

Catholic Parent **KNOWHOW**

Practical
Pointers,
Scripture
& More

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Something
New for *Lent*



Take a Meaningful Walk through Lent

Dear Parents,

Deanna: He “was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1-2). This has become my favorite Scripture passage to reflect on during Lent. I know how important it is to understand the fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, and to practice them, but I seldom have a chance to read something that really reflects what I feel in response to these traditions and the motivation for them.

In this passage, however, I instantly visualize God the Father holding my hand and walking with me during Lent. That is the feeling I have often wanted to share with others. Silly me, for not realizing it was in the Bible all along.

York: Deanna’s Bible reference shows us something we might not think much about: Jesus didn’t conduct His ministry alone. He had help. In the same way, we cannot take a meaningful walk through Lent without help from Him who created us, loves us, and imbues each of us with different gifts, although each of us has that greatest of gifts — free will.

We can take that greatest of gifts and choose to make the sacrifices that are associated with Lent. We don’t have to do it only during Lent; we may do it all the time — every Friday, for instance — but, being creatures who seem to thrive on seasons and symbols,

we make a concerted effort as Catholics to spend this special time of the year focusing more specifically on the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus — moments of sorrow turned into everlasting joy.

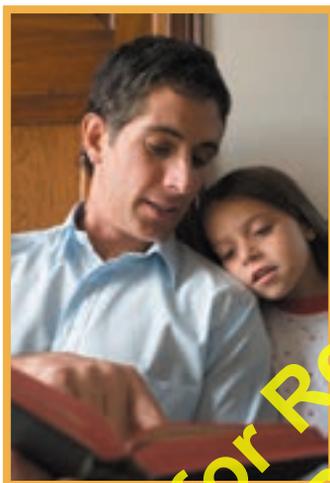


Image Source

There is a mysterious joy in Lent as we walk with God. This is the true joy of Lent.

Deanna: With each of our sacrifices, we are brought into direct conflict with a brick wall: the strong cultural notion that any practice of sacrifice is bad and worthless. It is then that we need to remind ourselves that God is here, right next to us, holding our hand. He is why we are doing this — so we can see Him, despite the negative elements of our culture.

The touch of His hand makes Him visible; the warmth of His smile fills us.

There is a mysterious joy in Lent as we walk with God. This is the true gift of Lent. Lent is not merely giving, misery, and waiting, but the discovery of a joy that goes “hand in hand” with our journey.

York A. Young
York A. Young

Deanna A. Young
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THE DISCIPLINE OF LENT WHAT WE DO

Prayer

We may feel at times that prayer is a habit difficult to maintain; this may be a result of focusing on the sensual experience of prayer — what we *get out of* it. To counter this, we might try talking to our families about what we are doing *for* God and *for* other people by praying. Lent invites us to conversion, to focus on what is truly important, and to desire a deeper relationship with Christ — all of these brought to fruition through prayer. Moments of prayer, even during very busy days, build and strengthen our friendship with God, our knowledge of God, and, yes, our experience of God.

Almsgiving

We tend to think of almsgiving more during the Lenten season, but it's even better to make it part of our everyday lives. Begin now. Doing something nice for someone, unasked, or foregoing a favorite material object and giving the money to the poor are beautiful examples of practicing what Jesus taught: "Love thy neighbor."

As a family, we can work at a soup kitchen or offer time at a clothing drive. These small steps open our eyes, ears, and hearts to greater opportunities to see the needs of others and to experience how fulfilling it is to meet those needs.

Be sure to talk about experiences of serving and giving.

Fasting

This is likely the most well-known form of penance undertaken during Lent. The Church calls those of us ages 18 to 61 to fast — to have only one full meal, and two others that do not equal a full meal — on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. That's only two days out of an entire year, so don't be afraid to perhaps add all Fridays in Lent to the list. Abstinence, the practice of giving up meat on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays of Lent, is an obligation for those age 14 and up.

But why fast at all? Because fasting reminds us that many among us do not have what we have. Our fasting places us in solidarity with them and reminds us to pray for them and do whatever we can to help them. Fasting also increases our self-discipline and mastery over our wants and desires. Being able to say "no" to some of the things we want is a good quality to nurture.

Fasting, done with an attitude of giving God our suffering and sacrifices, will be accepted with love by God. "And your Father . . . will reward you" (Matthew 6:17).

"Fasting" can also encompass surrendering more than just food. Giving up anything that we often enjoy — a traditional movie night, a week's television watching, or a night at the coffee house — helps redirect our focus to Our Lord and, coupled with prayer, is another excellent form of sacrifice.

