for the good of their families and of all the families of the world.

Grant that the young may find in the family solid support for their human dignity and for their growth in truth and love.

Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, may prove mightier than all the weaknesses and trials through which our families sometimes pass.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.

We ask this of you, who are Life, Truth, and Love with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



PRAYER FOR OUR FAMILY

by St. Teresa of Calcutta

Heavenly Father, you have given us the model of life in the Holy Family of Nazareth. Help us, O Loving Father, to make our family another Nazareth where love, peace, and joy reign. May it be deeply contemplative, intensely

Eucharistic, revived with joy. Help us to stay together in joy and sorrow in family prayer. Teach us to see Jesus in the members of our families, especially in their distressing disguise. May the Eucharistic heart of Jesus make our hearts humble like His and help us to carry out our family duties in a holy way. May we love one another as God loves each one of us, more and more each day, and forgive each other's faults as you forgive our sins. Help us, O Loving Father, to take whatever you give and give whatever you take with a big smile. Immaculate Heart of Mary, cause of our joy, pray for us. St. Joseph, pray for us. Holy Guardian Angels, be always with us, guide and protect us. Amen.

RECIPES FOR MEALS AND LIFE!

One time I enjoyed a delightful conversation with a man I sat next to on a flight returning from filming some television shows at the EWTN studio in Alabama. You might be wondering what this has to do with recipes. Well, my seatmate, Bill, and I somehow started chatting about families and the faith. He is Baptist and I am Catholic. It turns out we both wholeheartedly believe in the importance of teaching the faith to our families and of being an exemplary model to them.

Bill shared with me about an older woman very dear to him and his wife. In fact, they affectionately call her “Nonna” as if she were their grandmother. Nonna is from Italy and never shares her famous spaghetti sauce recipe—that is, until very recently when she lovingly gave it to them. It was handed down for generations, and now Bill and his wife feel very blessed to have it, too.

Bill and I began discussing the process of making spaghetti sauce. After admitting that many times when I am in a hurry I open a jar for our spaghetti dinners, I shared vivid memories of my mother’s homemade sauce simmering in a big pot on our old kitchen stove. I smiled and told Bill that I wouldn’t ask him for Nonna’s “famous” sauce recipe, since I knew it was confidential and reserved for family members. He smiled and told me that one of the secret ingredients is the fennel seed she adds to the meatballs. He suddenly looked to be deep in thought for a few seconds, and then he

said something quite revealing: “The thing is, you need to keep stirring the sauce.”

Nonna’s sauce recipe requires a lot of stirring after each new addition to the pot.

“That’s the problem!” I quipped. Shaking my head back and forth slowly, I added, “We don’t have time to stir the sauce anymore.”



Families today have become so busy that often they eat fast food rather than take the time to make a good meal. They wrestle with crazy, demanding schedules. I certainly understand that we can’t always be “stirring the sauce,” but I think it would be nice to bring some of that tradition back to our hearth and home. We can strive to carve out some time to make special meals.

As you go through the weekly dinner table lessons in this book, you will notice that woven throughout are fun and delicious recipes you can make with your family. Most of them have a little story to accompany the recipe. I sincerely hope that you will also feel encouraged to reach out to your relatives and share recipes to keep family traditions going. It is a wonderful way to stay in touch with those relatives, too. I also encourage you to create your own distinct and memorable stories by spending time cooking together in the kitchen. Don’t worry about the mess! Messes can be part of the fun and part of the memories!

Children and grandchildren grow up so quickly, and you definitely want to seize the time now to create those delightful memories with them. Do your best to find time—at least occasionally—to “stir the sauce.”

In addition, I’d like to suggest that you take out your good china for these Sunday family dinners. It’s something my mother taught me when she was sick with cancer. She said we shouldn’t wait for a special holiday

or occasion to take out the good china. We need to celebrate our family now. Perhaps you can eat in the dining room that evening rather than at the kitchen table. Go ahead and light some candles, too, and enjoy the special experience together. Be sure to invite our Lord and have fun together learning the faith!

ONE

Learning to Love Our Neighbor from St. Teresa of Calcutta

CONTEMPLATE

Because we cannot see Christ we cannot express our love to Him, but our neighbors we can always see, and we can do to them what, if we saw him, we would like to do to Christ.

— St. Teresa of Calcutta,
*Something Beautiful for God*⁵

PREPARATIONS

Decide if you'll enlist helpers to assist with making the fun recipe and for help with setting the table. If time allows, read the Contemplate passage above and think about it during the day. Also, read the Dinner Table Teaching in advance of your dinner time.

OPENING PRAYER

(to be read out loud by parent or guardian or by all)

Dear Lord, Jesus, please visit our family, blessed with one another and with food to eat. Please bless our bodies and our souls. Please take care of

those who are lacking in food and do not have a family. *Grace Before Meals. Hail Mary.*

DINNER TABLE TEACHING

*Read the Contemplate passage and this Dinner
Table Teaching out loud to the family.*

St. Teresa of Calcutta was a religious sister who founded the Missionaries of Charity order and devoted her life to wholeheartedly caring for the poor. She lived the Gospel of Matthew (see Matt. 25:31–46). She knew that Jesus's words, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40 NRSV), should apply to all of our lives. Jesus taught us very clearly that whatever we do to others, we do to Him. Further, he taught us that we will be judged at the end of our lives by how much we have loved and served Jesus in others. Jesus's words make it very clear to us how we should behave toward others and care for the people in our lives. Jesus wants us to treat everyone with His love and tenderness.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Ask the children to share their thoughts.

How can we "see" Jesus in our neighbor?

What are some ways we can love Jesus in our family members and all those we encounter?

Who in particular do you think you should show extra love to? (For example, someone you know who may be hurting in some way.)

How can you show them love?

