

Navigating Family Prayer

Post by “Joshua” of December 21, 2019 at 10:17 PM

As we come into the important holiday week of the Jewish and Christian calendars, this may be an issue for some of us in the coming days. I've recently planted myself nearer to family, and so for me, the problem of prayer has been a daily fly in the ointment. Tomorrow is a Mass day, which puts an exceptionally fine point on the problem.

Catholics these days get "Confirmed" in their faith at about the age of 16. I had no faith at the age of 16, but this was no obstacle. I would have called myself an agnostic at the time, and the path of least resistance was to show up, let the bishop put his hand on my forehead, and say the meaningless words.

Sometime years later, but still many years ago, I stopped taking the Eucharist. I haven't taken it since. If by chance I were asked, I could offer a citation from the Catechism—which I alone of my family have ever bothered to actually read—that would satisfy Catholic Canon Law and possibly silence a few wagging tongues.

But the truth, of course, is that neither the Catechism nor Canon Law mean a jot to me. I have always thought that there was something to be said for tact. From an Epicurean point of view, there is still more to be said for candor. Well, I realized today that what I needed was a very brief précis that avoided certain conversational landmines—*atheism*, as an example—and also promised mild pedantry, so as to disinvite further inquiry. Since I'm new to the area, and I haven't been so close to family since college, the time to save my Sundays is now.

And in the end it's rather simple; you may choose Athens, or you may choose Jerusalem. But you *must* choose.

Post by “Cassius” of December 21, 2019 at 11:20 PM

In my case the family that once caused those problems for me is now all dead, but I know exactly what you mean. I guess that is one benefit of getting older, you see less and less reason to waste time just for the sake of pleasing other people. But while they are still with you and important to you, it is definitely hard.

Post by “Cassius” of December 21, 2019 at 11:24 PM

Also - we are not quite there yet that we have everything in place, but Sunday mornings are turning into the perfect day and time for online Epicurean discussion, so that is a goal to work toward to make the choice of things to do even more stark. We have had most of the Dewitt book review discussions on Sunday mornings and we need to move to a firm commitment to have something *every* Sunday.

Post by “Elayne” of December 22, 2019 at 7:32 PM

Joshua, when I hear people say things like that, I am so grateful my family is atheist. At least Epicurus was dealing with people who believed in multiple gods, and he wasn't atheist in the way that would have been meant back then. He just had a different definition of gods, since his were material.

He still participated in the compulsory rites. But you are in a different situation, since mass is not compulsory by law.

What did you come up with? And how did it go?

Post by “Joshua” of December 22, 2019 at 9:26 PM

I'm envious, Elayne!

The odd thing is that religiosity in my family grows more serious and overt as time goes on. I mostly stopped going to Mass in high school/college, which wasn't ever a big deal. There was another atheist in the family; now he's an evangelical christian. My own cynical suspicion is that this gradual resurgence of faith is at least partially a function of political clustering in a polarizing media climate—a way of policing the boundaries between the 'us' and the 'them'. Perhaps it isn't so odd after all.

Any road, I didn't go today, and casually mentioned that I won't be there Christmas Eve either.

Post by “Elayne” of December 22, 2019 at 9:47 PM

Well, I hope they just leave it alone, then! Maybe they'll put you in the "prayers of the faithful", lol. I think you are right about political clustering and increased religiosity.

When I am in other groups and a prayer comes up, my response varies. Sometimes I just don't care one way or the other, and I just bow my head as if I am praying. But if I'm feeling more adventurous, I keep my head up and my eyes open, and I look around to see who else is. I've met some fellow non-believers that way. I wink at them.

It comes up for me in board meetings, student graduation ceremonies, political forums... our City Council always opens with a prayer, and they put the atheists, Wiccans, etc into the rotation so they can get away with it. Here is a local atheist doing an invocation. Ha! That was ok with them because it was idealistic. But I might make 'em faint if I did an invocation to pleasure!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cYLC48aZyc&feature=youtu.be>