



Nurturing Faith in Families Series

Families and Lent Acts of Love and Sacrifice

Lent is the season of the Church year leading up to Easter. Lent is preceded by Shrove (Pancake) Tuesday, begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Maundy (Holy) Thursday.

The purpose of Lent is to prepare for the death of Christ on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter Sunday through 40 days of prayer, fasting, repentance, almsgiving and self-denial. The 40 days mirror Christ's fasting in the desert before he began his public ministry.

During Lent, Christians 'do penance' – that is, they make personal sacrifices. Doing penance helps us 'make right' our lives and relationships where we need to, so we become better persons and better reflections of God's love.

The family home is the 'domestic church' and families grow in their awareness of what this means by participating in practices and devotions associated with the seasons of the Church.

Here are 40 suggestions for putting Lent into practice at home and deepen your family's faith one day at a time (or as and when appropriate to your family life and situation):

- Day 1:** Start your day with 10 minutes in God's presence through e.g. prayer, reflection or meditation. (Family prayer suggestions are downloadable from the diocesan website www.dbb.org.au/family)
- Day 2:** Tell family members you will be specially praying for them.
- Day 3:** Fast from TV, computer or other technical devices you would usually use as part of your leisure time.
- Day 4:** Decide as a family what good works you will support during Lent e.g. Catholic Mission, Project Compassion, St Vincent de Paul.
- Day 5:** After Mass, discuss the homily as a family. What lessons did you take from it that you are going to put into practice in the coming week?
- Day 6:** Give up a treat for a day or so, it might be one of your favourite foods.
- Day 7:** Read a book about your faith. Discuss what you learn with your children.
- Day 8:** Give your support to someone in need at home, at work, at school. Realize that siding with the vulnerable is a core belief of our faith.
- Day 9:** Take a walk with one of your family members one-on-one. Or work on a fun project together. Spend time connecting and sharing joy.
- Day 10:** Participate in The Stations of the Cross for Families and reflect as family on how each of the 'The Stations' can be applied to our daily lives. (Downloadable from diocesan website at www.dbb.org.au/family)
- Day 11:** Practice hospitality by welcoming a friend, relative, co-worker, or neighbour to your table for a simple meal today or a chat over tea or coffee.
- Day 12:** Pick out one snippet of scripture or part of the Mass and think about it through the week. Invite your children to do the same.
- Day 13:** Find ways to compliment/express gratitude for every one of your family members.
- Day 14:** Don't answer the phone/messages during meals. Practice the spiritual discipline of "Be where you are, and do what you're doing" throughout the meal.
- Day 15:** Talk to your children and point out how so many of the commercial messages they hear are full of empty promises that will not satisfy. Be aware of how you are susceptible to those empty promises, too.

- Day 16:** Read or discuss an uplifting story or news item with your family.
- Day 17:** Practice virtues such as patience, tolerance, compassion, forgiveness. Invite your children to choose one virtue to specially practice each day.
- Day 18:** Tell your child a favourite story about when he or she was younger.
- Day 19:** Take home a copy of your parish bulletin and read all the articles. Discuss with your children what lessons you have learned and how you see signs of God's life and love in the activities of your parish.
- Day 20:** Start each meal with prayer, thanking God for all the gifts you receive.
- Day 21:** Make time to play a board game or card game popular with your family. Afterwards, thank God for the gift of family.
- Day 22:** Our world for many is full of pain and turmoil; pray as a family that others will experience the peace and contentment that your family enjoy.
- Day 23:** Read the gospel readings for next Sunday. Think about them and discuss them as a family.
- Day 24:** Don't be a party to gossip today at school, at work, in the neighbourhood, at home. Don't participate in malicious talk about others.
- Day 25:** Invite someone active in your parish to dinner and talk about their activities. Consider how your family can offer time and talent for the good of the community.
- Day 26:** Worship together as a family and have a favourite meal afterward at home, on a picnic or at a restaurant. Avoid distractions that separate you from each other, and spend the Sabbath day together.
- Day 27:** Email or write a letter to a family member you've been out of touch with, letting them know they are in your thoughts and prayers.
- Day 28:** Read to your children from a "Lives of the Saints" book. Share the story of an ordinary person's extraordinary holiness.
- Day 29:** Be aware of your call to be a Christian during the day at work, home, or school. Look for ways to exercise your faith right where you are and give witness to Christ.
- Day 30:** At some point during the day, put down what you're doing and purposely spend quality time with your children.
- Day 31:** Review your child's religious education books or homework and discuss it together. Share how these lessons tie into your own lives as persons of faith.
- Day 32:** Look through a family album together and tell stories of your children's grandparents and other family members. Share what their faith has meant to them and reflect on the goodness of their lives.
- Day 33:** Perform a particular act of generosity in the neighbourhood, at work, at the parish or school.
- Day 34:** The media encourages consumerism. For every shopping trip, make a point to balance your life by spending time connecting with people you meet or come into regular contact with.
- Day 35:** Do a family member's home task today without looking for credit. Offer this as a gift of time and a sign of care and connection.
- Day 36:** Make a conscious effort to fast from bad habits and practice good habits.
- Day 37:** Don't rush away from the table after your family meal. Have everyone tell one thing they're grateful for during the day, or one person they helped or were helped by.
- Day 38:** Forgive anyone in your family that you need to forgive. Ask forgiveness of those you have hurt. Attend a parish Reconciliation service.
- Day 39:** Watch a DVD that reflects Christian family values. Watch it together as a family.
- Day 40:** Have your children ask an older relative about their faith and what it has meant to them through the years.

Lent is a time for healing and spiritual growth in your family. It is a time to devote our hearts and minds to becoming better Christians. It is a time to take on an attitude of simplicity in our everyday lives, a time to move closer to God with our family.

May yours be a truly blessed Lenten season!

1/2015
(40 suggestions adapted from a list developed by Tom McGrath)