

INTRODUCTION

The Church offers the faithful a marvelous opportunity for spiritual growth and conversion during the penitential season of Lent. With God's grace and our faithful efforts in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we can make the most of this time of year to grow deeper in holiness and please God, all the while growing closer as a family.

In his final homily on Ash Wednesday of 2013, Pope Benedict XVI invited us to turn wholeheartedly to God during Lent:

The Church proposes to us, first, the strong appeal that the prophet Joel addressed to the people of Israel, "Thus says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning" (2:12). Please note the phrase "with all your heart," which means from the center of our thoughts and feelings, from the roots of our decisions, choices and actions, with a gesture of total and radical freedom. But is this return to God possible? Yes, because there is a force that does not reside in our hearts, but that emanates from the heart of God. It is the power of his mercy. The prophet says, further: "Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, rich in faithful love, ready to repent of evil" (v. 13). The return to the Lord is possible as "grace," because it is the work of God and the fruit of that faith that we place in His mercy.¹

Called to be first and foremost educators, Christian parents can help mold their children's consciences and souls immensely by offering a continual example of charity and forgiveness, practicing the virtues, and creating a loving atmosphere of family prayer in their home—their domestic church.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is an outstanding spiritual guide for our family Lenten journey. Her teachings are simple enough for children to grasp, yet her unique understanding of what is necessary to grow in holiness is extensive.

During a season that is meant to transform hearts and souls, this book will provide and encourage a daily occurrence of family prayer and communication as you journey through Lent together. By following the suggestions regarding how your family can apply Saint Thérèse's

wisdom to your lives, you will participate more fully with the rhythm of the Church regarding Lenten prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

You can choose morning or evening (or hopefully both) to gather with your brood. Your time will be well spent reflecting on Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's life and insight as well as the great traditions of Holy Mother Church.

To use this book, simply gather your family and move page by page, day by day, forging your way through Lent. You can come together morning or evening at your kitchen table, around a prayer table, or wherever you feel most comfortable when praying as a family in your domestic church. Make it special—light a prayer candle if you wish.

Saint Thérèse's Inspiration: Each day a quote from Saint Thérèse begins the page and sets the tone, in a sense, for the Lenten day.

Parent Reflection: You will be given points to ponder in this section each day. Some of it will be for you and some for your children.

Family Prayer: There are two opportunities for prayer during each day of meditations—one at the beginning and one at the end. Feel free to elaborate and adapt to suit your family's needs.

A Story from Saint Thérèse's Life: This book as a whole will tell the story of Saint Thérèse's life from the earliest years, highlighting notable parts. This section can be read by an older child or a parent.

Fasting: Each day, "fasting" suggestions will be made to help guide you (the parent) and your children about what to fast from. It will not only be from certain foods, but more often it will be fasting from bad habits or enjoyable activities. Feel free to adapt it to what works best for your family.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fasting and abstinence. Church law requires that no meat may be eaten on these days by Catholics fourteen years old and older. People with medical conditions and pregnant or nursing mothers are exempt

from fasting and abstinence. Catholics from the age of eighteen through fifty-nine must fast on these days having one full meatless meal and two smaller meatless and penitential meals. The two small meals together should not equal a full meal.

Almsgiving: Each day “almsgiving” suggestions are provided to help with ideas to accomplish as a family or individually.

Prayer: Each day you will be given a simple yet poignant thought to think and pray about throughout the day.

You will see that there are no entries for Saturdays of Lent. I suggest that you use the Sunday prayers and activities throughout the weekend. The suggestions for almsgiving on Sundays may take a little longer to do and are appropriate for the weekend when there is more time.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux wrote a beautiful morning prayer that expresses how each day of our lives should be a prayer offered from a heart in love with God. Pray this prayer each morning throughout Lent and beyond as well.

