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I have a recurring memory that pops into my head from time to time. I would be hanging out with my friends when I suddenly realized the time—5:09. I'd drop what I was doing (even if I was batting in the bottom of the ninth) and set off at top speed, desperately trying to make it home by 5:15, the appointed dinner hour in our home.

My parents weren't big on having too many rules, but one of the few non-negotiables in our home was that we were all at the dinner table at 5:15 pm. I'm so glad they insisted.

Years later as I was writing a family newsletter, *At Home with Our Faith*, I started paying attention to all the research that was pouring out about the many positive effects of regular family meals at home. Year after year, the encouraging research results have continued to grow exponentially.

According to the mountains of research, children who enjoy regular meals with their family do better in school, exhibit fewer anti-social tendencies, and are more successful with their peers. They are far more likely to graduate high school and far less likely to take up smoking, use alcohol or drugs, or experiment with sex. The list of benefits goes on and on.

And it's no surprise. We bring all our hungers to the table—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual—and all of them can be fed. The meal doesn't have to be like a Norman Rockwell painting—everyone smiling around an orderly table. There may even be teasing and taunting and spilled milk. It doesn't matter. The fact that you are there together, sharing your lives, and being present to one another is how the magic happens.

Family mealtimes prepares us to be really present to one another so we can better appreciate the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It can be a school where we learn to pray about what really matters to us, day by day, and the place where we practice forgiveness, both giving and receiving. It's the place to bring our needs and know they will be met. In effect, it becomes a great place to prepare our minds and hearts to move from the family table to the table of the Lord in our parish.

So after all these years I'm glad my parents were so strict about the family meal. My wife and I held fast to this practice with our own daughters. And that memory of me running frantically always ends well—catching my breath and taking my place as my family says together, "Bless us O Lord, and these, thy gifts..."

8 Faith Reasons to Enjoy Regular Family Meals:

1. They foster gratitude.
2. They help you share your family's values.
3. They become a spiritual anchor echoing the faithfulness of God.
4. They nurture your spiritual self.
5. They are an opportunity to practice virtues such as kindness, respect, forgiveness, tolerance, understanding, and joy.
6. They give you the chance to create lasting memories with your children.
7. They show you who you are and where you belong.
8. They prepare you for fuller participation in the Mass.