



Living LENT

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We've heard the phrase, *"What would Jesus do?"* As we start the season of Lent, a better question is, *"What did Jesus do?"* Jesus, about to transition from the hidden mission of home to the public mission of proclaiming the Good News of God's love, **was drawn to pray and fast for 40 days in the desert.** The desert. Why would Jesus go there – on purpose? Though preparing for a big life-change, his instinct wasn't to busy himself. It was to retreat. To quiet himself. To listen. To allow himself to be tested in his core. To encounter the Father and let his heart be focused, nourished, and shaped for his mission.

We are invited to metaphorically enter the desert each Lent. What are we preparing for? Our own mission. . . God's mission for us: life. . . as followers of Jesus and witnesses of his love. We also prepare to celebrate during Holy Week and Easter the events that most define our Christian faith: the suffering, death, and rising of Jesus. Why desert? Fewer distractions, no pretense, just you as you are and God as he is. What is your image of "desert"? Stark and spare? Deserts can also be places of life and beauty. But how do we enter the "desert"? While flying to Arizona would be nice this time of year, the church offers three more feasible ways we can all seek a desert encounter with God: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

This resource will offer perspective on these three practices, as well as offer practical ideas and aids for how to live them – individually, and as families.

Though roughing it in the desert implies some discomfort. . . go for it.

Embrace it. It is purposeful. It is the Lord we seek. . . and the truth about ourselves. . . so that God can heal what is broken. We trust, by the power of his Resurrection, he will bless our desert sojourn with newness of life and renewed energy for our mission, even in pandemic. So. . . live this Lent.

YOUR LENTEN PLAN

"May we not let this time of grace pass in vain..." - Pope Francis, Lent 2020

Catholics hold two truths in tension: the more effort we put into disposing & preparing ourselves for something the better the outcome, and, in the words of Pope Francis, *"Holiness is not achieved by our efforts, for it is grace!"* He continues, *"By ourselves, we cannot remove the dust that sullies our hearts. Only Jesus, who knows and loves our heart, can heal it. Lent is a time of healing."* (Pope Francis, Lenten Message 2020)

Even if Lent is already underway, **take some quiet time** individually, and as a family, to **ask Jesus what "dust" he wants to help you remove**. What life-giving ways of being does he want to help you adopt? Where is the desert in which he's waiting to meet you? Help kids see Lent positively and even enjoy the togetherness of it.

Write down your plan* with a **what, when, and how**. Include one item for each of the following three practices: prayer, fasting, & almsgiving Keep it simple! Be open to God working his own plan.

*Planner templates are available at dmdiocese.org/living-lent

LENTEN LINGO

Paschal Mysteries:
Jesus' suffering, death, & resurrection

Holy Week:
The week prior to Easter, starting on Palm Sunday

Holy Triduum:
The 3 days leading up to Easter Sunday - Holy Thursday, Good Friday, & Holy Saturday

Penance:
Action(s) to express sorrow for having done wrong

ASH WEDNESDAY

While not a holy day of obligation, attending Ash Wednesday Mass is a good start to Lenten season.

Start by explaining what Ash Wednesday is to your children before arriving at Mass.

- The ash cross traced on our foreheads marks us with the sign of Jesus
- The ash also reminds that us that God made us from "dust" (Genesis 2:7) and that one day to "dust" we will return (though because of Jesus we no longer need to fear this).
- The cross is a sign of the Good News of Jesus, to whom we commit to living more closely, especially this Lent



PRAYER

"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God" – St. John Damascene

All that we do can be prayer. However, like any "vital and personal relationship", it's important to take time regularly to turn our full attention to God. We seek to encounter God: becoming aware of and learning to enjoy his presence, laying bare our hearts to him, and listening to his "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) – especially through his Word, Sacred Scripture.

Lent is a time to start praying if you're not; and, if you are, to take it up a notch or renew one of your existing moments of prayer – living it with special attention. It is also a time to intentionally learn and talk about faith with those close to us – to raise our awareness, hear God's call to our own hearts through the words of others, and encourage each other on the journey.

- **Make Sunday Mass central** to your week – we gather together to feed our souls on God's Word and Jesus in the Eucharist, and are empowered to bring the love of Jesus out to the world.
- **Choose a form of prayer and a moment of learning & talking about faith with your family.** You can start with the [Living Lent Faith Conversations](#), which include: a reflection, conversation starters & a recommended form of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.
- **Choose a form of personal prayer you'll make part of your day & week.** This could be praying as a family before meals or spending 5-10 minutes in silence in the morning before getting ready for the day.
- **Lent is a time for noticing God's love in our lives, and how we respond.** The daily examen helps us do that. If you're not familiar, or simply want to renew your existing examen, you can [find a guide online](#).

