

saint mary's press

Prayers By Young Teens

Looking  
Past  
the  
Sky

Edited by  
Marilyn Kielbasa



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# Preface

In the summer of 1997, Saint Mary's Press, in Winona, Minnesota, hosted a focus group on early adolescence. We invited nine people from around the country who work with young people ages eleven to fifteen. These people were catechists, youth ministers, diocesan personnel, schoolteachers, and counselors. One of the strongest recommendations that came from the group was to do a book of prayers by young teens, similar to *Dreams Alive* and *More Dreams Alive*. Both of those collections of prayers by teenagers, published by Saint Mary's Press in 1991 and 1995 respectively, have been popular with young people and with those who work with young people.

In October 1997, I sent a letter to parish and diocesan religious education offices, youth ministry offices, and parochial elementary and middle schools all over North America. The letter was an invitation to collect prayers by young people in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and submit them for possible publication. No topics were specified. The prayers could be funny or serious, and could be focused on the young people themselves, on other people, or on the bigger picture. Most important, the guidelines indicated that "we are looking for writing that reflects honesty, authenticity, and an awareness of the real world of young adolescents."

The writers were given the option of being identified by their full name, their first name, or their initials, or of remaining anonymous. All prayers were identified by the school or parish from which they came.

Because this project was directed at a relatively new audience for Saint Mary's Press, I was not quite sure what to expect. I was pleasantly astounded by the response. Prayers and reflections poured in from all over the country; by the end of February 1998, we had collected over fourteen hundred prayers by young adolescents from forty-three states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Guam.

Though the response surprised me, the quality of the prayers did not. They were honest, thoughtful, humorous, sincere, reflective, joyful, sensitive, passionate, anguished, fun, touching—in other words, they reflected the spectrum of life.

On more than one occasion, I was moved to prayer myself, inspired by something one of the young teens had written. Most of the editing process was done in awesome wonder, with the words of the Scriptures echoing in my mind and heart: “And a . . . child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6).

The most difficult aspect of editing this book was having to eliminate so many wonderful prayers. The task of choosing the prayers and reflections was, at times, agonizing. Thankfully, I had help. After reading and sorting all the prayers, I asked six students to read through them and give me feedback. The team included Christopher Gorman and Julie Rozek, from Winona Senior High School and Saint Mary’s Parish; and Gretchen Baumgardt, John Corcoran, Ryan Hinton, and Ruth Kolar, from Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, in Winona, Minnesota.

I am sure the students would agree with me that the assignment was a difficult one. However, the contribution of this student advisory team was indispensable, and I am grateful to them for their help.

## Using the Prayers

The prayers and reflections in this book are useful to young people individually, as well as in ministry settings and family settings. The uses are too numerous to list, but some suggestions follow:

- Adults who work with young adolescents in ministry settings might consider using the prayers in these ways:
  - to start or end a class
  - to give focus to a prayer session
  - as part of a retreat
  - to trigger discussion about topics of importance to young teens
  - as part of parent, sponsor, or staff meetings
- *Looking Past the Sky* would be a helpful gift to parents and to adults who work with young teens in secular settings. The prayers can remind adults that young adolescents are people of faith. Young teens’ age and place in life give them a unique perspective on God, the world, relationships, and themselves.



- Young people can use the book in these ways:
  - for personal prayer in the morning, in the evening, or anytime in between
  - as a springboard to write their own prayers or reflections in a personal journal
  - to share with friends or family members

The uses of *Looking Past the Sky* are limited only by one's creativity. If you find a unique way to use this book, I would love to hear about it. Write to Marilyn Kielbasa at Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320. My e-mail address is [mkielbasa@smp.org](mailto:mkielbasa@smp.org).

## A Final Word of Thanks

A book like this would not be possible without the contributions and cooperation of many people:

- Thanks to the diocesan, parish, and school personnel who got the word out, gathered the prayers, and submitted them.
- Thanks to parents, catechists, and teachers who nurture the faith of young people in families, parishes, and schools.
- Thanks to the young people themselves who allowed their prayers and reflections to be submitted for consideration. I only wish we could have published all of them.

