

INTRODUCTION

The Church in her infinite wisdom provides an excellent opportunity for the faithful to grow spiritually and transform their hearts and souls during the penitential season of Lent. With God's saving grace and our own faithful efforts in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we can use this time of year wisely to grow deeper in holiness and please God, all while growing closer as a family, too.

St. John Paul II, so beloved to countless people, is an exceptional spiritual guide for your family's Lenten journey. The insightful pontiff reminds us about our Christian responsibility to embrace the forty days of Lent with a greater awareness and attentiveness to the holy season. He encouraged the faithful to observe Lent with great fervor, reliving it with Jesus:

"O that today you would hear his voice: harden not your hearts."

This invitation echoes in our souls as today, Ash Wednesday, we begin our Lenten journey. It will lead to the Easter Triduum, the living memorial of the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection, the central mystery of our salvation.

The holy season of Lent, which has always held deep meaning for the Christian people, recalls ancient biblical events such as the forty days of the universal flood, a prelude to the covenant that God made with Noah; Israel's forty-year pilgrimage through the desert to the promised land; the forty days that Moses remained on Mount Sinai, where he received the tablets of the Law from Yahweh.

In particular, the Lenten season invites us to relive with Jesus the forty days that he spent praying and fasting in the wilderness before beginning his public mission, which culminated on Calvary in the sacrifice of the Cross, the definitive victory over death. (General Audience, February 28, 2001)

Each day, Christian parents have opportunities even amid the busyness of their lives to guide their children toward heaven and its rewards. Called by God to be first and foremost educators, parents can and should do their very best to help mold their children's consciences and souls through their continual example of love and forgiveness, by

practicing the virtues, and by creating a loving atmosphere of family prayer in the heart of their home—their domestic church.

Lent is a season meant to transform hearts and souls. This book will provide and encourage a daily occurrence of family prayer and communication as you move through Lent together. By following the suggestions regarding how your family can apply St. John Paul II's wisdom to your lives, you will participate more fully with the rhythm of the Church regarding Lenten prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

You can choose morning or evening (or hopefully both) to gather with your brood. Your time will be well spent reflecting on St. John Paul II's life and wisdom, as well as the great traditions of Holy Mother Church.

To use this book, simply gather your family and move page by page, day by day, forging your way through Lent. You will see that there are no entries for Saturdays of Lent. I suggest that you use the Sunday prayers and activities throughout the weekend. You can come together morning or evening at your kitchen table, around a prayer table, or wherever you feel most comfortable when praying as a family in your domestic church. Make it special—for example, light a prayer candle if you wish.

St. John Paul II's Inspiration: Each day a quote from St. John Paul II begins the page and sets the tone, in a sense, for the Lenten day.

Parent Reflection: You will be given some points to ponder in this section each day. Some of it will be for you and some for your children.

Family Prayer: There are two opportunities for prayer during each day of meditations—one at the beginning and one at the end. Feel free to elaborate and adapt to suit your family's needs.

A Story from St. John Paul II's Life: This book will highlight notable parts of St. John Paul II's life. This part can be read by an older child or a parent.

Fasting: Each day, “fasting” suggestions will be made to help guide you (the parent) and your children about what to fast from. The fasting will not only be from certain foods, but more often from bad habits or enjoyable activities. Feel free to adapt the suggestions to what works best for your family.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fasting and abstinence. Church law requires that no meat be eaten on these days by Catholics fourteen years and older. People with medical conditions and pregnant or nursing mothers are exempt from fasting and abstinence. Catholics from the age of eighteen through fifty-nine must fast on these days by only having one full meatless meal and two smaller meatless and penitential meals. The two small meals together should not equal a full meal.

Almsgiving: Each day “almsgiving” suggestions are provided to help with ideas to accomplish acts of love as a family or individually.

Prayer: Each day you will be given a simple yet poignant thought to think and pray about throughout the day.

May your family receive many rich blessings as you pray, fast, and give alms together and journey toward heaven and its rewards throughout this Lenten season.

ASH WEDNESDAY



“Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return.” The traditional rite of distributing ashes, which is repeated today, is always very eloquent, and the words accompanying it are expressive. In its simplicity, it suggests the transitory nature of earthly life: everything passes and is destined to die. We are wayfarers in this world, wayfarers who must never forget their true and final destination: heaven. For, though we are dust and destined to become dust, nevertheless not all will come to an end. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, is destined for eternal life. In dying on the Cross, Jesus opened the way for every human being.

The entire Ash Wednesday liturgy helps us to focus on this fundamental truth of faith and spurs us to undertake a resolute journey of personal renewal. We must change our way of thinking and acting, set our gaze firmly on the face of Christ crucified and make his Gospel our daily rule of life. “*Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel*”: let this be our Lenten program, as we enter an atmosphere of prayerful listening to the Spirit.

