

Introduction

It's Lent again. Time for fish on Fridays, more prayers, and...what's that third thing? Oh, right. Almsgiving. Isn't it tough enough getting through each day without all of these extra things to remind our families about? How will we do it? The answer is simple. God's grace. We can't do any of this on our own. God's grace is what gets us through everything. And God's grace, infused in our Lenten practices, will make every day better for our families. We just have to ask and be open to it. Are there things you'd like for your family right now? Maybe you'd like to pray more together. Maybe you'd like to get everyone to Mass on time. Ask for God's grace as you explore how to help your family grow in the Spirit this Lenten season. You'll find inspiration and ideas here. And because parents have enough to do already, I'm making it really simple and easy. The reflection gives you just one line from the daily Mass reading to think about. The prayer to say with your family takes only a few minutes, and the activities are easy and, yes, fun. It's all meant to help you and your family touch those moments where God lifts you with his grace and changes you forever.

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Picture Perfect

“And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.” » MATTHEW 6:18

Imagine the disciples listening to Jesus as he perfectly describes hypocrites tooting their own horns about their fasting and good deeds. The disciples nod and grin because they all know someone *exactly* like that. Of course, Jesus can paint the clearest pictures of human behavior—he’s the Son of God! But here’s another insider’s view he shares with us: “Your Father sees what is hidden.” Think about that today. The Being who created the universe sees your family’s struggles and sacrifices. He hears your prayers and the prayers of your children. He knows and loves you. During Lent, let’s resolve to worry less about what others think of us, and instead, let’s savor the love of our God, who has made us from dust.

FAMILY PRAYER ► Have one person read the prayer aloud; the rest of the family can respond after each line: ***We return to you, Lord, with all of our hearts.***

Return to me with your whole heart says the Lord.

We return to you, Lord, with love, prayer, and fasting.

We lay our lives at your feet, trusting in your mercy.

FAMILY ACTIVITY ► When you get ashes today, take note of the events your parish has planned for Lent. Then gather the family to make your Lenten plans.

Eternal Time Management

“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” » LUKE 9:23

We know that kids procrastinate. That’s partly because they don’t yet know how to break down that state report into small, doable bites. They haven’t fully learned how to set goals and monitor their own progress. But those are teachable skills, and I think Jesus knew that. That’s why he’s always giving us specific goals and tasks, like picking up our cross one day at a time. Think of Lent as an opportunity to do some time management for your soul. Look at these forty days as ways to follow Jesus, one step at a time. No need to get ahead of yourself or bite off more than you can chew. For today, what cross does Jesus invite you to carry? Spend a few moments talking to him about it.

FAMILY PRAYER ► All respond after each line: *Jesus, help us follow you.*

Lord, you know the crosses we carry.

Help us carry them without complaining.

Show us how to lovingly help others carry their crosses too.

FAMILY ACTIVITY ► Make crosses with construction paper. Have everyone write their names on theirs, along with some ways they will follow Jesus this Lent. As a Lenten reminder, place your crosses somewhere easy to see and access.

Time to Savor

They ask me to declare what is due them, pleased to gain access to God.

“Why do we fast, and you do not see it?” » ISAIAH 58:2–3

It’s a tender moment when you see your child sharing or helping someone, simply out of genuine love. We savor these times when our kids discover that love isn’t about getting approval, praise, or a reward. Yet sometimes it’s hard to resist this kind of thinking in our own relationship with God. Perhaps that’s because we do things like fasting during Lent, which we follow with a treat at Easter: our actions deliver rewards. You also hear it in comments like, “Your prayers work better with God because you’re so holy.” But God hears the prayers of sinners and saints alike. He sees our sacrifices and loving deeds and sees us growing into people who love others as he loves. God savors these moments too.

FAMILY PRAYER ▶ All respond after each line: *Bring us close to you, Jesus.*

Thank you, Lord, for all your gifts.

Help us think less about the things we want, and more about what you want for us.

FAMILY ACTIVITY ▶ If you’re going meatless today, make dinner special with an indoor picnic. Talk about why we might choose to go without something, and how it can be a sign of love.

Sick Time

“Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.” » LUKE 5:31

I sometimes wonder how Levi could afford a banquet for Jesus after leaving his job behind. Did he have a drop-everything-and-follow-the-Messiah savings account? Maybe he made the meal a potluck. Whatever the nature of the gathering, people found reason to criticize. Tax collectors and sinners? *Gasp!* How could Jesus and his disciples associate with that crowd? You hear similar criticisms about our modern gatherings with the Lord. How can anyone sit through Mass surrounded by so many self-righteous people? And let's not even talk about the priests. Jesus gives us the same answer today. We are *all* in need of his healing. Before Mass tomorrow, close yourself off from thoughts about who else will be there. Think about the healing *you* need. Come to God with that.

FAMILY PRAYER ► All respond after each line: *Heal us, Lord.*

To you, O Lord, we lift up our souls.

Hear our prayers for ourselves and for others.

Heal us all in body, mind, and soul.

FAMILY ACTIVITY ► February 11 was World Day of the Sick.

Let's not let the month end without remembering the sick and suffering among us. Write the names of those you know who are sick on your family crosses and pray for them today—and all through Lent.

Temptation Junction

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

» MATTHEW 4:1

A nun at my high school used to say that Lent isn't Lent until you've been tempted at least once. How about you? Have you been tempted yet? The beginning of any undertaking is fraught with temptations and reasons to call the whole thing off. And let's not kid ourselves. Temptation isn't a figment of our imagination. It's real, and it happens to everyone, including Jesus. Today's reading is a great opportunity to casually bring up the subject of temptation with your family and talk about your experiences. How can you come at this together, as a family, and as God's children? Remind everyone, including yourself, that when we're tempted, we can take shelter in the loving arms of Jesus.

FAMILY PRAYER ► All respond after each line: *The word of God stands forever.*

Jesus, when you were tempted in the desert, you turned to your Father.

Show us, Jesus, how to do the same.

FAMILY ACTIVITY ► Talk about how Jesus quoted Scripture when confronted with temptation, and make reading the Bible together part of your Lenten plans. (If you don't have a family Bible, access one online at uscbb.org.)