*Looking Past the Sky* is a collection of prayerful thoughts of young people—who are the present and the future of the world and the church. My wish is that every person who opens this book finds in it consolation, inspiration, and great hope.

Marilyn Kielbasa  
Editor



# Part One

## Prayers to Begin and End the Day

Promise to God

Thank you for guiding me through my day.

In the name of the Father, protect  
In the name of the Son, help me  
of the Holy Spirit, I may

your Way.

Angel of God protect me throughout the  
me of any harm, fear, or evil that stands in  
disturbs my connection with God.

Dear Lord,  
Help me through my day,  
May it go by safe and easy.  
AMEN

my family and friends  
have a successful day  
with your kindness.

# Morning Prayers



Good morning, God. It's me.  
I see my eyes are open,  
The sun is shining.  
I can't think of one bad thing.  
For right now, the world is right.  
Please let this day continue this way.  
Guide me, watch over me, bless me.  
Thank you, God. I love you, God.  
Amen.

*Aaron Orlando  
Saint Ambrose School, Houston, TX*



Dear God,  
Help me through this day,  
Through the good times and the bad times that come my  
way.  
I need help on that gigantic test,  
The spelling, the science, and all the rest.  
I need help with the problems that lie ahead.  
God, help me through the times when I just want to go  
to bed.  
And when I go to bed tonight, I'll be sure and pray.  
But please, dear God, help me get through today.  
Amen.

*Megan Borer  
Saint Thomas More School, Omaha, NE*



Dear God,

I beg of you to guide me through the troubles that will face me this day. Please help me with the prayers and petitions I give you, that you may hear me in my despair. I turn to you for answers when I am confused, and you are there to help me decide what to do. If it's a worldly-known problem or just a minor glitch at home, no problem is too big or too small for you. That is why you are our God. Once again, I turn to you this day for the guidance and hope to make it through yet another day. Amen.

*Anthony Capizzi*

*Saint Cyprian School, Sunnyvale, CA*



Dear God,

Thank you for giving me life, for waking me up, and for giving me the gift of another day. Help me to see the good in other people and to do what is right for the sake of others. Help other people to see what is right, and help them to do no evil. Give me the gift of love, laughter, and everlasting peace. Amen.

*Emily Hamer*

*Saint Joseph School, Wauwatosa, WI*



Our Lord my God, I want to give you thanks for the wonderful day you have given us and for letting me live another day. Make my day peaceful, and let no evil take over me. I praise you, my God. Amen.

*Candina Rodriguez*

*Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Violet, LA*



God, today, keep me in your thoughts.  
Help me to remember the value  
Of things that cannot be sold or bought,  
Like love, honesty, courage, and kindness,  
And all other things you taught.  
I offer my day to you, O God,  
So keep me in your thoughts.

*Kelly Koeninger*  
*Saint Thomas School, Fort Thomas, KY*



O Lord God on high,  
We are thankful for this day; help us to use it wisely.  
Help us to teach those who cannot learn,  
Help us to feed those who cannot support themselves,  
Help us to pray for those who do not believe in you,  
Help us to be kind to those who are unhappy,  
Help us to always look for you and keep seeking you.  
This we ask through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

*Christopher Navarro Mahoney*  
*Saint Ambrose School, Houston, TX*



Please help me get through the day  
and not worry what others say.  
I can quickly get very upset.  
I hate being so sensitive.  
So please help me keep calm  
and not worry about everything and everyone.

*Kathryn Elizabeth Klein*  
*Holy Spirit School, Louisville, KY*



As the sun peeks through my window,  
I wake each morning knowing that you are near.  
I rise from my bed and bow low.  
I pray silently to you, knowing that you will hear.  
I ask that you help me face the day.  
I ask that you keep safe my family and friends.  
I know that you will, for "no" you never say.  
And when the day has drawn to an end,  
I will climb back into my bed.  
My room will fill with moonlight,  
And I will think of all that you have said,  
Knowing that you will keep me in your sight.

