

## **Be Still: Creating a Family Prayer-Altar and Rule of Life**

The truck has stopped, but I feel like I'm flying through the windshield still. We have all been forced to stop; dear Lord, please don't let us miss this opportunity.

I keep reading and rereading this letter from the Abbot General of the Cistercians:

*Contemporary man, in fact, no longer knows how to stop. One stops only if one is stopped. To stop oneself freely has become almost impossible in contemporary western culture, which is globalized, for that matter. One does not even really stop on vacations. Only unpleasant setbacks manage to stop us in our breathless race to take ever greater advantage of life, of time, often also of other persons. Now, however, an unpleasant setback like an epidemic has stopped almost all of us. Our projects and plans have been annihilated, until we do not know when. We too, though we live a monastic or even cloistered vocation, how much we are used to living like everyone else, running like everyone else, thinking about our life and always throwing ourselves toward some future!*

*To stop, on the other hand, means to rediscover the present, the instant to be lived out now, the true reality of time, and thus also the true reality of ourselves, of our life. Man only lives in the present, but we are always tempted to remain attached to the past that is no more and throw ourselves toward a future that is not yet and perhaps never will be.*

*In Psalm 46, God invites us to stop to recognize his presence in our midst:*

*"Be still and know that I am God,  
exalted over nations, exalted over earth!  
The Lord of hosts is with us:  
the God of Jacob is our stronghold." (Ps 46:11–12)*

God asks us to keep ourselves still; he does not impose it. He wants us to stop before him and remain freely, by choice, that is, with love. He does not stop us like the police who arrest a fugitive delinquent. He wants us to stop as one stops before a beloved person, or how one stops before the tender beauty of a newborn who sleeps, or at a sunset or a work of art that fill us with wonder and silence. God asks us to stop in recognition that, for us, his presence fills the whole universe, is the most important thing in life, which nothing can exceed. *To stop before God means to recognize that his*

*presence fills the instant and thus fully satisfies our heart, in whatever circumstance and condition we find ourselves (Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori).*

**Make a family prayer-table or home-altar.** You do not have to be living with family to do this. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches on the importance of a prayer-altar:

*The most appropriate places for prayer are personal or family oratories (CCC 2696). For personal prayer, this can be a "prayer corner" with the Sacred Scriptures and icons, in order to be there, in secret, before our Father. In a Christian family, this kind of little oratory fosters prayer in common (CCC 2691)*

In addition to the dinner table (another altar of the domestic church), place this prayer-altar in the prominent place of your house. Put the TV elsewhere. And then consider creating altars in your individual bedrooms. Keep it simple. Push a small table against the wall; cover it with a beautiful sheet; place there a crucifix or holy image, a bible, real flowers, and a candle. For more, read *The Little Oratory: A Beginner's Guide to Praying in the Home*:

**Create a family rule of life:** "a daily schedule that is supported by moments of prayer-like telephone wires supported by utility poles every few hundred yards (Fr. Jose Medina)." Return to your prayer-altar at these daily moments of prayer, these supporting utility poles. At this prayer-altar, the family will stop before God and "recognize that his presence fills the instant and thus fully satisfies our heart."

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School sent out a fine proposal for a daily schedule. A common rhythm of the day can be supported by "Come Holy Spirit, come thru Mary" as you rise, the Angelus three times a day before meals, the rosary after dinner, and the Memorare before going to sleep. Or, join us five yahoos in the rectory from your home for the Morning and Evening prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours, at 8:15 a.m. and 5:45 p.m. All of this prayer can be entered into at the sacred space of your prayer-altar. Eat all your meals together as a whole family, sharing thanksgivings for where each of you saw His presence today. Take care of the home together. Schedule plenty of time for personal silence and prayer; schedule plenty of time to be outside, together, being creative; schedule the limited times to use screens—ask yourself multiple times a day, "Am I using this screen to escape or distract myself from what is happening before me?"

We have been given this time to be with those given to us, those right in front of us, not to live in Zoom. Things will fall apart—make the family agreement to regularly forgive and ask for forgiveness. Ask for grace at your prayer-altar.

We have all been forced to stop, dear Lord, we accept the opportunity you have given us to awaken to the incredible joy that is being together as a family, in the same place, at the same time, undistracted—here is the Kingdom! Mary and Joseph, help us. Be with us. Thank you.

### **Make a prayer-altar.**

1. Push a small table against the wall.
2. Cover it with a beautiful sheet.
3. Place there a crucifix or holy image, a bible, real flowers, and a candle.

### **Create a rule of life:**

For example:

7:00 a.m.: *Wake & Come Holy Spirit, come through Mary*

7:30 a.m. *Angelus* & Breakfast

8:00 a.m. Daily Work and Play

(technology allowed from 9:00am-10:00am)

12:00 p.m. *Angelus* & Lunch

12:30 p.m. Daily Work and Play

(technology allowed from 12:30pm-1:30pm)

4:00 p.m. Individual: Silence, Stillness, Scripture, Walk (at family or bedroom prayer-altar)

5:00 p.m. *Angelus* & Dinner & Thanksgiving

(no technology beyond this point)

7:00 p.m. Rosary (at prayer-altar)

7:15 p.m. Family Togetherness

9:00 p.m. *Memorare* (at bedroom prayer-altar) & Sleep

Sources/Reference:

- [Please see Part IV of the Catechism for one of the best syntheses on prayer. Click to the right.](#)
- [See CCC 2201-2233 for a good syntheses on Family Life and the Kingdom of God.](#)

- [Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, The Cistercian Abbot General's letter to the Cistercian communities at the time of the pandemic. Please read the full text here.](#)
- [Morning and Evening Prayer: https://www.ibreviary.org/en/](https://www.ibreviary.org/en/)
- [https://hallow.app/ A Catholic meditation app to help you find peace and grow in your spiritual journey.](https://hallow.app/)
- [\*The Little Oratory: A Beginner's Guide to Praying in the Home:\* https://www.sophiainstitute.com/products/item/the-little-oratory](https://www.sophiainstitute.com/products/item/the-little-oratory)

- Fr. Isaac Coulter, Associate Pastor