O my God! I offer thee all my actions of this day for the intentions and for the glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I desire to sanctify every beat of my heart, my every thought, my simplest works, by uniting them to Its infinite merits; and I wish to make reparation for my sins by casting them into the furnace of Its Merciful Love. O my God! I ask of thee for myself and for those whom I hold dear, the grace to fulfill perfectly thy Holy Will, to accept for love of thee the joys and sorrows of this passing life, so that we may one day be united together in heaven for all Eternity. Amen.

May your family receive rich blessings as you all journey closer to heaven and its rewards through this Lenten season.

ASH WEDNESDAY

You know well enough that our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them.

—*Story of a Soul*

Parent Reflection

As we begin Lent, we are called to deepen our prayer life. In so doing, we—in a sense—enlarge our hearts with love for God and our fellow human beings. Today when you gather your family, explain to the children that we try to do three things each day during Lent. First, we give up something. This is called fasting. Second, we give something to others—help, possessions, or money we share with others. This is called almsgiving. Finally, we pray more. All three of these things should be part of our daily lives, but Lent is a season for doing them more intensely.

You may want to ask the children if they have decided to *give up* something for Lent or if they have chosen to *do something* special to please Jesus. Take a few moments to help them formulate their Lenten resolutions. These should be simple actions that they can accomplish throughout the season. You can share with them what you are planning to do this Lent as well. Have the children (with your help) write down their resolutions to be used as a reminder to them of what they have committed to do this Lenten season. They can hang their Lenten resolutions on their bedroom door, put them on a prayer table, or keep them in their pockets or backpacks.

Saint Thérèse's words above remind us that God isn't expecting perfection from us. Sure, he wants us to try hard and strive to do our tasks as well as we are able, but it's not a competition! Rather, our good Lord is very pleased with the love we put into our faithful actions.

Family Prayer

All make the Sign of the Cross.

Parent: Dear Jesus, help us to be faithful to our Lenten resolutions. Guide us to have a better understanding of Ash Wednesday and the penitential season that we begin today. Please grant us the graces we need to travel through this holy season with faith, hope, and love. Now let us listen to these words of Saint Thérèse.

A parent or child reads the opening quotation aloud.

All: Blessed Mother Mary, be with us as we gather to pray on this Ash Wednesday, beginning our Lenten journey.

Saint Thérèse, please pray for us. Amen.

A Story from Saint Thérèse's Life

Saint Thérèse, the youngest of nine children, was born in Alençon, France, on January 2, 1873, as Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin. Her father, Louis, who had once dreamed of being a monk, became a husband and father instead and made his living as a successful jeweler and watchmaker. Thérèse's mother, Zélie Guerin, had considered becoming a religious to serve God and the sick, but God had other plans for Zélie. Instead, she cared for her children and husband and also kept her hands quite busy creating lace; she immersed herself in that trade when she was discouraged from becoming a nun.

The close-knit Martin family endured much sorrow. Four of Thérèse's siblings died of enteritis at a young age: three as infants and one at five-and-a-half years old. The family might have seemed ordinary otherwise, but the remaining five girls were all inspired to enter religious life, which indicates a pretty extraordinary, faith-filled family open to God's graces. Four of the daughters became contemplative Carmelites at Lisieux Carmel, and the other became a Visitation sister.

Fasting

Discuss with your children what you can offer to God as a sacrifice during Lent. Can you and the kids give up a dessert, a TV show, a video game, or the Internet at times? Decide what you will all do as a family. Encourage the children to do something individually.

Almsgiving

In Saint Thérèse's simple words of wisdom featured at the start of today's meditation, we learn that the Lord is looking for our love (not things). List three ways your family can show love to others outside the immediate family—a neighbor, a friend, or a relative.

Prayer

Today's Intention: Let's pray to try to do everything with love.

Closing Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for loving me! Saint Thérèse loved with all her heart. Teach me to open my heart fully to your love and to be more generous.

All pray the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be.

All through the Day: Jesus will teach me to love.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

The little bird sings all the time.
His life doesn't worry him.
One grain of seed makes him happy.
He never sows here below.