*Kelly McGrath*

*Our Lady of Hope/Saint Luke School, Baltimore, MD*

In the name of the **Father**, protect my family and friends.

In the name of the **Son**, help me to have a successful day.

In the name of the **Holy Spirit**, help kindness grow in  
the world.

Amen.

*Roger Priego*

*Saint Bartholomew School, Bethesda, MD*

**Angel of God**, protect me throughout the day.  
Protect me from any harm, fear, or evil that stands in my  
path or disturbs my connection with God. Amen.

*David J. Atkins*

*Saint Pius X School, Tulsa, OK*



Dear God,  
Thank you for putting a smile on my face and a warm special feeling in my mind, heart, and soul today.

Some days it's hard to be around other people when they hurt my feelings. But sooner or later, your love will shine through them.

Be with me so that I can have the strength and courage to make the right choices. Amen.

*Michael*

*Saint Richard Catholic Community, Richfield, MN*



In the name of the Father, please guide and protect me throughout the day.

In the name of the Son, thank you, Jesus, for dying for us on the cross and for showing us the path for a sinless life.

In the name of the Holy Spirit, thank you for always being there in my times of need. Amen.

*M. K.*

*Saint Bartholomew School, Bethesda, MD*



# Evening Prayers



Dear God, creator of heaven and earth,  
Thank you for this wonderful day,  
For all the cool things I have received.  
Please bless my mom, dad, brothers, sisters, grandma and  
grandpa, aunts, uncles, and cousins,  
The poor and the homeless.  
Please try to bring justice and peace to the earth.  
God, have a great night.  
When it is my time, please make it peaceful.  
Amen.

*Matt Schueller*  
*Saint Joseph School, Wauwatosa, WI*



Dear God, Mary, and Jesus,  
I just want to say thank you for this wonderful day with my  
friends, my family, and at school.  
I am sorry for all the sins I have committed today.  
I offer a prayer for my nanny;  
Help her get through everything.  
I pray for myself, that I may have a good day tomorrow;  
For my mother, father, brother, and anyone in the world who  
needs help and love.  
Thank you, God, for everything you have given me today  
and always!  
Amen.

*Corinne Hartin*  
*Sacred Heart School, Bayside, NY*



Thank you, God,  
For this whole day.  
Thank you, God,  
For all the play.  
Thank you, God,  
For all I say.  
Thank you, God,  
In every way.

*Alexandra Portolano  
Saint Andrew the Apostle Parish, Silver Spring, MD*



God,  
Today was a beautiful day. The sky was blue, and the sun was shining. I woke up on time and fully rested. I gave my mom and dad a kiss and left for school. When I got to school, I even had extra time to talk to my friends. My teachers were in good moods, and I received an A plus on my test. I didn't even have that much homework. My mom came home at five o'clock and I helped her start dinner. My dad came home at six fifteen. I greeted him with a hug. We finished eating, and I cleared off the table. I read for a little bit, then got ready for bed. Now I am talking to you. Thank you for everything today. I was wondering if you could watch over my mom, my dad, my brothers, all my friends, and especially my aunts and those who aren't as fortunate as I am. Also, if you could help me during my test tomorrow, I would appreciate it. I know that I don't always do what's right, but tomorrow is another day, and I will try harder. Thank you for everything you have given me. I love you. Amen.

*Katrina Gatta  
Holy Rosary School, Claymont, DE*



Dear God,

Please protect my family and relatives. Keep me safe from evil and danger in my sleep and while I'm awake. Forgive me for all I have done wrong. Help the people I have hurt or treated unfairly to forgive me. Thank you for the many gifts you have given me. Guide me to do the right things. Help me to become more like you. Goodnight, God. I love you.

