

Novena for the family



► to St Josemaría Escrivá

Prayer to Saint Josemaría



Saint Josemaría Escrivá

Founder of Opus Dei

PRAYER

O God, through the mediation of Mary our Mother, you granted your priest St. Josemaría countless graces, choosing him as a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei, a way of sanctification in daily work and in the fulfillment of the Christian's ordinary duties. Grant that I too may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into occasions of loving You and serving the Church, the Pope and all souls with joy and simplicity, lighting up the pathways of this earth with faith and love.

Deign to grant me, through the intercession of St. Josemaría, the favor of ... (make your request). Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

Day 1

Marriage, a divine vocation

► St Josemaría says:

For a Christian, marriage is ... a real supernatural calling, a great sacrament, in Christ and in the Church, as St Paul says. ... It is a sacred sign, an action of Jesus that invades the soul of those who get married and invites them to follow him, by transforming their whole married life into a divine journey on earth. (Christ is Passing By, 23)

It is important for married people to acquire a clear sense of the dignity of their vocation. They must know that they have been called by God not only to human love but also to a divine love, through their human love. It is important for them to realise that they have been chosen from all eternity to cooperate with the creative power of God by having and then bringing up children. Our Lord asks them to make their home and their entire family life a testimony of all the Christian virtues. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 93).

Love which leads to marriage and family, can also be a marvellous divine way, a vocation ... What I have told you about doing things perfectly, about putting love into the little duties of each day, about discovering that “divine something” contained in these details, finds a special place in that vital sphere in which human love is enclosed. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 121)

► Intention A: for family life

May God Our Lord make us understand the greatness of Christian marriage; may we also understand it as a divine vocation – a personal, loving call from God – with a mission which is entrusted to us in this world: to build a Christian family that is holy and stable and, in the words of Pope John Paul II, the “first and vital cell of society” and of the Church.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

May God Our Lord make us have before our eyes the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, who, filled with Faith and Love and forgetful of themselves, lived entirely for God and for each other in simple, joyful and generous self-giving and a spirit of service.

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Day 2

Marriage, a way to holiness

► St Josemaría says:

Marriage is to help married people sanctify themselves and others. For this reason they receive a special grace in the sacrament which Jesus Christ instituted. Those who are called to the married state will, with the grace of God, find within their state everything they need to be holy. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 91)

Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in that union. It would be a serious mistake if their spiritual life were to develop with their backs turned to, or at the fringes of, their home. Family life, conjugal relations, the care and education of children, the effort to provide for the needs of the family as well as for its security and development, the relationships with other persons who make up the community, all these are among the ordinary human situations that Christian couples are called upon to sanctify. (Christ is Passing By, 23)

Sanctify the home one day after another, to create with love a true family atmosphere. Many Christian virtues are necessary in order to sanctify each day of one's life. First, the theological virtues [faith, hope and charity], and then all the others: prudence, loyalty, sincerity, humility, industriousness, cheerfulness... (Christ is Passing By, 23)

► Intention A: for family life

May we come to understand that we can sanctify ourselves by fulfilling our conjugal and family duties (towards our spouse, parents, sons and daughters) with love and our eyes set on God, knowing that, step by step, we can reach the heights of the Christian ideal of holiness and that, day after day, we can grow in identifying ourselves with Jesus Christ by imitating His love and practising the other Christian virtues.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

May God Our Lord help us to create a true family environment, to strive so as to live the virtues that can help us “to be a family”: self-denying tenderness, humility, self-forgetfulness, understanding, generosity in giving and forgiving, and, in general, everything that helps overcome selfishness and enables love to triumph.

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Day 3

Christian love

► St Josemaría says:

Sometimes we speak of love as if it were an impulse to self-satisfaction or a mere means to selfish fulfilment of one's own personality. But that's not love. True love means going out of oneself, giving oneself. Love brings joy, but a joy whose roots are in the shape of a cross. As long as we are on earth and have not yet arrived at the fullness of the future life, we can never have true love without sacrifice and pain. (Christ is Passing By, 4)

Each of us has his own character, his personal taste, his moods... and his defects. But we all have likeable aspects in our personality as well, and for this reason, and many others, everyone can be loved. It is possible to live happily together when everyone tries to correct his own defects and makes an effort to overlook the faults of others... On the other hand, if husband and wife dramatise their little differences and reproach each other for their defects and mistakes, they put an end to peace and run the risk of killing their love. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 108)

You will only be good if you know how to see the good points and the virtues of others. That is why when you have to correct, you should do so with charity, at the opportune moment, without humiliating... And being ready yourself to learn and to improve in the very faults you are correcting. (The Forge, 455)

► Intention A: for family life

May God Our Lord free us from egoism and from considering marriage as a way to fulfil our selfish ambitions, such as “the right to be happy”. May we see this as deceitful, turning marriage into a means of pursuing satisfaction, pleasure and personal dreams, instead of realising what it really is: a vocation of love, of the sort of true love which – as Jesus teaches – finds greater joy in giving than in receiving.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

May we have the strength to check our temper, our moods, our defects (however small), our love of comfort, and all shortcomings that hinder social interaction. At the same time, we pray that we may be understanding and patient with the faults of others, and not give those faults undue importance, or make a drama out of minor problems.