Stewardship

Stewardship is an attitude of using gifts and goods in proportions that are pleasing to God. For instance, many families give God ten percent of everything they earn. Treating what we have as gifts from Our Lord and sharing those gifts with others is something Catholics, and many people everywhere, are called to do. In their pastoral letter on this topic, the U.S. bishops point out, "Whoever wants to follow Christ will have much work to do on his behalf — announcing the Good News and serving others as Jesus did" (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 1992).

If this term is new, Lent is a good opportunity to investigate what it means and ways to incorporate some stewardship practices into family life.

More About Stewardship...

<http://www.catholicstewardship.org/en/index.cfm>

<http://www.osv.com/OSV4MeNav/CatholicStewardship/tabid/4744/Default.aspx>

<http://www.usccb.org/bishops/stewardship.shtml>

<http://www.usccb.org/stewardship/disciplesresponse.pdf>

How the Lenten Calendar Developed

The word "Lent" was derived from the Middle English word *lenten*, perhaps Anglo-Saxon in origin, before the year 1000. In that language, the word meant "spring."

What we know as Lent today was celebrated in much shorter form in the early Church, perhaps just three days in some areas. Local churches essentially determined their preparation time for the coming recognition of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) appears to be the first time that forty days was mentioned as an appropriate preparation time, probably in imitation of the number of days Jesus fasted in the desert before His public ministry.

By the fourth century, in most of the West, we find references to six days of fast per week for six weeks (Sundays were excluded); in the seventh century, the days from Ash Wednesday through the First Sunday of Lent were added to make the number 40.

8 Special Lenten Things to Do with Your Children

Make a desert.

Get some sand, maybe from your own sandbox, and heat it in the oven to dry it out. Put it on a plate or cookie sheet and add rocks and cacti as you like. Some stores sell small cactus plants for as little as four dollars, and rocks and stones can be found almost anywhere. Check backyards or playgrounds.



Pure Stock

Talk to the children about the forty days in the desert. This display can show how barren of food and shade a desert is and make it easier to understand the discomfort and sacrifice that one would feel if in a real desert. For older children, you can use it as a source of meditation on Jesus' sufferings; they can use their imaginations to relate the barren, dry landscape to their own sacrifices for Lent.

Do up the purple.

Place purple felt or cloth behind a crucifix in the home or school room, or use purple construction paper to make a scene from Calvary, with three crosses, to tape up on the wall. You might also set up a purple candle on a plate and arrange stones around it for a striking dinner-table centerpiece; it can serve as a reminder to remember the poor and be moderate in our food consumption.

Walk the neighborhood.

Get out the family wagon or wheelbarrow and go around the neighborhood collecting nonperishable food for the local food pantry. Many people are willing to give to the food pantry but think it is silly to make the effort for their one



Hemera

or two cans — so if you volunteer to do the delivery, everyone will be able to accomplish more through the power of a group than anyone can do on his or her own.

Make a crown of thorns.

There are many different ways to do this. Using grapevines or pipe cleaners, weave a crown and add pieces for the thorns. Or you could use a circular wreath from a craft store and put toothpicks in it for thorns. You can even have family members add a thorn each time they notice a particularly difficult time of sacrificing they made — going to a party and not eating the candy or cake that is offered, or being home sick from school without the small comfort of television that you may have given up.

Visit other parishes.

If possible, take the family to another parish for some of the Lenten services. It is great to join in celebrating worship in other parishes, where architecture and the environment are probably different than what your children are used to. If you live in a larger city, think about attending Stations of the Cross at different parishes on Fridays. Just the change in scenery can add immeasurably to your appreciation of these prayers.



SVP Productions

Breathe deep.

One evening after dinner, or in the middle of a Sunday afternoon, have the family listen to a meditation tape of music or nature sounds. (Of course, if you live where it is not freezing during Lent, you can listen to these things outside!) Expect it to last only about 15 minutes, but even in that short time, everyone can learn a little about meditation — and have a lively discussion afterward about all the things people were thinking about during this quiet time. Be sure to unplug the phone and turn off the lights to help create atmosphere. If you do this activity often enough, you can begin to guide and suggest a part of the Gospel to think about during the quiet.



Hemera

Celebrate your kids.

Play a game — tag, hide and seek, hot and cold — or have a pillow fight. Or, perhaps, try a game from the past in which toys were not so readily available. Doing anything that gets you together and interacting with simplicity is the goal here. Kids, when limited to a few items, are still able to find fun and games; it's only been in recent years that they have so many toys that some could be lost at the bottom of the toy box and forgotten about. This can even lead to giving up many of the usual toys for Lent.

Let them eat soup.

Soup is a simple food, yet remains very nutritious. It is a perfect Lenten food to teach the idea of fasting.

