

they pray with their parents: they listen to the daily prayers and progressively absorb them. As they grow in common prayer, members of the family overcome the temptation to mutual estrangement and egoism. Family prayer prevents domestic quarrels and divorces; it reduces generational conflicts and teaches reconciliation and forgiveness.

660 The Christian family prays for the parents and family members (living and deceased). It asks God that children be educated and brought up well. It prays for spiritual and material benefits, and for the family's earthly homeland. It also invokes God's blessing on each day and especially difficult needs, so that in this way prayer "without ceasing" (see 1 Thes 5:17) will be achieved in the domestic church.

### **3. Family Rituals and Customs**

661 The family—the domestic church—is a liturgical community of mutual, unselfish, and dedicated service to God and one another. Besides common prayer, the family liturgy includes a common reading of God's Word and Christian literature, as well as blessings and thanksgiving for God's gifts at common meals: "We give you thanks, O Christ our God, for you have satisfied us with your earthly good things. Do not deprive us of your heavenly kingdom, but as you came into the midst of your disciples, O Saviour, granting them peace, so also come to us and save us."<sup>435</sup> This is how we pray after the noon meal.

662 The solemnity of the family liturgy is particularly evident at the vigil suppers on the eve of Christmas and Theophany, and at the Paschal breakfast. The prayerful service of the family members is seen in the festive greeting and blessings that they exchange. For example, the father solemnly initiates the vigil supper by distributing the Christmas prosphora to each family member, and then the consecrated Jordan water. At Pascha (Easter), he also distributes a portion of the Paschal egg. The Christmas and Jordan carols, as well as the Easter songs that accompany the festive meal, are a majestic proclamation of the "great deeds of the Lord," a joining to the ceaseless praise of the angels. Indeed, both common prayer and common meals are Christian family treasures.

663 A special form of marital love is the intimate relations of husband and wife. With God's blessing, the two become one body, reflecting in the domestic church the mystery of Christ's unity with his Church (see Eph 5:31-32). The joining of husband and wife is conducive to mutual love; it sanctifies them and opens them to conceiving new life. This is why

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<sup>435</sup> *The Divine Liturgy: An Anthology for Worship, Prayer after Noon Meal.*

the Church prays that God would "keep their marriage bed undefiled that their common life be without flaw"<sup>436</sup> The sanctity of a daily family routine, the introduction of Christian rituals and customs into the household's way of life, a liturgical spirit of domestic interaction-211 this creates a solid foundation for the spirituality of family relations.

#### **4. Reading Holy Scripture and Spiritual Literature in the Family**

- 664 Daily reading of Scripture, especially the New Testament, should be joined organically to the practice of daily prayers. For in prayer we address God and in Holy Scripture God speaks to us. The Word of God helps parents to raise their children and helps children to respect their parents. Having understood this, the family will turn to Holy Scripture as to their best counsellor.
- 665 Spiritual literature, which includes the Lives of the Saints, the works of the Fathers of the Church, and ascetical literature, favours the establishment and development of one's personality in the grace of the Holy Spirit. As one reads spiritual literature (e.g., the *Patericon* of the Kyi-van-Caves Monastery, or the Confessions of Saint Augustine), one learns the experience of repentance and conversion. In the process of spiritual growth, a person must walk along the difficult path of asceticism—over-coming sinful habits and temptations and struggling with passions. This path was described by the ascetics in their works (e.g., Saint John of the Ladder in his *Ladder of Divine Ascent*).
- 666 Through the centuries, the most accessible and beneficial work for family reading was and remains the Lives of the Saints. In their lives, the saints are shown in a variety of situations of life that they resolve because of the sanctity of their lives—a sanctity derived from cooperation with God's grace. Every family member's growth in sanctity, similar to the saints, is the principal aim of the family community.
- 667 Besides the reading of religious literature, the spiritual life of the domestic church is fostered by the viewing of religious films, television programs, religious sites on the internet, and by listening to religious radio programs and recordings on evangelical themes, as well as by reading Christian magazines. All this will help the contemporary family to find eternal spiritual treasures. It will also help them to draw responsibly and constructively from authentic spiritual and cultural springs, to react against a simplistic and coarse understanding of the family, as well as

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<sup>436</sup> *Trebnyk*, The Right of Crowning, Prayer after the Gospel