



*Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your heart and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.*

Joel 2:12-13

Every year in the middle of a week in late winter we go to church to have the ashes smudged on our clean foreheads. Every year the churches are filled to overflowing with the regulars and not-so-regulars. Why do we still undergo this ritual of ashes that is centuries old, as old as the prophets who pleaded with God's people to turn back from sin and toward God? We go because we need to go, because at least once a year we need to be reminded that our deepest hunger is the hunger for God.

Lent is a gift that the Church in her wisdom celebrates every year. *It is a gift of time, a gift of contemplation, and a gift of quiet so that we may listen to the Word, who whispers to us to come back to the God who created us.* It encourages us to turn away from the noise and over-indulged appetites so that we may understand the hunger that can be filled—with the grace of God.



"Finding God... in Ash Wednesday" by Julianne B. McCullagh (excerpt)

Table Blessing

Leader: I was hungry.

All: And you gave me food.

Leader: I was thirsty.

All: And you gave me drink.

Leader: I was a stranger.

All: And you welcomed me.

Leader: I was naked.

All: And you clothed me.

Leader: I was ill.

All: And you comforted me.

Leader: I was in jail.

All: And you came to see me.

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, may our Lenten fasting turn us toward all our brothers and sisters who are in need. Bless this table, our good food, and ourselves. Send us through Lent with good cheer, and bring us to the fullness of your passover.

All: Amen.



God is Waiting for You

If you want to improve your spiritual life this Lent, the best place to start is right where you are.

Let go of a bad habit. What would you list as your worst habit as a parent? Nagging? Inattention? Interrupting? Lack of time? Pick one habit and try, a day at a time, to let go of it. Jesus came to free the prisoners. If you feel like a prisoner to a bad-parenting habit, take advantage of Lent to loosen its grip on your life.

Strengthen a good habit. Take a minute to write down three parenting skills that you're really good at: coaching, keeping a sense of humor, staying calm when everyone else is flying off the handle, taking care of the daily details, seeing the big picture. Pick one and think of how you can put this strength to good use on a daily basis. When the flu hits your household, you know how illness can be passed from person to person. But healthy living is contagious too. Exercising your strengths can benefit those you live with.

Ask God to lead you. Every morning, first thing, ask God to help you be a better mom or dad. You have a mission from God to be the kind of parent your child needs. Sometimes when I'm worried about a difficult situation in my family, I think ahead to that situation and picture God already there. With the thought that God is present there, my attitude changes. My fear diminishes; my love grows. I no longer see it as a "godforsaken situation."

Think of an ocean liner traveling the seas. A small change in its course will, over time, greatly change the destination. Lent is an opportunity to have small changes in your daily life make a big difference in your family over the long run. *Practice Lent, right where you are. It's where God is waiting for you.*

Excerpted from *Raising Faith-Filled Kids: Ordinary Opportunities to Nurture Spirituality at Home* by Tom McGrath

LENT is an important season in the Church's liturgical year. It is a 40-day period of fasting, abstinence and repentance that begins on Ash Wednesday. No meat is eaten on Fridays during Lent. The season culminates with the liturgies of Holy Week, which recall the passion and death of Jesus. Purple is used for vestments and altar cloths during Lent. At Mass, the Gloria is omitted and the word "alleluia" is not said or sung.

Time, Talent & Treasure

Stewardship is an incredibly simple concept: it is the realization that everything we have, including our lives, is a gift of God. Like the widow who dropped two small coins into the Temple treasury, Jesus wants us to offer what we have been given (Mark 12:41-44). By thinking of creative and prayerful ways to incorporate stewardship into our daily routines, we change our lives. Here are some ways in which you can practice the principles of giving time, talent, and treasure. Choose some to begin this Lent, and resolve to make stewardship and a generous heart both your perspective and your year-round routine.

Make a simple task a prayerful one by dedicating to God the work you are about to do.

Attend daily Mass as often as possible.



Take an inventory of your family's clothes and outgrown toys. Decide which items are no longer needed and donate them to a charity that will put them to good use.



Visit an elderly neighbor or relative, either in person or by phone.

Pray while standing in line at the supermarket for all those in the store, for all those who grow and process food, and for all those who are hungry. Each week buy some canned goods that you can donate to a local food bank.



Think carefully about alternate uses for your money before purchasing luxury items, recreation equipment or clothes.

Commit to doing one good act each week that will benefit someone without his or her knowledge.

Eat all your meals at home for a week or month and donate the money saved to a worthwhile charity.



Help an elderly neighbor or parishioner: mow the lawn, rake the leaves, shovel the snow, or take out the trash.



After saying grace before the family meal, **ask your children to relate something for which they are grateful** or some way in which they have performed a kindness or put the needs of another before their own.

Visit a senior center to read to or visit with the residents.



Invite a homebound person to go grocery shopping with your family, or offer to take them to doctors' appointments or pick up their groceries or prescriptions.



Cultivate the habit of complimenting and thanking people whose work typically goes unnoticed and unappreciated (those who clean offices and schools, deliver the mail, collect the garbage, etc.)

Dedicate a special jar or piggy bank for spare change. When the jar fills, donate the money to a favorite cause that the family has agreed upon.



As a couple/family discuss your talents and how you are making use of them to serve each other, your parish, diocese, and community.

Lent is the 40 day period in the Church year set aside for spiritual preparation for Easter.

It is a time of Renewal

Those being welcomed into the Church prepare for the purifying Sacrament of Baptism. Other Christians recall their own baptisms.

It is a time of Penance

Through Lenten practices, Christians seek forgiveness for sins, to reconcile themselves with God, the Church, and members of the community, and to strengthen their faith.

Lent prepares you to celebrate more fully the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The more earnestly and deeply you observe Lent, the more you benefit spiritually. *Easter will have more meaning and joy for you!*

Choose Lenten practices that unite you with your parish's observances and are suited to your own needs and hopes. *Devotions will be more successful if you are:*

◆ **Positive**

Lent teaches us that there is joy in the darkest moments

◆ **Responsible**

Decide on your own plan, in accordance with Church practices

◆ **Open**

Be willing to admit a need for change

◆ **Loving**

Fill your life with love for God and others.