The SYMB*LS of Lent



What We See

Sacrifice, purification, simplicity, surrendering ... These are words that describe *attitudes* and *approaches* to embracing Lent, but all these are big words for children. To help them understand better what Lent is about, use symbols as teaching tools.

Ashes

Ashes, a token of penance and sorrow since the days of the Old Testament, are used on Ash Wednesday to denote the beginning of our journey toward Holy Week, the Crucifixion and, ultimately, the Resurrection. The ashes for this day are made by burning blessed palms from the previous Palm Sunday. One of the formulas said when ashes are placed on the forehead, in the form of a cross, is: *Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return* (cf. Genesis 3:19).

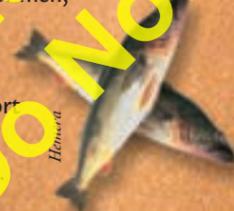


WJP Witman

Fish

Because of the Church's rules of abstinence (no meat on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays of Lent), fish is a very common meal for Catholics during this time. But fish represent much more for us. Christ called the apostles to be fishers of men, and we are the "fish."

Also, in the early Church, the simple drawing of a fish was a sort of secret code among Christians being persecuted for their beliefs.



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Purple cloth

The color purple, visible in the priest's vestments during Lent and often incorporated into the Church environment, serves both a sad and a happy purpose.



Corbis

Purple represents the pain and suffering Jesus endured during the final days of his life. Jesus was draped with a purple cloth during the scourging and crowning of thorns (see John 19:1-5). But purple also is the color of royalty, indicating that Jesus rules all humankind as King.

Desert

Deserts are barren, empty, dry, areas where one must sacrifice to survive. Much of the sacrifices we strive to make during Lent have the same characteristics. By the way, Jesus' forty days of fasting before he began his public ministry — during which he was tempted by the devil — took place in the desert: "The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert, so that the devil could test him" (Matthew 4:1, CEV; see also Mark 1:12 and Luke 4:1).



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Palms

The people of Jerusalem used palms to welcome Jesus into the city and hail Him as king (recounted in each of the four Gospels, though John 12:13 is the only one to mention palms). Less than a week later,



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it seemed everyone in Jerusalem forgot about that; nevertheless, we remember this moment as we begin our celebration of Holy Week.

Pretzels

If we fold our arms onto our chest with our hands just below our shoulders, and look in a mirror, we can see the shape of a pretzel. This simple food was invented perhaps as long ago as the fifth century. The dough is rolled into a long narrow piece, then folded to represent a common posture for prayer.



Hemera

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The Suffering of Lent

What It Means

Our present culture would have us believe that we need to be happy all the time and avoid suffering at all costs. However, putting sacrifice during Lent may be to others, however, to us as Catholics it has great value.

All of humanity is connected. “God desires ‘that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ’” (Paul VI; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 776). Suffering can be embraced for the benefit of our fellow man — the old “offer it up” notion that many of us remember our parents telling us. Most of us probably don’t even say that anymore . . . although Lent would be a great time to bring back that practice!

Lent can be our time to fortify ourselves against those parts of the culture that don’t want us to recognize God, or our responsibility for others. We can use this time, and the Church’s support, to teach our children how meaningful it is to suffer and sacrifice for one another and for God.

The special prayers and activities that parishes undertake during Lent can go far to help children see that Jesus was a real person who did real things for us. Now, we are called to do real things for Him, which means doing for others (see Matthew 25:31–45).

Mary’s Example of Suffering

Mary is an ultimate guide to Lent for us. She can become a light to show us true compassion — a word that actually means “to suffer with.” Sometimes, Jesus’ suffering can seem unreachable for us; it seems too intense to even comprehend. But meditating about Mary can enable us to enter into Jesus’ suffering on a meaningful level. She watched in horror as her Son was beaten, as His blood was spilled during the scourging. As a mother, she had to watch her child suffer pain He not only did not deserve but that she could not interfere with. In doing so, Mary did what was most difficult for a parent to do: she stayed with Jesus and witnessed and waited with Him, hoping that her presence would ease His sorrow in some way.

The Seven Color Rosary (also called Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows Chaplet), said on a string of beads, calls us to meditate on the seven sorrows of Mary.



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THE FIRST SORROW — THE PROPHECY

The prophecy of Simeon, who told the Blessed Mother of the bitter passion and death of Jesus.

THE SECOND SORROW — THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Mary is forced to flee with Joseph and Jesus into Egypt to save her beloved Son from the death decreed by Herod.

THE THIRD SORROW — JESUS IS LOST IN THE TEMPLE

Our sorrowful Mother is separated from Jesus for three long days while He is lost in Jerusalem, eventually found teaching in the Temple.