*Bernardine Coughlin*

*Saint John Vianney School, Saint Pete Beach, FL*



Dear God,

Thank you for everything you gave me today. Thank you for my family. They mean a lot to me. I am sorry for everything I did wrong today. I just wanted to say thank you for loving me each and every day. I love you! Amen.

*Lauren Spittler*

*Saint Vincent de Paul School, Omaha, NE*



Dear God,

Thank you for a great day. Thank you for not letting anything bad happen to my family. Please let us have a safe night. Please don't let anything bad happen. If something bad has to happen, let it happen to me. Please forgive me for all the wrong I did during the day. Please make sure I wake up in the morning, and help me through tomorrow. Please protect me when I am scared. Please let my mom get home safely from work. Thank you, God, for everything. I love you. Amen.

*Bernadette*

*Saint John Vianney School, Saint Pete Beach, FL*

Dear God,

Help me through my day.

May it go by **safe** and **easy**.

Amen.

*Kyle Dean Davis*

*Saint Francis de Sales Parish, Lebanon, MO*



Thank you for guiding me through this day.

I pray with **all my heart** I may

Teach others to follow in your way.



*Renee M. Thibodeau*

*Saint Louis School of Religion, Fort Kent, ME*



Dear God,

Hello! It is me again. I was looking at the stars, and I realized what a good job you did! They sparkle like diamonds in the night. Thank you for my family and friends. Without them I would be next to nothing. Thank you for all the animals and plants. Please help those who are sick and dying and their families and friends. Please help me control my temper and be nicer to other people.

I am sorry for yelling at people that shouldn't be yelled at. I am also especially sorry for bugging my parents. Please forgive me. Well, that's all for now. Thanks for listening. I love you.

*Michelle L. Ciesielski*

*Saint Agnes School, Springfield, MO*



Dear God, forgive me for the sins I have committed today.  
Help me to sin less and to become more and more like you.  
Help me to resist evil and all temptations in my life.  
Help me to have more patience and tolerance toward others.  
Most of all, help me to love others as you have loved me.  
Amen.

*Kathryn Wilson*

*Saint John Kanty School, Milwaukee, WI*



God, I thought of you today  
when I slept and when I played.  
God, I thought of you today  
when I saw the birds and trees,  
when I saw the flowers bloom,  
when I saw the bee get honey,  
when my dog chewed his bone,  
when my cat stubbed her toe.  
God, I think of you every day,  
but most of all today.

*Laura Hausladen*

*Saint Paul School, Saint Paul, MO*



Dear God,  
We're sorry for all the wrong things we did today. As we  
think back on doing those bad things, it just doesn't seem  
like they were even worth the effort anymore. Even though  
our evil may show through our actions, we still have enough  
love in our heart to try to turn our wrongs into rights. Please  
help us do better tomorrow. Amen.

*Brigid Mullen*

*Saint John the Baptist School, Howard, WI*



Dear God,  
Thank you for this day. Thank you for letting me go to school  
and come home again. Thank you for my family. I thank you  
for letting me eat my three meals today. And thank you,  
God, for everything around me. Amen.

*Andrew W. Repasky  
Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Fort Collins, CO*



God, as I sleep through the night,  
I know that you will keep me safe.  
As I walk through the day,  
I know that you are near my heart.  
As you lead me and guide me,  
I learn right from wrong.  
And when I say my nightly prayers,  
I know that you will be there for me tomorrow.  
Amen.

*Wendy Ponze  
Saint Catherine of Siena School, Metairie, LA*



Dear God,  
Thank you for another day. Thank you for life, for friends, and  
for everything you give me. I pray that I may always live out  
your will. I pray, too, for the people who sacrifice their life for  
freedom and justice.

