



Year of the Word

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The Year of the Word 2007

Luke: The Good News of God's Mercy

Reflection and Activity Guide for Families

From the Austin Diocese Catholic Family Counseling and Family Life Office
Note: This guide is offered as a supplement to the book, *Luke: The Good News of God's Mercy*, by Kevin Perrotta, so that families can share the themes of the book of Luke as this Gospel is studied and reflected upon by the adults of our diocese during this Lenten season.

Week 1: Surprised by God (Luke 1:26-55)

This week's Scripture passage calls us to reflect upon the ways in which God sometimes does things we don't expect. Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will be the mother of his son certainly comes as a surprise to her, and she marvels in the Magnificat at how God, in his greatness, is changing things (lifting up the lowly, scattering the proud).

Questions for Family Discussion:

- What is the best surprise you ever had? Why was it a good surprise?
- What good surprises has God given your family?

Family Activity:

Surprise a family member this week by doing something nice for them when they least expect it.

Family Prayer:

Create a prayer space in your home by using a mantle, an end table, or a small decorator table, and placing an icon or to, a candle, a bible, and some flowers or greenery on it. (Decorate it in the way that is most meaningful to your own family.) Use this prayer space as the place to gather as you pray together and reflect on the Gospel passages each week.

This week during your family prayer time, take turns thanking God for the gifts he has given your family, especially the "surprises" he has given. Close with a prayer you can say together (Suggestion: The Hail Mary, the Magnificat, and the first two joyful mysteries of the Rosary relate to this week's Scripture passage).

Week 2: An Argument about Dinner (Luke 5:12-32)

In this week's Scripture passage, Jesus is criticized for eating with sinful people, and he points out that he has come to bring "sinners to repentance," in other words, to help people learn how to follow God and do what is right.

Questions for Family Discussion:

- How do parents help children learn to follow God and do what is right?
- Some friends in this week's Scripture went out of their way to bring someone close to Jesus. How can family members go out of their way to show Jesus to one another?

Family Activity:

Make a list of family rules – guidelines family members are expected to follow. Some rules will be the same for everyone, and some will be different for parents and kids. How do family rules help us do what is right and make Jesus present to one another?

Family Prayer:

Gather in your family's prayer space, and talk about a time when another family member has taught you something about God. Thank God for this person in your family. Close by saying the "Our Father" together.

Week 3: A Man Had Two Sons (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32)

In this week's Scripture passage, we read the familiar story of the Prodigal Son. As we read this passage, the differences and similarities between the two sons in the story are striking. The two sons have very different personalities. Both sons have a lot of room to grow. But the father loves both sons unconditionally.

Questions for Family Discussion:

- How are people in your family alike? How are they different?
- How do you show one another that you always love each other, no matter what?

Family Activity:

Using a piece of poster board or a large piece of paper, draw a family portrait together. Make sure the picture shows ways that family members are alike and different.

Family Prayer:

Gathered around the prayer space, thank God for something you appreciate about another family member. Close with a familiar prayer you can say together.

Week 4: No Servant Can Serve Two Masters (Luke 16:13-15, 19-31)

This week's Scripture passage is about priorities. Jesus points out that it is not possible for two different things to have the "top spot" in our lives.

Questions for Family Discussion:

- What does our family believe are the most important things in life? How is this seen in the way we spend our time and energy?
- What changes do we need to make as a family, so our actions will fit what we value the most?

Family Activity:

Plan an activity together that reflects something you value most as a family. Where would you go? What would you do? Can you put this plan into action soon?

Family Prayer:

It makes sense to give God the #1 place in our lives when we stop to think about how wonderful, powerful, and good he is. Gathered in your prayer space, take turns naming great things about God, and close with a prayer you can say together.

Week 5: You Will Be With Me in Paradise (Luke 22:14-20, 24-30; 23:32-43)

In this week's Scripture passage, Jesus shares a meal with his disciples, and gives this special meal as a way

in which they can remember him after he has left them. The thief on the cross also asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into his kingdom.

Questions for Family Discussion:

- How do special meals help us celebrate and remember important family times?
- What other things help us remember one another when we are apart?