THE FOURTH SORROW — MEETING ON THE ROAD TO CALVARY

Mary meets Jesus on the road to Calvary and sees Him fall under the cruel weight of the Cross.

THE FIFTH SORROW — JESUS DIES

The Blessed Mother watches Jesus die on the Cross.

THE SIXTH SORROW — MARY RECEIVES JESUS

Mary receives and embraces the dead body of Jesus in her arms.

THE SEVENTH SORROW — THE BURIAL OF JESUS

Our Sorrowful Mother sees Jesus placed in the tomb.

A Lenten hymn called “*Stabat Mater*,” often sung during the Stations of the Cross, also reflects on Mary’s suffering.

Stabat Mater

— *Blessed Jacopone da Todi*

At the cross her station keeping
 Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
 Close to Jesus to the last.
 Through her heart His sorrow sharing,
 All His bitter anguish bearing,
 Lo! The piercing sword had passed . . .
 For His people’s sins rejected,
 Saw her Jesus unprotected,
 Saw with thorns, with scourges rent.
 Saw her Son from judgment taken,
 Her beloved in death forsaken,
 Till His spirit forth He sent . . .
 Jesus, may Your cross defend me,
 And Your Mother’s prayer befriend me:
 Let me die in Your embrace.
 When to dust my dust returns
 Grant a soul, which for You yearns,
 In Your paradise a place.

Amen.

Other Prayers and Penitential Psalms for Meditation

Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) established seven penitential psalms to be prayed during Lent. They are Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142.

Psalm 6 is broken into three parts: (1) a cry for mercy; (2) suffering through the night, and (3) rejoicing that God heard the psalmist’s cries.

Psalm 31 includes two lines often used for meditation: You are “my rock and my fortress . . . Into [your] hand I commit my spirit.”

Psalm 142 is often called “A Prayer in Time of Trouble.” The psalmist cries out to the Lord, You are “my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Give heed to my cry.”

Each of these psalms is a great prayer and helps us to meditate on our sins and sufferings with a reminder that God will be, and already is, there for us. It is encouraging to know He is there to help during Lent and also important for us to cleanse ourselves of our own faults.

Pick one day of the week and read a different Psalm each week throughout Lent.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS



Stations of the Cross for Children book available at www.ew.com

There are many ways to pray the Stations of the Cross. Because they incorporate movement in many parishes, this is a prayer that children find attractive. It is also a prayer in which simple meditations or storytelling can be used to great effect. Once children learn the fourteen common stations, they, too, can tell the story.

The Gospels tell a story as well, and a reference to each of the Stations can be found in the Bible. Even

though a few of the verses may seem to fit better in one area of the Gospel than another, we offer the following as a simple guide:

THE FIRST STATION — Jesus is condemned to death (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:13; Luke 23:23–25; John 19:16)

THE SECOND STATION — Jesus takes up the Cross (John 19:17)

THE THIRD STATION — Jesus falls the first time (Matthew 27:31; Mark 15:20)

THE FOURTH STATION — Jesus meets his Blessed Mother (John 19:25–27)

THE FIFTH STATION — Simon helps Jesus carry the Cross (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26)

THE SIXTH STATION — Veronica wipes the face of Jesus (Luke 23:27)

THE SEVENTH STATION — Jesus falls the second time (Luke 23:26)

THE EIGHTH STATION — Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:28–31)

THE NINTH STATION — Jesus falls the third time (John 19:17)

THE TENTH STATION — Jesus is stripped of his garments (Luke 23:34)

THE ELEVENTH STATION — Jesus is nailed to the Cross (Matthew 27:33–38; Mark 15:22–27; Luke 23:33–34; John 19:18)

THE TWELFTH STATION — Jesus dies on the Cross (Matthew 27:46–50; Mark 15:34–37; Luke 23:46; John 19:28–30)

THE THIRTEENTH STATION — Jesus is taken down from the Cross (Matthew 27:57–58; Mark 15:42–45; Luke 28:50–52; John 19:38)

THE FOURTEENTH STATION — Jesus is placed in the tomb (Matthew 27:59–61; Mark 15:46–47; Luke 23:53–56; John 19:39–42)

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A Lenten Prayer

Gracious, merciful Lord,
Be my guide this Lent and always.
Draw me closer to You.
Help me to suffer as I ought.
You are the Great Comforter.
Be with me, Lord, as I pray and fast.
Teach me to pray and fast to join to You and all the saints.
Teach me to offer up my suffering to help those most in need.
Guide me to be ever mindful of You and the greater purpose
You have in mind for me.

Amen.

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