

# How to Have Supper

“Won’t you stay for supper?”  
The Christian greeting that matters most

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**Homemaking?** Homemaking is an ancient human activity. It’s far more than providing food, firewood, and other essentials. It’s creating a particular atmosphere within a house, set by those things which bring about a sense of belonging, welcoming, and love. Even in homes where poverty dominates the economics of the family, such an atmosphere can be created. It doesn’t take a lot of money to make a home. It takes heart, and especially a Christian heart fired by the grace of Christ.

Money can, in fact, be an obstacle, as Jesus himself observed many times.

Here are some of the elements, which when taken together, help make a home.

- Making time for each other, even when you’re busy. Reorganize your schedule to make more time for your home life.
- Sharing laughter over the small things, like burps or farts, accidental ways of saying things, a funny thought you had today.
- Knowing when you’re wrong or have made a mistake - and letting that fit into life for you. It really isn’t necessary to point out every mistake someone living in your household makes. For Pete’s sake, lighten up!
- Freely and voluntarily give each other affirmation and support, looking for ways to give each other compliments. Don’t let a single meal go by without a compliment to the cook, for example. And be full of thanks to each other for helping make your house a real home.
- Giving each other help in times of trouble - when there’s addiction, depression, illness, or relationship loss - or when the money runs out and you don’t have all your shopping done. Or when a childhood memory returns to haunt you, or when you hurt each other. There’s nothing like forgiveness to deepen love within a household.





- Sharing meals together, especially supper - planning the menu, shopping, cooking, setting the table, cleaning up... but mainly, lingering over the meal, chatting and allowing each other space to breath. There's just nothing like "home cooking." It's a lost art but it can be reclaimed. The supper meal can be that moment around which the entire day is organized. It's the summit of the day, the hour to which everything in the day points.

**There is no experience in life more important than having supper, which is why Jesus chose to leave behind a meal rather than a textbook, a moral code, or a theology system.**

- Sharing playtime which might include things like TV shows, movies, games, or just sitting quietly in the same room, reading the Sunday paper. Stop at lawn sales, go to fairs, and never miss the doughnuts and coffee after Mass on Sunday morning.
- Decorating your house a little. It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive; it has to be really what you like. Keep the house clean, as clean as you can because it just makes the home more welcoming. And add little personal touches to it: a photo here, a favorite gift there. These displays help others see into your own heart. And it's the heart of your home that's important anyway.
- Appreciating beauty, which only sounds expensive. Many people live without noticing the beauty all around them, but beauty is one of the surest ways to be near to God.
- Music sends one back into the memories of the past while creating its own memories for the future. It's as close as your radio. When sitting down to supper, let music help create the atmosphere of elegance. There's nothing wrong with a little elegance.
- Smells in a house - bread baking, cookies, the barbecue grill, garlic. One of the most important side benefits to home cooking is the smells it provides. Smells are what help make a house homey. They tell guests how welcome they are. And they jog the memory of love.
- Teaching manners, hospitality, graciousness. Again, sharing supper every evening is full of benefits. One of them is that it's a chance to treat each other like royalty. Learning to be hospitable toward each other and guests is one of the most important traits of a person following the Way of Christ.
- Leaving love notes for one another, or notes of support and affirmation.
- Learning to be "the big one." Sharing life in a household can be trying, even when love is abundant. Sometimes there will be conflict. Sometimes there will be one piece of cake too few. These are times to learn the mysterious teachings of Jesus first hand. There's a certain experience of growing one's inner space, one's soul, by taking the last seat, by giving twice as much as is asked, by forgiving seventy-times-seven times.

- Talking about one's faith. The events of the day, the supper no matter how simple, and even one's very breath - these are all gifts. Only when you are making home can you see them that way. And now and then, talking about how God's hand provides and guides is the only true way to understand any of the arcane dogmas of the church. No theological system can explain in all its books and doctrines, what one walk in the woods as a household can explain about God.

**Teach about home making.** The finest form of Christian adult formation is that which coaches, teaches, and shows by example how to "make home." Like making love in a marriage, making home is essential to the growth of faith. Read back over the church's own documents and read back over that list of elements that goes into "making home." There are many ways for the parish community to foster home making. Without it, everything else we do may be in vain.

Why? Because faith is *not* lived at the parish. Creating great parishes is not really the goal of the Gospel. Faith lived in everyday life & building the Reign of God in the world is the goal. Faith of this kind is learned from parents and household members, as the church's own documents repeatedly point out. So, rather than more classes on church doctrine, why not offer classes on homemaking instead? Why not help people who live alone connect for meals with others? Why not distribute recipes for simple but good meals? Why not have cooking classes, or teach about how to be a host or a guest?



**What's the key to "making home?"** Have supper together. Really. It's that simple.

A few years ago we attended the funeral of a friend who had died from cancer. They'd been members of a small church, which is where the memorial service was held. The cremated ashes stood on a table at the front.

After the opening prayer, some singing and a little Scripture, a very close friend and longtime companion of the dead man rose to address us and eulogize his friend.

"I've learned a lot about life by going through Fred's death," he told us. "I've learned that both our families love us profoundly. From the beginning, you have all been here for Fred and me. You're amazing!

"I've learned that our friends will stand with us no matter what. Most of you are here today. Thank you for all you gave to Fred and me during this time. Your unconditional love has been a tremendous example to me.

"I've learned the names of diseases I hope never to hear again. I've learned about medical procedures designed in hell that they used to try to keep Fred alive. And I've seen Fred be as heroic as it is possible for anyone to be in the face of unending bad medical news."

