

Embrace Lent As A Family

LITURGICAL SEASONS ARE MORE THAN COUNTDOWNS TO UPCOMING HOLIDAYS, they are an invitation for introspection to examine our habits, faith practices and walk a little closer with Jesus. With the upcoming season of Lent, it is important not only to engage our children in conversations, rites and rituals, but to demonstrate how the season can have restorative and transformative power on us as families.

Suggested Activities for Families During the Lenten Season:

Go to Confession as a Family: Your child is most likely going to have opportunities for reconciliation in school during the Lenten season, but modeling the significance of Lent by going as a family sends a powerful message to children that it is a special time in the Church year.

Set a Family Lenten Goal: Often we focus on what to “give up” for Lent, which is a great practice to teach the habit of sacrifice, but think about what spiritual goals you can set as a family during this time. It can be something simple like praying together on the way to school or cleaning out your closets and donating all of the things you don’t need to charity. No matter the goal, being intentional by explaining to children how these small acts connect to their faith reinforces the notion of family being the domestic church.

Celebrate Saints: Lent is a time for penance and reflection but there are some exciting saints to celebrate during the season. Don’t forget to show the joy of the Catholic faith by engaging in special activities for St. Patrick’s Day and the Feast of St. Joseph. Make sure you share the stories of the saints with your children and not just the secular aspects of the holidays. Incorporate prayer into your celebrations and make special intercessions as a family part of the celebration.

Connect with a Church Community: Chances are your parish has a whole host of activities planned for Lent that you can engage in. If you haven’t been to church in a while or don’t belong to one, Lent is a great time to go back or consider checking out local parishes.

Care for the Poor: Children benefit greatly from exposing them to larger world views than their own home or school. Catholic Relief Services provides free



projects, recipes and prayers for families during Lent. There also is no shortage of need in your local area. Find a charity or cause you are passionate about and find a way to help as a family. www.crsricebowl.org/families

Let Your Children Take the Lead: Parents can empower children as faith leaders by giving them some guidelines, but allowing them to decide what projects, goals or prayers to pursue. Encourage your children to come up with a Lenten plan for your family and then put it in a place where everyone is reminded of it. You may be surprised what they come up with and the exercise teaches them that you trust them to be leaders in the household.

Evangelize and Connect: If you have older children with social media accounts, consider having them curate images, prayers and posts that you can both share online. Your posts may provide an inspiration to another family and be a bright light among all of the negative media that is out there.

These are just a few ideas, but there are a multitude of free resources for parents and families to grow together in faith during the Lenten season. Denise Utter, president of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL) recommends a great place to start by visiting www.catholicfamily.org/lent. Do you have inspiring ideas to share? Tag @NCEATALK on Twitter or @NCEAorg on Facebook to show us how your family’s Lenten journey is going.