PRAYING THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Meditated on especially during Lent, these 14 stops along Jesus' way of the cross (*Via Crucis*) adorn churches around the globe. The Stations are traditionally prayed communally on Fridays during Lent, but you can also enter into this prayer at home.

- Pray along with the Stations in the Hallow app
- Print and color your own [Stations of the Cross](#) to pray as a family, reading along with the ["Stations of the Cross for Children"](#) from Loyola Press.
- Reflect on one Station of the Cross per day during Lent



FASTING

"Created things...can become so dominant that we can forget the deepest longing of the heart...God...we fast, so as to allow that deeper hunger to emerge." - Bishop Robert Barron

Fasting is purposefully going without something that is part of our ordinary lives. It traditionally curbs physical pleasures (eating, drinking, etc.), but can also be extended to other aspects of our habitual existence like unkind speech, judgmental or overly anxious thinking, and digital screen time.

Fasting can: remove distractions, remind us of our dependence on God, realign our behaviors, and strengthen our hearts to be more Christ-like, allowing us to unite ourselves to the suffering Jesus & express sorrow for our sins. Going without puts us in touch with the needs & suffering of others who live without.

In the desert-like starkness of fasting, might God allow us to encounter ourselves in a new way?

- **Make the necessary plans for fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and abstaining from meat on all Fridays of Lent.** If you currently don't regularly eat meat, what can you offer up instead?
- **Consider what God is inviting you personally, or as a family, to give up this Lent.** Chisel away at a specific bad habit or attitude, bring Lent into your physical life, or free up time & resources for God or the needy.

GUIDE TO FASTING

Ash Wednesday & Good Friday:

- Catholics ages 18-59
- No meat or snacking
- 1 full meal, 2 smaller meals (together not equaling a normal meal)
- Exemptions include: the ill, pregnant and nursing mothers

ABSTINENCE

All Fridays of Lent:

- Ages 14+
- No red meat or poultry

IDEAS FOR FASTING

Fasting isn't just about refraining from meat or a favorite food, but is about embracing poverty and relying on Jesus. *How can you live more simply through fasting this season?*

- **Live in solidarity with the poor:** ration your water, eat only rice and beans for a day, or turn down the heat in your house. *Discuss your experience as a family.*
- **Avoid unnecessary spending during Lent.** Can you go 40 days without shopping? Money saved from this can be given to charity.
- **Fast from digital devices or media.** Fasting isn't just about food, but can be anything that is occupying our time instead of God (like social media, TV shows, or video games).



ALMSGIVING

"And if there is among them a man that is poor or needy ... they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food." - Aristides

Prayer and fasting, when done well, bear real fruit in our actions toward others. Christ-like love, "in deed and in truth" begins with our family, and extends out to all we encounter in our day (in-person, online, or in traffic). But Christ's command to love goes even further to our enemies and, in a *preferential* way, to anyone in need – for *all* are our brothers & sisters (not just the ones we know & like).

Almsgiving is a specific kind of love, that of sharing our time, talent, and resources with the poor – not just painlessly out of our excess but in a way that costs us. This is the Christian way of life, given special focus during Lent. If we're looking, we'll discover many people with needs in our own communities.

In our Lenten "desert," might we encounter "the other" in a new way?

- **Do some personal & family research on the Church's social justice teachings** and on the needs of people in your community as well as the organizations set up to help them. Why social justice? This maxim is enlightening, *"Charity gives. Justice changes."*
- **Adopt an ongoing "project" to actively help the needy this Lent.** This could be as simple as kids doing extra chores to "earn" coins for a CRS Rice Bowl, or more involved by volunteering with a local organization.
- **The corporal works of mercy may be better suited to little kids than the social teachings.** Download the "Living Lent Corporal Works of Mercy" chart and help kids live mercy in home and beyond.
- **Involve kids in packing a bag** of packaged snacks to keep in the car for needy people you encounter

LEARN MORE ABOUT CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Lent is a time to give, but also to examine where the Gospel hasn't yet changed our hearts and society in regards to the marginalized. Catholic social teachings are the Gospel principles applied to social systems.

- Discover the seven themes of social teaching: *preferential option for the poor & vulnerable, dignity of work & labor, life & dignity of the human person, call to family/community & participation, human rights & responsibilities, care of creation, and solidarity*
- How can you start incorporating these themes into your life?

