

Helping Children Speak to God

Greetings!

Imagine never connecting with a friend. No phone calls. No texts. No walks with interesting conversation. No communication at all. Would you feel close to that person? Would you feel free to turn to the person when in need or to share good news?

Now think of your relationship with God. How good would that relationship be if it was void of communication?

Prayer is simply talking to God and listening for God's response. And when we make time for communication with God, our relationship with God grows.

We can help our children understand this in many ways. Of course, we will want to incorporate structured times of prayer into their day. We can make sure to include grace before meals. We can use the traditional table blessing "Bless us, O Lord." We can sing the refrain of one of our Communion songs, such as "Dona Nobis Pacem," "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name," "I am the Bread of Life," or any familiar hymn from Mass.

Encourage children to present their needs to God.

Another time for scripted prayer is bedtime. Many families teach their children a special prayer that they say as they get ready to sleep, such as the prayers of the Rosary. This is also a good time for children to learn to pray extemporaneously. Encourage them to present their needs to God. At bedtime, we can ask, "For whom and for what would we like to pray tonight?" These spontaneous prayers can be funny, tender, and meaningful. Praying for the Church, for the world and its leaders, for special issues such as the care of creation, for the people we love, and more, can be part of this prayer time.

Help children understand that prayers to God are no more limited to certain times or words than any relationship is. Saying, "God, help me with my test" or "Help Grandpa get better" are prayers. When afraid, we can pray to God for help. When we see someone in need, we can pray that God will be there for them through other people. Model this for your chil-



Parents and grandparents can show children how to bring prayer into their day.

dren. When passing an accident site, ask the children to join you in praying for the people involved, their families, and the rescue workers. Is a youngster struggling with behavior? At naptime, pray together that God will be there to help with good choices. Remind them that God is always present and is embracing them.

Help children see that prayer is also praise and thanksgiving. Do they see something amazing in nature? "Wow, God! That's awesome" is a prayer. Are you wrapping a gift? "Thank you, God, for Aunt Sheila" is a prayer.

Of course, we have to "practice what we preach!" See if encouraging this loving connection with God for your children deepens your prayer life.