

Family Liturgical Living: Lent

I have a confession: I am not good at "lenting." It was hard enough for me as an individual. Still, now as a parent, it is extra challenging to incorporate lent into our busy family life. Baseball, tennis, 4H, and many other commitments seem to take over our calendar, and everything just gets lost. Lent can easily be reduced to just giving something up in our chaos, much like a new year's resolution (which I quickly fail to stick to). To help keep Lent holy, we need to reflect on the 3 pillars of lent: fasting (giving something up), almsgiving (helping others), and prayer.

Fasting is one of the most ancient practices linked to Lent. Scripture is filled with references to the importance of prayer and fasting. In fasting, we develop self-control, and it aids us in prayer, as the pains of hunger remind us of our hunger for God. Fasting, traditionally, is willingly restricting yourself from food and drink for a period of time. Many Catholics chose to fast from other things besides food, including TV, video games, or social media. Have each person in your family decide what would be best for them to fast from. Challenge each other to choose foods or activities that will really help them realize their hunger for God. Each time there is a "hunger pain," say a small prayer, such as- Jesus, I trust in you.

Most of us think of giving money when we think of almsgiving. Still, for families, especially young children, this is not very realistic. Almsgiving is a sign of care for those in need, and an expression of gratitude for all God gives us. Alms for kids can be simple:

- Helping a sibling clean their room.
- Serving everyone their drinks at dinner.
- Writing a card to a distant family member.

Other forms of alms are to volunteer as a family at our local food pantry and thrift store. Donate items from your home to give to a local charity, such as Martin de Porres or Run the Race. Whatever you pick as a family, make it simple enough to be realistic. For example, our older sons have decided to volunteer on 2 Saturdays to volunteer at the food pantry in our family. We know that we can make that work even with our busy schedule- even if it will be challenging. Our younger sons have decided to tutor their little brothers. And one child has chosen to make sure he keeps his room clean to help me from going crazy. Whether we are serving our local community or serving our family, almsgiving should lead us to gratitude for God's grace in our lives.

The pillar that is easily overlooked is prayer. As an adult, this is the one pillar I have been the most successful at observing. I typically buy a Lenten Devotional that guides me along. Now, incorporating prayer for the entire family can be challenging. There are so many beautiful ways to encourage children to prayer that it can be overwhelming. My tip is to just pick one simple thing and stick to it. A few examples you can do individually or as a family include:

- Learning the 5 finger prayer,
- Reading a chapter of the Gospel a day,
- Saying one decade of the Rosary a day,
- Committing to learning the Rosary,
- At the end of each day, think of 3 things to thank God for.
- Pick a person who you will pray for all throughout Lent.

Talk about the three pillars of Lent and decide what you would like to do as a family. Fill out these Lenten Promise Cards and post them in your kitchen for everyone to see. Help each other by holding one another accountable and praying for one another. Lent is a particular time for us as individuals and as families to reflect on God's grace. When we do this, by His grace, we can be happy, holy families.

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Lenten Promises

prayer

fasting

almsgiving

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