



Creating Pure Hearts in the Home

A Lenten Preparation
Checklist for Families

☑ Go to the Source

Bring your family together to share a Scripture account of Jesus in the desert. If possible, gather to read and discuss before Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. The accounts of Jesus in the desert set the stage for Lent (for example, Matthew 4 recounts the story of Jesus being led by the Spirit into the desert, where he fasted for forty days and forty nights.) Depending on the age of your child, read together from a children's or youth Bible. After reading together, help your child to understand that Jesus took time to fast and pray so he would be more ready for his work in the world. Explain that we are also called to pray and to fast so that we may be more ready for what God is calling us to do.

☑ Simplify

Lent is meant to be a season of simple living so that you can make time for prayer, penance, and good works. Evaluate your busy schedule to see where you can make adjustments in your family life. Perhaps you can cut back on scheduled activities to come together in your family's prayer space. Perhaps you can extend family mealtime for reflection and discussion. Perhaps you can dedicate your time to a shared service project or volunteer together. Think about ways you can make Lent a time of simple living for your family, and make it happen.

☑ Create a Lenten Table Scape

In the same way that decorating for Christmas and Easter helps us to remember what we're celebrating, adding items to our home that remind us of our Lenten journey helps us focus on what Lent is about. Consider keeping a vase filled with sand to remind your family of Jesus' time in the desert. Palm branches on display recall Jesus' joyful entry into Jerusalem before his Death. Use deep purples and violets to reflect the Lenten colors used in your church and worship. The family table and your prayer space are places that you can incorporate these symbols and reminders of Lent. Involve your child in preparing and decorating these spaces.



✓ Discuss the Meaning of Fasting

Fasting is an important aspect of the Catholic observation of Lent. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics, aged 18 until age 59. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence. Children are not expected or obliged to fast during Lent, and neither are those who are ill or have other extenuating health circumstances. However, many Catholics choose to “give up” something for Lent. This sacrificial practice helps to focus on the important work of Lent: the prayer, penance, and good works that prepare us for Easter. Discuss with your child why we as Catholics fast. Refraining from certain things, limiting our appetites for food, sweets, media, and spending helps us to free up room for God in our lives. Ask your child what is taking up space that God could otherwise have in his or her life. Then share your answer to the same question. Each week, meet as a family to discuss how your fasting or Lenten practices of prayer, penance, and good works are going.

✓ Emphasize the Importance of Feasting

Explain to your child that while it is important to fast during Lent, it is also a good time to “feast” on good things, using the space we are making by fasting. Invite your child to consider what he or she could “feast” on this Lent. Good ideas include time spent reading Scripture, doing acts of kindness, serving others, praying, spending time with family members, and being grateful for the good things in our lives.

✓ Recall Your Baptism

Set aside time one night during Lent to remember and discuss the Baptism celebrations of your family members. Lent is a time for those of us who are already baptized to reaffirm what this sacrament means in our lives today. If possible, pull out family photos and remembrances from the celebration of the sacrament, including scrapbooks and mementos, the candle, or white garments worn. Think about and pray together about the new life Jesus Christ shares with us in Baptism.