CLOSING PRAYER

(to pray together out loud)

Grace After Meals; Dear St. Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us; Our Father.



Look over the optional activities below and discuss with the family to see if you can carry them out during the upcoming week.

WEEKDAY PRAYER

Each evening of the upcoming week at the dinner table, pray this simple prayer.

Dear Lord, Jesus, open our hearts to love more. St. Teresa of Calcutta, help us to be attentive to the needs around us, and show us how to love with Jesus's love. Amen.

THEME EXTENSION

This activity is for anyone in the family, or it can be carried out together.

Sometime this week, surprise someone with an unexpected act of kindness. Ponder this in advance if possible. Will it be a homemade greeting card? Will it be doing something to help another?

EXTRA CREDIT!

This activity is for anyone in the family.

Read Matthew 25:31–46 and ponder the words and meaning. Then research St. Teresa of Calcutta's life and share something about her with the family at the dinner table during the upcoming week.



• RECIPE •

Irish Soda Bread

Every year when St. Patrick's Day is coming up, I get a hankering to make Irish soda bread. Each time I make it I think (since St. Paddy's Day falls during Lent) that it really tastes too good for a Lenten bread. I use my friend Mary Maguire's old-time recipe and tweak it a bit. I usually double this recipe to make two loaves: one just to make sure it tastes good and one for St. Patrick's Day!

Ingredients

- 3 cups flour (sometimes I use a wholegrain flour for more nutrition)
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. caraway seeds (optional)
- 1¼ cups buttermilk (I use milk with a couple of tablespoons of apple cider vinegar mixed in to curdle it)
- ¼ cup butter softened (you can substitute with soy margarine)
- ½ cup sugar (sometimes I use honey)
- 1 egg
- 1 cup raisins (I love to use golden raisins or a combination of golden and black)

Directions

Mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and caraway seeds in a large bowl. Cut in the butter until crumbly; stir in the raisins and sugar. Add beaten egg and buttermilk to mixture; stir until dough clings together.

On a lightly floured surface, knead gently and shape into a ball. Grease and flour cake pan lightly; place dough in pan and pat to fit pan. Brush top with beaten egg and cut a deep cross in the top of the bread with a sharp knife. Don't forget the cross! Bake in oven at about 350°F for about an hour or until a cake pick inserted in the center comes out clean. Place on a wire rack, and brush the top with butter. Yum!

Note: Sometimes I substitute soy butter for the butter. I sometimes shape our loaves into rounds and bake them on cookie sheets rather than in cake pans—both ways work well. Every now and then I don't put an egg wash on top. Occasionally, I use half whole wheat flour and half unbleached white flour to make the bread a bit more nutritious. Also, I'll let you in on a little secret: I don't usually have buttermilk on hand, so instead I use regular milk with a couple of tablespoons of cider vinegar mixed in to curdle it. Don't worry, this is safe, and some recipes give this option.

One thing I can guarantee is that every time I make Irish soda bread, I ask myself why I only make this bread at St. Patrick's Day. It tastes so delicious! Enjoy!



TWO

Living the Beatitudes

CONTEMPLATE

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

—Matthew 5:1–3 (NRSV)

PREPARATIONS

Decide if you'll enlist helpers to assist with making the fun recipe and for help with setting the table. If time allows, read the Contemplate passage above and think about it during the day. Also, read the Dinner Table Teaching in advance of your dinner time.

OPENING PRAYER

(to be read out loud by parent or guardian or by all)

Dear Lord, Jesus, please visit our family, blessed with one another and with food to eat. Please take care of those who are lacking in food and do not have a family. *Grace Before Meals. Hail Mary.*

DINNER TABLE TEACHING

Read the Contemplate passage and this Dinner

Table Teaching out loud to the family.

Jesus taught the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:1–10). *Beatitude* means a state of deep joy and happiness. Jesus impressed upon his followers that authentic Christian discipleship is based on the Beatitudes and that they would be happy in this life and the next if they followed them. He also said that the Beatitudes fulfill God's promises to Abraham and his descendants. Faithful followers of Jesus will enjoy meaningful rewards despite the challenges they endure. Jesus further taught His followers that love is at the heart of all Christian commandments.

The Beatitudes are as follows:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Matt. 5:3–10 Douay-Rheims)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Ask the children to share their thoughts.

What does it mean to hunger and thirst for justice? *Parents, help the kids out with this.*

Who are the clean of heart? Are you?

Do you know anyone who has suffered persecution for justice's sake? Do you think some of the saints might have suffered in this way? Is there someone you can think of who might be currently suffering persecution for being a Christian? *Parents can tell the children about Christians who were persecuted and who are being persecuted.*

CLOSING PRAYER

(to pray together out loud)

Grace After Meals. Teach us, Lord, to follow you always, even when it is difficult, even when we are criticized. *Our Father.*

Look over the optional activities below and discuss them with the family to see if you can carry them out during the upcoming week.

WEEKDAY PRAYER

*Each evening of the upcoming week at the dinner table,
pray this simple prayer.*

Lord, Jesus, I want to follow You. Lead me so that I may lead others to You. Please bless and give strength to the persecuted. Amen.

THEME EXTENSION

This activity is for anyone in the family, or it can be carried out together.

Ponder someone you know who has been mourning. Devise a plan (simple or more involved) that you can carry out to bring them comfort. It can be as simple as an e-mail or a phone call.

EXTRA CREDIT!

This activity is for anyone in the family.

If possible, find some time this week to read over the Beatitudes again and contemplate each one slowly. If you'd like, imagine yourself sitting at Jesus's feet as He is telling you how to live a life of beatitude. After sitting quietly, praying, and meditating on the Beatitudes, choose one or two that especially seem to be speaking to your heart, and ponder ways you can live them more fully and deeply.

