

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

“Bless Us, O Lord . . .

Last week we shared a few thoughts on the lost art of saying grace. That got me to thinking of a bit more about a ritual that some of us take for granted—and the prayer that goes with it.

At every meal, my wife and I sit at the dining table and take a moment to pray quietly together words that most of us learned before we were out of our childhood highchairs:

*Bless us, O Lord,
And these, thy gifts,
Which we are about to receive
Through thy bounty,
Through Christ, our Lord,
Amen.*

It’s one of the most familiar prayers we Catholics can utter—right up there with the Our Father and Hail Mary. And I suspect most of us don’t give it more than a passing thought. But this week, I’d like to make a suggestion: The next time you find yourself at the table, about to say grace, listen to those words as they escape your lips, because they speak volumes. Consider what you are saying:

“Bless us, O Lord . . .” Father, confer on us Your blessing—a generous act of love that we really do not deserve.

“And these, Thy gifts . . .” While You’re at it, could You also bless the food sitting before us? Seeing this food on our table, when we know others are going hungry, we realize that this is all part of a harvest that You have graciously provided us. It is truly a gift.

“Which we are about to receive . . .” The gift has been given, and we are about to accept it into our hearts, and into our bodies.

“Through Thy bounty . . .” But we cannot forget that it is here because of Your ever-generous creation, Your bounty: It’s all because of the earth You made, the soil You enriched, the seeds You allowed to bud from ripening plants, the creatures You placed on this earth to roam the fields, feed at the rivers and nest in the trees. It’s all Yours. And it is also, in some way, ours.

“Through Christ, our Lord . . .” We ask all this through Your beloved Son, our savior and our brother, Jesus Christ.

“Amen.” To all that we have asked, and all that we have offered, we can add only one word: Amen. Yes. The punctuation at the end of every prayer, the affirmation at the end of every hope. *Yes.* We seal this with our hearts, and our assent.

Saying grace takes less than a minute. And we usually forget it before the first fork leaves the table. But every now and then it is good to take a moment, and take a deep breath, and make every word matter. (It doesn’t hurt, of course, to practice this with all forms of prayer that can easily become, by repetition, rote and routine.)

Our lives and our meals are enriched when we don’t just say grace, but pray it. So try it sometime. Especially in the post-Thanksgiving blur, when there will be leftovers to enjoy and extra helpings of God’s blessings for us to pray over. Prayers of thanks have even more meaning during this time of year. Take a moment to think about what it all means.

You just might find yourself going back for seconds.

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