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Grace Before Meals

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I N T R O D U C T I O N
Grace Before Meals
R E C I P E S F O R F A M I L Y L I F E

So he commanded the skies above; the doors of heaven he opened.

God rained manna upon them for food; bread from heaven he gave them.

All ate a meal fit for heroes; food he sent in abundance.

PSALM 78: 23-25

If food is one of God's bountiful blessings to His people, it only makes sense that the preparation of that food can also be a blessing, especially to our families. There are countless opportunities to teach and learn about God in every aspect of our relationship with food. From our earliest years we can understand the miracle of growth as we sow seeds and watch them flourish under our watchful care, or prop a potato over a container of water and watch it sprout roots and leaves. As grandparents, we can pass on traditions flavored with secret recipes for the special cakes and pies that have been family favorites for longer than anyone remembers. Or perhaps we can tell the stories of times when God showed His goodness by providing "manna" for our family in times of trouble.

In between these two extremes of discovery and remembrance, the time spent in a kitchen preparing a meal as a family offers unmatched opportunities to learn and talk about much more than measuring flour or chopping vegetables. Conversations come easily in a kitchen, and both parents and children often find it safer to have a heart-to-heart talk if they don't have to be eye-to-eye while they're doing it.

The inevitable shared successes and failures that come with the process of creating sauces and soufflés also serve a deeper purpose.

They shrink the gaps in relationships stretched by packed schedules.

This edition of *Grace Before Meals* was created especially for families. Without being “preachy” or boring, parents can use these themed meals—from the obvious like Thanksgiving to the less obvious like World Day of the Sick—to provide food for the soul as well as the stomach.

Along with short essays, scriptures, and menus, you’ll find dozens of suggestions for transforming meal-time lessons into actions that respect children and teens, acknowledge their unique needs, and reinforce their connection to the family.

The best teachers, especially parents, never stop being students themselves. So it is our hope that you will be surprised by what you discover as you go through each chapter. Our prayer is that your own gifts and experience will be enriched as both you and your children learn how to prepare, serve, and enjoy meals that richly satisfy long after the meal is over and they have grown into adults.

Using This Book:

Experiencing true grace before a meal is not limited to the prayer families say before they eat. It happens when you come together to cook, talk, and share blessings at your table! Here are a few hints to help make *Grace Before Meals: Recipes for Family Life* even more effective:

Satisfying our Hungry Hearts

Each chapter begins with a brief passage from Sacred Scripture followed by a lesson or thought about the suggested event or holy day/holiday. From there, families have an opportunity to make the celebration happen by coming together to create not only a delicious meal, but great memories, too.

Let’s Talk

This list of questions can help families start conversations about the things that matter most to them, namely, what each of you believes. Some feel that families should not talk about religion, sports, or politics at the dinner table. I wholeheartedly disagree! These proposed questions allow your family to talk without fear, but with love!

Let's Listen

God's Word is alive and enlivening! These Scripture references give families an extra opportunity to consider God's perspective on family life and holidays, or as some originally called them, "holy days." Some families may even want to begin their family meal with one of the suggested passages or use it as a meditation throughout the week. This section reminds us that God does speak to us in our hearts, so let's leave room for Him at our table.

Let's Cook

The proposed menus come from my experiences while traveling, dining with my family, friends and parishioners, and experimenting to satisfy my own cravings. Don't feel obligated to use these exact menus in this exact order. Feel free to mix the recipes and ingredients based on your family's taste buds, cravings, and dietary restrictions. It is my hope that these recipes can inspire you to travel deeply in the journeys you all take in life and to experiment with your family's cravings as well.

Fun Facts

Fun Facts make life fun! That's why we've highlighted some of our family-friendly ideas, cooking tips, and other fun facts. We hope you enjoy the colorful and easy-to-read format, because we want to help make your family experience fun, as a matter of fact!

Journal About Your Journey

One of our goals in creating this book was to help you create new memories for your family. That's why we've made a special section of the book just for that. Feel free to include pictures or write some notes to help you keep the memories around, unlike leftovers!

Happy Feasting!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Leo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Acknowledgments

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