—*General Audience, February 28, 2001*

Parent Reflection

Today is a special day because you are embarking on your Lenten journey. We are fortunate to be reminded by our Church that we are entering a very distinctive time within the Church cycle in which we can commit ourselves to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to please God and to grow in holiness. Today, when you call the family together to begin your Lenten observance, explain to the children that we try to do three things each day during Lent. First, we give up something, and we call this fasting. Second, we give or share something with others—help, possessions, or money. This is called almsgiving. Finally, we pray more. As Catholics, all three of these things should be a certain part of our daily lives, but during the season of Lent, we focus on them more intensely.

Ask the children if they would like to *give up* something for Lent or if they want to *do something* special to please Jesus. Take time today to help them decide and to formulate their Lenten resolutions. You can share with them what you plan to do or give up as well. Help the children write down their resolutions. They can refer to their notes each day throughout Lent. You might want to hang them on the refrigerator, their bedroom door, a bulletin board, or wherever they can be reminded easily.

St. John Paul II's reflection above on the words we will hear today when receiving our ashes—"Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return"—reminds us that these words should cause us to pause and ponder our need to turn away from sin and seek what Jesus wants us to do. In doing so, however, we can hang on to hope, knowing that "in dying on the Cross, Jesus opened the way for every human being."

Family Prayer

All make the Sign of the Cross.

Parent: Dear Jesus, please help us resist getting caught up with the daily worries of life on earth. Help us turn to you in all things, confident that you have opened heaven for all of us to enjoy with you one day. Now let us listen to these words of St. John Paul II.

A parent or child reads the opening quotation aloud.

All: Blessed Mother Mary, bring us closer to your Son, Jesus.

St. John Paul II, please pray for us. Amen.

A Story from St. John Paul II's Life

St. John Paul II was born as Karol Jozef Wojtyla on May 18, 1920, in the small, ancient town of Wadowice, Poland, about fifty kilometers from Krakow. Karol was the youngest of the three children born to parents Karol Wojtyla (an administrative officer in the Polish army) and Emilia Kaczorowska (a former schoolteacher). Karol's older sister, Olga, had died before he was born.

Karol was baptized on June 20, 1920, by Fr. Franciszek Zak in the parish church of Wadowice. He made his First Holy Communion when he was nine years old and his Confirmation at age eighteen.

Fasting

Discuss with your children what they can offer to God as a sacrifice during Lent. They might choose to give up a favorite video game, dessert, candy, a TV show, or a certain amount of time on the Internet. Decide what you can do as a family, too.

Almsgiving

John Paul II's words above—"We must change our way of thinking and acting, set our gaze firmly on the face of Christ crucified and make his Gospel our daily rule of life"—should inspire us to change for the better. Today, give some time (ten or fifteen minutes) to God. Think about your life and the direction it is headed. Encourage the children to try to ponder how they can serve God better, too.

Prayer

Today's Intention: Let's pray that we may think about our lives and make the necessary changes so that we are pleasing God, not ourselves.

Closing Prayer: Dear Jesus, we are thankful for the opportunity to come together as a family to pray to you. Please grant us the graces we need.

All pray the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be.

All through the Day: Jesus wants me to focus on the Gospel and not on the distorted messages of the culture.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY



“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt 26:41). Let us be guided by these words of the Lord in a committed effort of conversion and spiritual renewal. In daily life, there is a risk of being absorbed in material concerns and interests. Lent is an appropriate time for a reawakening of genuine faith. . . . The means available to us are the same as always, but we must use them more intensely in these weeks: prayer, fasting, and penance, as well as almsgiving, that is, the sharing of what we have with the needy.

—General Audience, February 28, 2001

Parent Reflection

Family life is busy. We know all too well that if we let our guard down we can become lackadaisical. St. John Paul II calls us to put a much greater effort into our prayer lives during Lent. He reminds us of the “risk of being absorbed in material concerns and interests.” We must always seek to come closer to Jesus and not try to take an easy way out. Likewise, we must guide our children on the narrow path and protect them from an ungodly culture. Make this Lenten season really count!

Family Prayer

All make the Sign of the Cross.

Parent: Dear Jesus, you know how hard it is to get through our daily concerns and know what is right and good. Please give us your light. Keep our family together in prayer and draw us ever closer to you. Now let us listen to these words of St. John Paul II.

A parent or child reads the opening quotation aloud.

All: Blessed Mother Mary, bring us closer to your Son, Jesus.

St. John Paul II, please pray for us. Amen.