

40 ways to deepen your family's faith this Lent

LENT IS A TIME TO DEEPEN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD and to train your children in holiness. The good news is that you can do that right in the midst of daily family life.

Families face many spiritual challenges. In talking with parents, I have come up with a list of five major challenges they wrestle with: lack of time, lack of the joy that comes from intimacy and connection, lack of a clear sense of mission, lack of knowledge of their faith which can deepen their life, and the all-pervasive onslaught of the media.

Here are 40 Lenten suggestions that can help you address these threats and deepen your family's faith one day at a time. Each family faces its own set of challenges, and no two families are alike. So take these suggestions and adapt them to your own life and situation.

Also, remember that you are not alone. Around the world, millions of other men, women, and children are walking the 40 days of Lent as well. We walk this path together in the larger family of faith.

Day 1: Start your day with 10 minutes in God's presence. Express your sorrow for all the ways you've fallen short as a disciple during the past year.

Day 2: Tell one of your family members you will be praying for them all day

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today. Throughout the day, be mindful of that person and say a prayer. Check in with that person at the end of the day.

Day 3: Fast from TV today. Be aware of how much you rely on television simply to pass the day away.

Day 4: Decide as a family what good work you want to support during Lent: a soup kitchen, a mission organization, a charity, a relief fund. Make a plan to follow through during the next six weeks.

Day 5: Today 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: Slow down and begin your day by saying a morning offering in which you offer God the prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of the day. Teach your children this habit.

Day 7: Read a good book about your faith during Lent. Discuss what you learn

with your children. I recommend Alice Camille's *Invitation to Catholicism* (ACTA Publications) or Richard Rohr's *Why be Catholic?* (St. Anthony Messenger Press).

Day 8: Stand up for someone who is an underdog today 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: Do a family member's chore today without looking for credit. Offer this as a sign of

care and connection.

Day 11: Practice hospitality by welcoming a friend, relative, coworker, or neighbor to your table for a simple meal today.

Day 12: Pick out one snippet of scripture or part of the Mass and think about it through the week. For example, you might focus on a Psalm refrain, such as "Shepherd me O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life." Invite your kids to do the same.

Day 13: Find a way to compliment every one of your family members during the day today.

Day 14: Don't answer the phone during meals today. Practice the spiritual discipline of "Be where you are, and do what you're doing" throughout the meal.

Day 15: Talk to your kids and point out how so many of the commercial messages they hear are full of empty prom-

ises that will not satisfy. Be aware of how you are susceptible to those empty promises, too.

Day 16: Read an uplifting story aloud with your family. Quiet the house down and enjoy this age-old act of connection and value sharing.

Day 17: Practice a virtue, such as honesty, courage, prudence, or patience today, all day. Invite your children to choose one virtue to practice today, too. Remember, we hope for progress, not perfection.

Day 18: Tell your child a favorite story about when he or she was younger.

Day 19: Pick up a copy of your parish bulletin and read all the articles. Discuss with your children what lessons you learned and how you see signs of God's life and love in the activities of your parish.

Day 20: Don't rush into your meals today at home, school, or work. 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 that everyone loves. Afterwards, thank God for the gift of family.

Day 22: Fast from radio and music today. As you get used to the silence, listen for God's voice.

Day 23: Read the gospel readings for next Sunday. Think about them and discuss them as a family.

Day 24: Put a stop to gossip today. At school, at work, in the neighborhood, at home, don't participate in malicious talk about others.

Day 25: Invite a parish staff member to dinner and talk about the work they do. Consider how your family can offer your time and talent for the good of the community.

Day 26: Worship together as a family and have a favorite meal afterward either at home or at a restaurant. Avoid distractions like work, television, and shopping, and spend the Sabbath day together.

Day 27: Write a letter to a family



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member you've been on the outs with, telling what you admire about him or her.

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 today. Look for ways to exercise your faith right where you are.

Day 30: At some point today, put down what you're doing and look your child in the eye when talking with him or her. Make contact eye-to-eye and heart-to-heart.

Day 31: Review your child's religious education books or homework and discuss it together. Share how these lessons tie into your own life as a person of faith.

Day 32: Look through a family album together and tell stories of your children's grandparents and other elders. Share what their faith has meant to them.

Day 33: Perform an act of generosity in the neighborhood, on the job, at the parish.

Day 34: The media encourages consumerism. For every shopping trip, make a point to balance your life by spending time connecting with other people.

Day 35: Give a family member the gift of time by taking on a task they usually do. Pray for that person while you finish the chore.

Day 36: Teach your children a valuable lesson by sharing a story of a time you were "taken in" by an ad or message from the media and wound up disappointed.

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, and one person they helped.

Day 38: Forgive anyone in your family that you need to forgive. Ask forgiveness of those you have hurt.

Day 39: Rent a video on the life of Jesus (such as Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*) or on one of the saints (such as *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* on the life of Saint Francis of Assisi). 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.

During your observance of Lent, you have had many opportunities to strengthen the faith of your family. Now we have the chance to participate in the Holy Week celebrations of the most sacred mysteries of our faith.

Find a way to participate as fully as you can as a family in these rites. Accept this invitation to enter into the sacred mysteries. They hold within them the key to all meaning and the way to true peace. They express, in ways beyond words, the great truths we strive to live by and long to share with our children.

May yours be a truly blessed Easter!

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