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Day 4

The love of each day

► St Josemaría says:

[Christian couples] mustn't forget that the secret of married happiness lies in everyday things, not in daydreams. It lies in finding the hidden joy of coming home in the evening, in affectionate relations with their children, in the everyday work in which the whole family cooperates; in good humour in the face of difficulties that should be met with a sporting spirit.

(Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 91)

If a marriage is to preserve its initial charm and beauty, both husband and wife should try to renew their love day after day and that is done through sacrifice, with smiles and also with ingenuity. Is it surprising that a husband who arrives home tired from work begins to lose patience when his wife keeps on and on about everything she thinks has gone wrong during the day?

(Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 107)

[Wives,] your duty is, and will always be, to take as good care of your appearance as you did before you were married – and it is a duty of justice, because you belong to your husband. And husbands should not forget that they belong to their wives, and that as long as they live they have the obligation to show the same affection as a young man who has just fallen in love. (Christ is Passing By, 26)

► Intention A: for family life

May we receive the grace not to let ourselves be overtaken by tiredness and routine in the way we act, consider and communicate with one other; in the caring manner with which we greet others; in the joy we express when we get home, in the politeness with which we ask for things (“please”) and say thank you; in the considerateness with which we let our spouse know when we will be away, or late, and for how long, and in the care with which we look after material things.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

May we, spouses, with the help of God Our Lord, make an effort always to treat one another “as we did when we were engaged” (as St Josemaría used to say). May we think about the everyday joys we can give to each other and to the children in countless details. May we never fail to pay attention to personal matters (physical appearance, personal care for one another, and the tendency to isolate oneself when tired). May we flee, as if running from the devil himself, from being rude, unsocial or verbally offensive.

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Day 5

Bright and cheerful homes

► St Josemaría says:

Every Christian home should be a haven of peace and serenity. In spite of the small frustrations of daily life, an atmosphere of profound and sincere affection should reign there together with a deep-rooted calm, which is the result of authentic faith that is put into practice. (Christ is Passing By, 22)

Charity will fill all, and will lead to sharing joys and possible sorrows, to learning how to smile and forget about themselves in order to pay attention to others; to listen to each other and to their children; ... to do lovingly all the small acts of service that make up their daily life together. (Christ is Passing By, 23)

What really makes a person unhappy and even destroys a whole society is the frenzied search for well-being and the attempt to eliminate, at all costs, all difficulties and hardships ... Each situation brings its own grace. Each one is a special call from God, a new opportunity to work and to give the divine testimony of Charity. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 97)

Sometimes one needs to have smiling faces around. (Furrow, 57)

A sincere resolution: to make the way lovable for others and easy, since life brings enough bitterness with it already. (Furrow, 63)

► Intention A: for family life

May we learn to cover with a smile, for love of God and others, our tiredness or our impatience with their shortcomings or small annoying mistakes. May we never look victimised or sad, like people who feel misunderstood, ill-treated, ignored, or unappreciated.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

May we succeed in giving an optimistic tone to our conversations; may we avoid being pessimistic about events or people. Let us not make a drama out of financial or other hardships, but may we pray together and make the effort to overcome them, so that faith in the love of God and the virtue of hope may be the serene environment for all our family life.

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Day 6

With God's help, overcome the crises and difficulties of married life

► St Josemaría says:

Anyone who thinks that love ends when the worries and difficulties that life brings with it begin, has a poor idea of marriage, which is a sacrament and an ideal and a vocation. It is precisely then that love grows strong. Torrents of worries and difficulties are incapable of drowning true love because people who sacrifice themselves generously together are brought closer by their sacrifice. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 91)

We should all learn to keep quiet, to wait and say things in a positive, optimistic way. When her husband loses his temper, the moment has arrived for his wife to be especially patient until he calms down, and vice versa. If there is true love and a real desire to deepen it, it will very rarely happen that the two give in to bad temper at the same time. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 108)

We are never a hundred per cent right. In fact one can say that in matters like these, which are usually so debatable, the surer we are of being completely right, the more doubtful it is that we really are. Following this line of reasoning makes it easier to correct oneself later on and if necessary to beg pardon, which is the best way of ending a quarrel. In this way peace and love are regained. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 108)

► Intention A: for family life

May we be able to avoid with all our heart, negative criticism and offensive words concerning relatives (in-laws, cousins, etc) and, in general, may we avoid all attitudes, omissions and words, that may harm the self-esteem of others thereby leaving open wounds which are difficult to heal.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

[If a separation has unfortunately taken place, already]

May the spouse who has suffered injustice (betrayal, unforgiveness, or misunderstanding), see clearly that he/she needs to come closer to God than ever before, strengthened with divine grace and the spiritual guidance of a good confessor. May he/she understand that God is asking him/her for two main things:

- first, to pray, so as to overcome resentment against the spouse who caused the separation, and never to abandon hope in the miracle of reconciliation;
- second, to reject any bitterness, but dedicate himself/herself with renewed determination to the children, the apostolate and works of charity. And may the spouse who caused the separation realise that God is asking him/her for the humility to repent, to ask for forgiveness, and to put right, as far as possible, the harm that has been done.

