

Living the FAITH

A Spiritual Feast for Your Home: How Catholics Can Use the Old Testament in the Family

by Jem Sullivan, PH.D.

What is your family's favorite meal? Is it a holiday recipe, a simple weeknight dinner, or a gourmet dessert treat?

The Second Vatican Council teaches that “the treasures of the Bible are to be opened more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 51). Is the Bible a special table around which your family gathers, as if for a favorite meal?

As we consider ways to share the Old Testament in the family we discover that the Bible, whether prominently displayed or gathering dust on a shelf, offers rich spiritual nourishment for children, teenagers, and adults in your home.

It is said that we live in the Age of Information. The information superhighway moves us through the high speed traffic of news conveyed through television, the Internet, blogs, and instant messaging. We may have instant and high speed access to information at our fingertips. But the search for human happiness and daily wisdom remains. What is the place of the Bible in this Information Age?

The *Catechism* tells us that, the books of the Old Testament “are a storehouse of sublime teaching on God and of sound wisdom on human life, as well as a wonderful treasury of prayers; in them, too, the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way” (CCC 122, quoting *Dei Verbum* 15).

Much of the Old Testament takes the form of stories. The way God teaches resounds with human imagination. Through the rich tapestry of biblical narratives we learn about God's love and fidelity in the face of human doubt, apathy, and infidelity. In the drama of the biblical stories is reflected our own journeys of faith with our daily joys, struggles, and hopes.

Old Testament stories are especially compelling for young children who, with their natural capacity for awe and wonder, marvel at the unfolding of God's saving action and living presence in the world. Biblical stories that reveal weakness and sin are opportunities to discuss, at age appropriate levels, our humanness in light of God's love and mercy. Through the biblical range of human experiences, we learn God's ways and our response of faith.

To bring the Old Testament to life, assign family members to gather artistic images that depict biblical stories and themes. Let the painting, sculpture, stained glass, or piece of sacred music serve as a discussion starter for family reflection on God's word expressed in artistic forms.

The Psalms are a rich storehouse of prayers. In spite of overloaded family schedules, taking brief moments to pray together the Liturgy of the Hours, whether Morning or Evening Prayer, connects your home to the Church's rhythm of praise, thanksgiving, and

intercession. Handy Catholic resources now available make daily praying of Morning and Evening Prayer simple and sustainable.

Finally, *lectio divina* is another practical way to feast on the Old Testament in your home. This ancient Christian practice is being recovered in our time and was strongly encouraged during the 2008 Bishops Synod on the Word of God and in Pope Benedict's Exhortation following the Synod. Through the steps

of *lectio divina*—reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation—the wisdom of the Old Testament can bear rich fruit in your home and may even become your family's favorite spiritual food.

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