Family Activity:

In a 2005 study, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University found that children and teens who regularly eat with their families have lower levels of tension and stress at home, are happier and have better peer relationships, get better grades in school, are more likely to confide in their parents, have healthier eating habits, have a lower risk of suicide, and have a much lower risk of substance abuse. Plan a family meal together. Involve all family members in the preparation and clean-up. If you are not currently eating together as a family on a regular basis, discuss how you might have family meals more often.

Family Prayer:

Collect some pictures or other reminders of friends or family members who have died or who are living far away. Gathered in your prayer space, pray for these friends and family members, for those who have died, as well as those who are living but can't be with you right now.

Week 6: The Lord Has Risen Indeed (Luke 24:13-35)

In this week's Scripture passage, Jesus' disciples recognize their resurrected Lord as they share a meal together.

Questions for Family Discussion:

- Where can we see Jesus present in our own family life?
- How do the meals we share together as a family – and the Eucharistic meal we share with our parish family – affect who we are in our everyday lives?

Family Activity:

As a family, plan a time to attend Mass together and immediately afterwards do something good for others (perhaps shopping for food for the poor, or visiting someone who is home-bound). Talk about how we are changed when we recognize our Lord in the Eucharist we celebrate.

Family Prayer:

Spend some time as a family praying before the Blessed Sacrament, either before or after Mass or at a time of scheduled Eucharistic Adoration.

LENT: A GOOD TIME FOR SPRING CLEANING

Lent is a time in the Church year when we are asked to take stock, to step back and look at our lives as we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Easter. In the spring, many people also engage in a yearly tradition of giving the house a deep cleaning. The following reflection combines these two springtime traditions by providing a “room-by-room” family examination of conscience.

- ✓ **Living/Family Room:** This is often the entertainment center of the home, and a good place to ask, “What influences are we bringing into our home?” Are there movies, TV shows, music, or video games that are not compatible with the lives God has called us to live? (Some good resources for parents who wish to check this out can be found at www.usccb.org/movies, parentstv.org, and parentreviews.com).
- ✓ **Library/Study:** With what are we feeding our minds? Do our reading and Internet-surfing habits help us to be the people God made us to be? Philippians 4:8 says, “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Hint for parents: The Internet can be a dangerous place for children and teens, and while good filters can help, they are not always enough. Be sure to keep Internet access in a common room so you can monitor your child’s surfing without appearing nosy.)
- ✓ **Playroom:** This is a good place to ask, “Do we take time to relax and enjoy life (and one another)? In the Judeo-Christian tradition, we are *commanded* to take a day of rest each week (“Remember the Sabbath...”). God is so good to command us to slow down and appreciate all our blessings. While in the playroom, we can also ask, “Do we share with one another as we should?”
- ✓ **Kitchen:** Are we being good to the bodies God gave us? Are we eating nutritious food and limiting junk food? Are we making good use of our resources? Are we recycling? Are we giving to those who don’t have food to eat? Also, in the kitchen we can ask,

“Are we working together and doing our fair share around the house?”

- ✓ **Dining Room:** Recent studies have shown that when families have regular meals together, children make better grades, communicate better with their parents, have lower rates of depression, and get into less trouble. Do we make together time a priority? Are we considerate and empathetic as we talk to one another?
- ✓ **Bedroom:** Are we spending some time each day talking to God? Many people do this in the form of “bedtime prayers.” Whether at bedtime or at another time, praying together as a family has recognized benefits for family life. It really is true that “the family that prays together stays together.” Praying together at home sends children the important message that faith is not just something we do on Sundays at church; God should be part of our daily lives. Some Catholic families are now bringing back the tradition of family altars – sacred spaces in the home that serve as special prayer places and reminders of our faith. They may be as simple as a small decorator table or ledge with a candle, rosary, and statuary or icons. This is especially important if you have young children, who tend to be concrete thinkers. As they look around the home, what concrete things do they see that says, “Our family is Catholic”? Pausing to look in the bedroom mirror might cause us to consider whether or not we appreciate ourselves as persons created in God’s image. And while we’re here, let’s take a look in the bedroom closet. Do we dress with dignity and modesty, remembering that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19)?

This list may seem a little overwhelming at first, but how about taking one room in the home for each week of Lent? As a family, ask yourselves, “What can we do differently – better – this week?” The Christian life is a discipline, and while we will never reach perfection, we are called to be ever growing in holiness. As the plants begin to grow and the flowers bloom, how has God called us, as a family, to grow this Lenten season?