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Day 7

Co-operating with God

► St Josemaría says:

Our Lord sanctifies and blesses the mutual love of husband and wife. He foresees, not only a union of souls, but a union of bodies as well ... He has wanted to use love to bring new human beings into the world and to increase the body of the Church. (Christ is Passing By, 24)

You share in the creative power of God: that is why human love is holy, good and noble. It is a gladness of heart which God – in His loving providence – wants others freely to give up. Each child that God grants you is a wonderful blessing from Him: don't be afraid of children! (The Forge, 691)

The fact of having few or many children does not on its own make a family more or less Christian. What matters is the integrity and honesty with which married life is lived. True mutual love transcends the union of husband and wife and extends to its natural fruits – the children. Selfishness, on the contrary, sooner or later reduces love to a mere satisfaction of instinct and destroys the bond which unites parents and children ... I see clearly that attacks on large families stem from a lack of faith. They are the product of a social atmosphere which is incapable of understanding generosity. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 94)

► Intention A: for family life

May we learn to thank God every day for the great gift of children – He gave them to us – and may we see in them, in their education, in their Christian formation, in their true spiritual and material good, a very important part of the mission that God entrusted to us as part of His call to live the vocation to marriage and the family.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

[For those who have no children]

May we be convinced that if God did not grant us children it was not to diminish the holy ideal of fatherhood and motherhood. We can fulfil this ideal by diligently seeking to know what the will of God is, dedicating ourselves to other members of the family, or to institutions that help abandoned children, or actively working in the formation of Christian youth and, if appropriate, considering the possibility of adopting one or more children, after proper counselling and with due prudence.

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Day 8

Educating the children

► St Josemaría says:

Parents are the first persons responsible for the education of their children, in human as well as in spiritual matters ... They need prudence, understanding, a capacity to love and a concern for giving good example. Imposing things by force, in an authoritarian manner, is not the right way to teach. The ideal attitude of parents lies more in becoming their children's friends – friends who will be willing to share their anxieties, who will listen to their problems, who will help them in an effective and agreeable way. (Christ is Passing By, 27)

Let your children see that you are trying to live in accordance with your faith ... Let them see that God is not only on your lips, but also in your deeds; that you are trying to be loyal and sincere, and that you love each other and you really love them too. (Christ is Passing By, 28)

Parents should find time to spend with their children, to talk with them. They are the most important thing – more important than business or work or rest. In their conversations, parents should make an effort to listen, to pay attention, to understand, to recognise the fact that their children are sometimes partly right – or even completely right – in some of their rebellious attitudes. (Christ is Passing By, 27)

► Intention A: for family life

May we learn to dedicate ourselves truly to the mission of educating the children whom God has entrusted to us. May we realise that, for them, nothing can replace the daily example of their parents, or our persevering effort to develop them into Christian men and women of good character.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

May God Our Lord help us to avoid irritating authoritarianism towards our children, shown in outbursts of bad temper, harsh impositions and loss of self-control. These are clear signs that we as parents are not offering the sacrifice of spending time and patience listening to our children. May we realise our need to understand them, dialogue with them, and find practical ways of teaching them basic virtues such as loyalty, sincerity, respect, generosity, order, discipline and solidarity with those in need.

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Day 9

God in the home

► St Josemaría says:

Couples have the grace of the married state — the grace they receive in the Sacrament of Marriage — which enables them to live all the human and Christian virtues in their married life: understanding, good humour, patience, forgiveness, refinement and consideration in their mutual relations. The important thing is not to give up the effort, not to give in to nerves, pride or personal fads or obsessions ... The grace of God will not be lacking. (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 108)

The piety which you mothers place in the hearts of your children is never lost. (São Paulo, Brazil, 4 June 1974)

There is perhaps no better model for a Christian couple than that of the Christian families of apostolic times ... Families who lived in union with Christ and who made Him known to others. Small Christian communities which were centres for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is what we have to be: sowers of peace and joy, the peace and joy that Jesus has brought to us. (Christ is Passing By, 30)

► Intention A: for family life

May children see that their parents' participation at Mass, frequent Communion, the Rosary, morning and evening prayers, and at meals, are practised joyfully and perseveringly and not seen as an obligation performed mechanically.

► Intention B: for family life in difficulties

With the help of God's grace, may we never tire of praying for one another and for our children, especially when they encounter serious moral or spiritual difficulties or have dangerous habits or companions. May we always believe with firm faith that love, good example and patience, together with persevering prayer through the intercession of Our Blessed Lady, will plant a good seed in our children's hearts that will never be lost, but will bear fruit in the end, even after many years have passed.

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This Novena, prepared for couples by Fr Francisco Faus, aims to ask God through the intercession of St Josemaría, for the grace to maintain or continually improve a truly Christian family, on the bedrock of the love for Christ and the example of the Holy Family, the foundations on which – with the grace of the Holy Spirit – every Christian family should be built.

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