Then he paused as if to eye us for just a minute or two.

"But the biggest lesson I take away from all this," he said, "is that I've learned to dust less - and use the china more! Those great meals we all shared remain with me daily. When you die, it turns out, the only thing you really leave behind is the love you have in your heart. It's also the only thing you take with you on your next

journey. And didn't we celebrate love at all those wonderful suppers over the last three years? Are you glad we did that? Our china once sat on the shelf, unchipped. It's got a little more wear and tear now, thank goodness."

**Unchipped china, indeed!** How many of us will go to our graves with china we never used?! I say, take that china off the shelf and use it! Pause at the end of your day, even if you're a little tired, and share a meal with others. Sit down to a table, set as if for guests, even when it's only two or three or four people and you all live in the same house. Make supper the center point of your day.

**Why? You ask.** Because Jesus did. It's inescapable in the Gospels, no matter which one you read. In Luke alone, there are ten great meals, in the context of which Jesus carried out his ministry.

**Everyday dining.** And yes, we're talking here about *everyday* meals.

**Not easy.** In order to do this, you will have to reorganize your whole life, I know. Depending on your work schedule, choose a meal to make the center point of your



household's life. This means you may have to put other activities on hold. Turn off the television. Come home early from work. Have fewer evening activities, including at the parish.

The beauty of having supper together every day is that your whole household gets involved. People start asking, "What's for dinner?" early in the day. Or they want to invite a friend on Thursday. Or they decide to tape a TV show for watching later. This isn't where mom cooks, everybody eats, and mom cleans up. This is where everybody helps with every part of the meal.

Recently some neighbors stopped to see me. They have three children, all in their high school years. But the problem was that they were out of touch with their kids. They didn't even know who all their kids' friends were. They wanted to talk about some serious stuff: sex, money, careers, family history - but they didn't know how. Did I have any suggestions for them?

So I suggested they start having dinner every evening. "Set the table," I told them. "Use the good dishes. Light a candle. Put on some music. Turn off the TV. And cook together. Be around the kitchen. The smells and sounds will at least make them curious.

"Invite them," I advised, "but don't require them to eat with you. Sit down, share the meal, chat together, and linger for a while afterward. Just see what happens."

A month later I saw these neighbors again. "You won't believe it," she said. "By the end of the second week of having supper like this, all three kids were at the table,

and were asking to invite their friends, too. Now they take a turn at the cooking. We've never shopped for so many groceries in our life! And we just love it!"

And within a few months, this family was talking again. About almost everything. There was a new sense of "daily expectation" in the house. Their meals were simple; they aren't well off. But their meals were shared - and that's the key.

**If you cook it, they will come.** This may sound too simple, but when you cook and dine with others on a regular basis, reconciliation happens naturally. You simply cannot eat at table with people with whom you're on the outs. And when you dine together, a sense of agape, (the early Christian love feast) emerges very quickly. You start to get the sense that having supper together is romantic - and it is! And you get the sense that some large *non-verbal* communication of love is going on that is not possible in any other context.

It can't be hit or miss dining. It must be daily - or as often as possible. Why? Because it has to be something that everyone in the household can count on. They're going to bring themselves to this, not just their appetites. Building it into the structures of how you live together is vital.

And here's another thing. Having supper in the evening at home creates a natural sense of liturgy. It's liturgical, even though not fully public. There is a table, with linens, candles, and certain vessels used in the meal. There is the shared food, the break broken. There is wine to pour, a toast to make, lives to celebrate every single day. It takes on a liturgical air after a while.

The other night at our table, we were feeling just a little rushed. I don't remember why. But finally, the lights were turned down, the music was on, and we were sitting. Without thinking I picked up my fork to start eating. But I was reminded that we had not observed our opening rite, the toast.

Every evening we toast the people or events or notable happenings of the day. At first, it was just a lovely thing to do. Now it is the opening rite at every meal. We don't start without it. That's how liturgical tradition unfolds. For some people, this might be an opening prayer (another way of observing those notable happenings). For others, it might be the lighting of the candles, or the pouring of the wine.

The important thing is that having supper together as often as possible is occurring.



**And what if you live alone?** I don't have an easy answer for this. Living alone is a modern thing. As recently as fifty years ago, it was rare for a person to live outside of a household. One's very physical well-being and survival was dependent on living in a household.



But today many, many adults live alone. Many are older widows. Many are divorced. Many are single and plan not to join a household of any kind. Many are young people who intend to marry later. And even for these, having supper with others is important. The purpose of sharing supper in their cases isn't so much the bringing

together of a household as it is the powerful connections with others that dining provides.

This is one of the ways that small Christian communities can really serve the church. It can be a way for folks who live alone to connect. But I don't think they need an agenda for their discussions. What they need is a cookbook. If a parish organized itself around dining as the main sacred activity of its people (which it is!) then how it schedules evening activities, and how it helps bring those who live alone together, would support people having supper together.



**Let me repeat that.** The most important Christian activity of the members of any parish is *not* the parish council meeting; it's not the choir practice, not catechesis. It's having supper in their homes together. Organize the parish around making room for that. Teach about it. Encourage it. And go home yourself to supper with friends, family, or loved ones.

**Post-resurrection appearances.** Where did Jesus appear after his Resurrection? Almost always in the context of a meal: in the upper room: "Give me to eat." At Emmaus in the breaking of the bread after supper. And then there was that wonderful fish fry on the beach in the Gospel of John.

Likewise, if you dine together, Christ will be in your midst. You will soon recognize him.