

Lenten Inspiration for Families

Lent - Ash Wednesday

On Ash Wednesday we are marked on the forehead with a cross of ashes in a ritual of humility and repentance. The words of the ritual - *“Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel”* (Mark 1:15) – remind us to turn our hearts towards God’s love and mercy. As your family prepares to celebrate Lent, continue to use these words as part of a mealtime blessing or nightly prayer, accompanied by the Sign of the Cross.

Lenten Prayer

We, of course, need to make prayer a regular practice year-round, but it holds special significance during Lent. The use of the psalms is a simple way to focus prayer around Lenten themes of penitence, forgiveness, and trust in God. Set aside time each week to pray together as a family. Start with a simple psalm, such as: *“A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit”* (Psalm 51:12). Then offer prayers that flow from the psalm’s entreaties.

Lenten Fasting

Abstinence – refraining from a type of food – is part of the Lenten fast. We abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and each Friday during Lent and eat only one main meal on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In addition, many people chose to abstain from a favorite food or drink, such as candy or alcohol, in order to extend this Lenten practice. In addition to food, we can also abstain from certain behaviors, attitudes, or bad habits, such as harboring resentments or spending too much “screen time.” On or before Ash Wednesday, engage in a family discussion about the kind of abstinence that will contribute to your family’s well-being and loving relationships. It might be abstaining from complaints, arguments, selfishness, or entitlement. Check in with one another each Wednesday during Lent about your shared endeavor. Name ways it has been both a challenge and a blessing.

Lenten Almsgiving

Giving alms to those in need is one of three traditional Lenten practices. A few days before Ash Wednesday, decide together on a charity that serves the poor. You might consult a parish bulletin for ideas or donate to an organization that serves victims of a recent natural disaster or other tragedy. Set a bowl in a central location. Each week during Lent decide on an amount to place in the bowl, perhaps based on refraining from various luxuries. When placing the money in the bowl offer a prayer for those who will benefit from your almsgiving.

Feast of Saint Joseph

Saint Joseph is one of our most revered saints. We honor him for the love, protection, and care he gave to Mary and her son, Jesus. He is the patron saint of fathers as well as of families. His feast day (March 19th) occurs during the Lenten season and provides a lovely opportunity to give thanks for your own family. To do so, place family photos on a table. Share stories about the memories they hold for each of you. Then ask Saint Joseph to pray on behalf of all families, especially those in need of food, shelter, and safety.

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