*Jaemi Bowers  
Saint Theresa School, Phoenix, AZ*

# Part Two

## Thank You, God

Thank you for  
Please God, watch over me  
whatever I do  
Jesus, wherever I  
whatever I  
be guide  
lots of things  
said times  
In the name of the Father, protect  
In the name of the Son, help me  
name of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

Dear Lord,  
You tell us to make peace  
with others, but sometimes it's  
hard. You help us in times of  
need. Help us to love others as  
Jesus said.

... because it can  
... and so can  
... help me with



Creator of the earth:

I like to thank you for all the things that you have given to us  
without our asking, like the flowers that show us their  
smiling faces—the yellow flowers of thousand petals.

I give you thanks for the stars. I know that they are not really  
stars but that they are angels that are guarding us.

I give thanks to you because of the things that you give us  
without our asking.

Thank you for giving me this precious gift . . . that is life.  
Amen.

*Tania Castrejón DeOrlow*  
*Saint Ambrose School, Houston, TX*



### **A Camper's Thanks**

Thank you, God, for tall pine trees,  
the bee's buzz, and a cool breeze;  
for a walking stick to pass the miles away,  
for the enjoyment of each day;  
for brown rustic trails, for lobster tails,  
for sweet strawberries, wild raspberries too,  
apple pie, and campfire stew;  
for dark caves, and salty waves,  
for memories old and new, for the damp dew,  
for the red rose, for the grass that tickles your toes,  
for a sunny sky so blue.

But most of all, God, I thank you for you!

*Andrew Forecki*  
*Saint Mary School, Hales Corner, WI*





Dear God,  
I just want to say "hi!"  
I want to say that I'm having a good day.  
Thanks to you,  
    I have had a breakfast,  
    I have had a lunch,  
    I have had a dinner.  
Thank you, dear God,  
    For I have a nice house,  
    I have lots of friends,  
    And my life is pretty good.  
Thanks, God,  
    For water to drink,  
    For big maple trees,  
    For dogs that bark,  
    For juicy oranges,  
    And small green grapes.  
But thanks most of all  
    for a miraculous thing called life.  
Amen.

*Tracy M. Jarvis*  
*Mount Saint Joseph Academy, Buffalo, NY*



Dear God,  
Thank you for my hands and feet.  
Thank you for the food we eat.  
Thank you for the flowers that grow.  
Thank you for the pure white snow.  
Thank you for my family.  
Thank you, God, for loving me!  
Amen.

*Emily Pilgrim*  
*Precious Blood Parish, Dayton, OH*



Jesus, thank you for all the people of the world.  
You give us people to love,  
    but sometimes we do not love all people.  
Thank you, God, for loving us anyway.

Jesus, thank you for all our wonderful talents.  
You give us all wonderful talents,  
    but sometimes we do not use our talents to serve you.  
Thank you, God, for loving us anyway.

Jesus, thank you for giving us free will.  
You give us many choices,  
    but sometimes we do not make good choices.  
Thank you, God, for loving us anyway.

Jesus, thank you for showing your love to us.  
You show your love to us in many ways,  
    but sometimes we do not take the time to notice.  
Thank you, God, for loving us anyway.

Jesus, thank you for giving us life.  
You give us our life and the lives of others,  
    but sometimes we take our life and the lives of others.  
Thank you, God, for loving us anyway.

Jesus, thank you for giving us your life.  
You made the ultimate sacrifice for us,  
    but sometimes we still disrespect you.  
Thank you, God, for loving us anyway.

*Karen*  
*Cathedral Carmel School, Lafayette, LA*



God in heaven, up above,  
Thank you for the ones I love.

For my parents, who love and care;  
When I need help, they're always there.

For my brothers, who like to tease,  
But will help me if I say please.

For my grandparents, who tell me about the past;  
I hope these memories will always last.

For aunts, uncles, and cousins, too,  
And all the fun things that we do.

I see your love every day.  
I try to spread it in every way.

*Sarah*  
*Holy Cross Catholic Community, West Fargo, ND*



Thanks for all the homework due tomorrow.  
Thanks for siblings that are always asking "why?"  
Thanks for the toy I couldn't get yesterday.  
And thanks for the presents my dog and cat leave me.