—*The Poetry of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*

Parent Reflection

Is it possible to stop worrying completely? Perhaps this is an extra challenging feat for parents whose job is to be responsible for their offspring. Yet, our Lord would like us to try to offer up all our worries and to trust him with our lives. Saint Thérèse expresses this sentiment in her verse about a little bird. Let today be a day of trust and surrender.

Family Prayer

All make the Sign of the Cross.

Parent: Dear Jesus, please visit us here in our home. Help us to open our hearts to the graces you wish to give us today. Now let us listen to these words of Saint Thérèse.

A parent or child reads the opening quotation aloud.

All: Blessed Mother Mary, bring us closer to your Son, Jesus.

Saint Thérèse, please pray for us. Amen.

A Story from Saint Thérèse's Life

Soon after Saint Thérèse was born, the same illness that had stolen away her siblings threatened her as well. Upon the doctor's advice, she was sent to live in the forests of Bocage at Semalle with Rose Taille as her wet nurse. There she dwelled, away from the illness, faring well as a peasant baby. She returned to her dotting family when she was fifteen months old.

Thérèse's parents showered her with affection and educated her and her sisters in a thoroughly Catholic domestic church with much emphasis on family prayer, practicing the virtues, visiting the sick, and attending daily Mass. Though Thérèse felt passionately called at a young age to seek holiness and become a nun, she grew up as a regular girl and possessed a rather sensitive nature. She was at times spoiled, stomping her feet and throwing temper tantrums, but at other times, she played angelically and pretended to be a nun.

Fasting

Even seemingly small sacrifices are very meaningful when done with great love. Can you and the children give up a special treat today—something you really enjoy?

Almsgiving

Create a greeting card with the kids and include a comforting message, even one as simple as “Jesus loves you!” Mail the card or drop it off in someone's mailbox.

Prayer


Today's Intention: Let's pray to hear the inspiration of the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts.

Closing Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for our family. Please help us to love one another, putting one another before ourselves.

All pray the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be.

All through the Day: I will trust God like a little bird would!

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY



I understood how all the flowers He has created are beautiful, how the splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not take away from the perfume of the little violet or the delightful simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wild flowers.

—*Story of a Soul*

Parent Reflection

Each one of our children possesses his or her own distinctive gifts to share with the family and the world. At times, we may shake our heads in amazement, observing their vast differences in temperaments and behaviors. Seize the moment to teach your kids that we are all given unique gifts we can use to help others. No one person is better than another. We need both roses and wild flowers!

Family Prayer

All make the Sign of the Cross.

Parent: Dear Jesus, help us to respect one another's differences. Teach us to use our own gifts to aid one another. Now let us listen to these words of Saint Thérèse.

A parent or child now reads aloud the opening quotation.

All: Blessed Mother Mary, bring us closer to your Son, Jesus.

Saint Thérèse, please pray for us. Amen.

A Story from Saint Thérèse's Life

Thérèse was strong willed as a child and was known to be mischievous, but she was a happy little girl and brought an abundance of joy

into the Martin household. Perhaps it was Thérèse's strong spirit that helped her persevere and decide to cross the threshold of the convent to become a nun a few years later despite great difficulties in doing so. Thérèse had much to overcome in her short life, including the loss of her mother when she was only four-and-a-half years old. Zélie died of breast cancer at the age of forty-five. In her last days, Zélie prepared her daughters Pauline and Marie to help raise Thérèse, telling them she wouldn't be a problem—she was a “chosen spirit.”

Fasting

Today, fast from grumbling. Tell the kids that if they are tempted to be negative in any way, they should stop and say this prayer: “Help me, Jesus.”

Almsgiving

Give some time away today. We are all busy, but take a moment to compliment a family member or help someone with a chore. If possible, take this loving act out beyond the household too.

Prayer

Today's Intention: Let's pray to be more attentive to those in need, especially those in our own home.

Closing Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to respect others' differences and give of myself to make someone happier.

All pray the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be.

All through the Day: God gives me special and unique gifts to share.