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— *October's Family Challenge* —

Read Pope Francis' suggestions on the other side, consider your family's dinner patterns, and decide on one simple way your meal times can be enriched.

Suggestions:

- ◆ Screen-free meal times (No television, phones, etc.)
- ◆ Dinner all together at the table
- ◆ Invite someone to share your meal
- ◆ Involve the whole family in meal preparation and/or clean-up.

Share your plan at our November *Family Formation* meeting and enter the drawing for the monthly prize.

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For Pope Francis the dinner table is a key place to strengthen family bonds and foster a sense of “togetherness,” which he said can often be thwarted by an excess attachment to technology.

“A family that almost never eats together, or that never speaks at the table but looks at the television or the smartphone, is hardly a family,” the Pope said Nov. 11 [2015].

“When children at the table are attached to the computer or the phone and don’t listen to each other, this is not a family, this is [someone paying for a meal]!” Francis spoke to the thousands of pilgrims gathered in St. Peter’s Square for his Wednesday general audience.

“In family life we learn about togetherness from a young age, which is a very beautiful virtue the family teaches us to share, with joy, the blessings of life,” he said. Francis explained that the most concrete sign of this togetherness is when families are “gathered around the household table.”

“Sitting at table for the family dinner, sharing our meal and the experiences of our day, is a fundamental image of togetherness and solidarity,” he said, explaining that food isn’t the only thing shared at the table, but also affection and the happy and sad events of the day.

Togetherness, he said, is a “sure thermometer” to measure the quality of family relationships, since “in the family, if something is wrong, or if there’s some hidden wound, at the table you see it right away.”

The Pope said that Christians have a special vocation to live the virtue of togetherness, and noted how Jesus made a point to eat with his friends, and even presented the Kingdom of God as a joyful banquet.

“It was also in the context of a dinner where he gave the disciples his spiritual testament and instituted the Eucharist,” the Pope observed. Because Jesus gave us the Eucharist as a meal, there is a close relationship between families and the Mass.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the place where families, drawing from their own experience, open themselves to the grace of “universal togetherness and a fraternity without borders,” he said.

Francis said that the togetherness we experience within our own families and in the family of the Church is meant to extend to everyone as a sign of God’s universal love. The Eucharist then becomes “a school of inclusion,” where we learn to be attentive to the needs of others.

Article Source: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/eat-with-your-family-not-with-your-smartphone-pope-says-79491/>

Full Text of Wednesday Audience: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20151111_udienza-generale.html

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