Yes, let us be thankful.  
Be thankful for the chance to go to school and learn.  
Be thankful for the toys we have and the siblings we share  
them with.  
And let's be thankful for that cat or dog that will love us to  
the end.

We need to be more thankful.

*E. A. K.*  
*FACES Middle School, Fond du Lac, WI*



When I look out the window, what do I see?  
I see the wonderful world God created for me:  
the sky, the trees, the plants all around,  
wildlife and nature hiding, and waiting to be found.

People in cars and walking on streets—  
thank you, God, for all the people I meet.  
You have blessed me with loving friends and family;  
they seem to bring out the best in me.

Thank you, God, for all you have given me.  
Please help me to be all I can be.

*Bryan Scheffel*  
*Sacred Heart School, Fairfield, OH*



Thank you for my very life and for the air I breathe.  
Thank you for the birds that fly and for the fishes in the sea.  
Thank you for my family, who have helped me a whole lot,  
even for my little brother, who can sometimes be a pain.  
Thank you for the moon, the stars, the sky, the clouds, the  
rain.

Thank you for the food I eat and the drinks I drink,  
and thank you very much for the things I think.  
Thank you for my teachers who have taught me a whole lot.  
Thank you for my friends who are there when some are not.  
Thank you for these things and more.  
But thank you most of all for your love and for my life—  
Your greatest gifts of all. Amen.

*Anika J. Guldstrand*  
*American Martyrs School, Manhattan Beach, CA*



Thank you, God, for the life you bring me. You created me the way you thought would be nice, and I came out adorable. You, God, are the light of my life because you are always listening. When I'm in trouble, you understand. If I'm having a problem, you care.

God, you love me with all your soul, and I love you with all my soul.

*Elizabeth Marie Raycroft  
Northeastern Catholic Junior High, Rochester, NY*



Dear God,  
I want to give you all my thanks; a special thanks for putting me here on earth and making me who I am. I give you the greatest gratitude for helping me through times of pain and sorrow. Thank you for blessing me with such a powerful conscience that tells me right from wrong. I thank you for giving us your only Son so that we may be saved and have eternal life. God, I ask you to continue helping and supporting me while I struggle to climb the long path to heaven.

*Ryan Kelley  
Saint Patrick School, Stoneham, MA*



Dear God,  
Thank you for everything that I have in my life, including my loving parents and my baby brother. I know I've made mistakes at times, but I will try hard to do my best. Thank you for your forgiveness, and help me to work harder. Please help me to become a more responsible person, and help me to deal with the problems of growing up. Amen.

*Devan Pelon  
Saint Martha Parish, Okemos, MI*



Dear God,  
Sometimes I believe I forget to thank you. You have given me so many great things, and I think I sometimes take advantage of that. So now I want to thank you for my family, friends, and the food I have. I would also like to pray for those who are less fortunate than I am—those who haven't been blessed with the many things I have. I ask you to help so that I will have the courage to reach out to the outcasts that are too often ridiculed. I try to be friends with everyone, but it is not always easy. God, thank you for everything. Amen.

*Rachel E. Cox  
Our Lady of Hope/Saint Luke School, Baltimore, MD*



Thank you, God . . .  
for our parents that help us grow in God's love, working their  
hardest to make sure we receive an education.  
for our teachers that teach us responsibility and challenge us  
to do our best.  
for the knowledge you give to people to find ways to cure  
diseases.  
for the stars that shine so bright to help us see ourselves  
through the dark.  
for peacemakers all over the world that make peace among  
people.  
for the animals you have given us to observe.  
for nature and plants that make food for the animals and  
for us.  
for miracles that make wonderful things to help us.  
for our emotions that allow us to feel different things.  
I especially thank you for myself, and for the chance to  
imagine these things.

*Monique Nuñez  
Saint Theresa School, Phoenix, AZ*