

# Observing Lent as a Family

Greetings!

Each season of the liturgical year draws us into the mysteries of our salvation and invites us to grow in love of God and neighbor in a particular way. Lent offers the opportunity to turn away from sin and to live in the freedom of the children of God.

As parents and caregivers, we want to be mindful of the opportunities that the Lenten season provides for children to practice their faith. Children learn from our example. Rest assured that your embrace of the Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving is its own lesson. Spend some time in prayer and silence considering what holds you back from being the person God has called you to be. How might you practice prayer, fasting, and almsgiving so that you can better know, love, and serve God?

While you model this discernment to your family, you can ask your children if there is anything they might like to do for Lent. Given the freedom to decide for themselves, many children will enthusiastically adopt some form of Lenten observance. When I asked my children, “What would give you an opportunity to grow closer to God?” their answers surprised me: giving up time on the iPad, not picking fights with a sibling, or calling a grandparent every day to chat. It is an acknowledgment of the wisdom of their inner teacher, the Holy Spirit, to let them decide what will be most helpful to them.

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Additionally, you may want to decide on a discipline as a family. For several years, my family gave up eating in restaurants (including carryout) and donated our cost savings to our local food bank. Our almsgiving was not the only way this



Simple Lenten practices help draw the family closer to Christ and one another.

sacrifice changed us. Like many busy families, weekdays found us rushing from one thing to the next. Sticking with our sacrifice required a lot of focus. Some days, we drove past dozens of restaurants on our way to piano lessons and soccer while we ate soup, sandwiches, or leftovers in the car—sometimes contentedly and sometimes less so. While difficult, these moments gave us the opportunity to remember that love requires sacrifice and to reflect on the great love of the Lord Jesus whose sacrifice we were honoring.

Whatever you choose to do for Lent, make space for your family to encounter Christ in the Word, in the Eucharist, and in the least among us. I also encourage you to let your children see you receive the sacrament of reconciliation during Lent. When children observe their parents acknowledge their failings and seeking God’s grace and forgiveness, they are witnessing a model of the Christian life.

Teaching your children to honor the season of Lent is a gift that will help provide a blueprint for a life of faith. Keep the focus on Jesus: his love for us, his sacrifice, and the promise of eternal life with him.