Lent is meant to be a time for us to quiet ourselves and reflect on God. With the demands of life, finding time to be together and using our faith skills as parents to pass on the traditions of our faith becomes more and more difficult.

To help families focus on the Lenten season, St. Francis Strong Catholic Families is sponsoring this year’s Lenten Activity on Sunday, March 1st. Families will receive a unique St. Francis Lenten Calendar which will help them walk through the season of Lent day by day, similar to an Advent calendar. Included with the calendar will be ideas for prayer, fasting and almsgiving that will help families prepare for Easter. Families can use these ideas, or create new ones that speak to the individuality of their family.

Another focus for Lent is taking the opportunity to show our children the depth and roots of our faith by explaining the Christian meaning behind the secular practices of Easter. The bunny, baby chicks, colored eggs, and new clothes are all symbols of the new life of Easter. Pretzels are symbols of arms crossed in prayer. The palms remind us of Christ’s ride into Jerusalem. Spring flowers and lilies remind us of the purity of Christ. Good Friday’s hot cross buns remind us of the Crucifixion. Some families follow an old Polish custom in which baskets are brought to church to be blessed on Holy Saturday. The basket is traditionally lined with a white cloth and decorated with sprigs of boxwood, an Easter evergreen.

Items placed in the basket can include:
- Easter Eggs - Symbol of life and rebirth.
- Sausage or ham - all types of pork were forbidden under the dietary code of the Old Testament (Leviticus 11.7), but the coming of Christ exceeded the old law and the dietary items (Mark 7.19).
- Paschal lamb - it can be made of butter or cake or even a stuffed animal. Christ is seen as the “Lamb of God.”
- Horseradish/pepper - Symbolize the bitter herbs of the Passover and the Exodus.
- Bread - Christ is “the Bread of Life.”
- Vinegar - symbolizes the gall given to Christ at the crucifixion.
- Wine - symbolizes the blood of sacrifice spilled by Christ at the crucifixion.

Whatever traditions your family shares, use this time to teach, embrace and celebrate the joy and hope of this blessed season.

40 Days and 40 Nights

The number “40” has always had special spiritual significance regarding preparation, and appears numerous times throughout the Bible. In preparing to receive the Ten Commandments, Moses stayed on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. Elijah walked 40 days and 40 nights to the mountain of the Lord. Most importantly, Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days and 40 nights in the desert before He began His public ministry.

As Ash Wednesday approaches, we start thinking about how we can prepare ourselves during these 40 days of Lent for Easter. But, how can we do this in the modern world? The Church guides us with dietary rules: 1) Do not eat meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays during Lent and 2) Do not eat between meals on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. But what can we do in our own lives to make Lent a special time for us and our families? One way is to give up something that we like very much. Giving up that video game, or cell phone usage, or some special food is a good way for adults and children alike to take part in the tradition of Lent. However, this is easy; what can be more difficult is to do something positive in our lives. For example, dedicating time to attend the Stations of the Cross on Friday evenings, attending a daily Mass, making a weekly holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament, taking time for personal prayer and spiritual reading, and most especially going to Confession just before Easter are all ways to add spiritual richness to our lives as we prepare for the resurrection of our Lord.

It does not make a lot of difference what we do, it is the fact that we do something out of the ordinary during these 40 days of Lent that helps us focus and prepare for the celebration of Easter.

Walk the Walk...

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Symbol Key

Formation
Fills in the holes of faith knowledge that may have been missed growing up and highlights what makes Catholics distinct

Prayer and Worship
Understanding what happens at Mass and incorporating prayer into family life.

Family (The Domestic Church)
Incorporating Catholic customs and traditions into family life.

Charity and Service
Highlights charity and service opportunities for the family within St. Francis Parish and the greater community.
Charity and Service

"In the poor and outcast we see Christ’s face; by loving and helping the poor, we love and serve Christ."

- Pope Francis, Message for Lent 2014

Lent is a time to prepare for the holiest period of the Christian year. The three traditional pillars of Lenten observance are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. As part of our observance, many of us wish to incorporate Lenten practices that bring us closer to God such as charity or daily devotions.

Lent is a wonderful time to discuss and plan ways to give as a family. Find a cause or situation locally, nationally or globally that has touched your family. Research ways your family can volunteer or donate to your chosen cause. Look at Catholic organizations such as Catholic Relief Services (crs.org) and Catholic Charities (catholiccharitiesoregon.org) as well as local volunteer organizations and Hands On Greater Portland (www.handsongreatPortland.org).

These organizations’ websites often provide the mission and scope of each group as well as information on the many ways to support their cause. For example, on the Hands On Greater Portland website, type in your zip code and area of interest to get a list of nearby service projects or nonprofits who need help. This website even maintains a family friendly list of projects that are safe, simple and about 2 hours in length, great for the 0-10 year old crowd.

After volunteering, set aside time to reflect as a family on the experience. What did your family notice about the interaction and the people you were helping? Did any of your perceptions or feelings change as a result of your experience? And most importantly, why is serving others an integral part of your family’s faith?

Family charity and service projects can strengthen relationships between family members and provide a strong ethical environment for our children. But, without the important family discussions after the fact, kids may not fully process and understand how these amazing experiences connect with our Catholic faith.

Our Catholic faith.
how these amazing experiences connect with the fact, kids may not f

As We Start our Lenten Path

As we start on our Lenten path, the Church liturgically slows down, allowing us to amend our lives. During the 40 days prior to Easter Sunday, we prepare ourselves spiritually for the death and resurrection of Christ through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. The Mass during Lent also changes with the absence of the Gloria and Alleluia, and the priests adorn purple colored vestments, symbolizing penance.

Holy Week, with Palm Sunday (also called Passion Sunday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday is an important time in the Church. On Palm Sunday, we celebrate the first joy of the season—Our Lord’s triumphant entrance into Jerusalem where He was welcomed by crowds worshiping him and laying down palm leaves before Him. Holy Thursday is one of the most complex and profound of all religious observances. It is a combination of the celebrations of Jesus’ last supper with the Disciples and Passover, and it is when consecrated holy oils are presented to the Church to be used throughout the year. Good Friday observes the price that Christ paid to achieve our redemption—His passion and death on the cross. We venerate the Cross and recall all that has been given to us by God. Holy Saturday is the final day of Lent as we prepare for Easter Sunday.

Our focus turns to how we can fulfill this Lenten season of renewal preparing for the celebration of Easter. We reflect upon our own journey involving our start from baptism. Lent reminds us that this is the season to turn away from our worldly distractions and to journey home to God. This should be a time of inner reflection. At the end of the Lenten journey, we should expect to find ourselves in a different place spiritually than when we started.

There is no love without sacrifice! God gave up something for us over 2000 years ago and it changed the world forever. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son”. He didn’t do it because he had to but because he wanted to. Yes, he really loved us that much! He chose to do something for us that would leave no doubt in our hearts other than to conclude that He must love us. He was willing to undergo such great suffering on our behalf. What have we given Him back?

If we can take time to reflect, repent, and prepare our hearts for the resurrection of Christ, we will find ourselves involved on a new level with the Church and Mass. Let’s take time this Lent to review our faith and all that God has done for us. These 40 days can be the start of a new path for all of us.

WORD SEARCH

Find the hidden words for Lent

T M H Y Z H P R U S S V I X F
R SH R S R V E P E U D Z J O
Y T G E I L M J B R N M E V
N V A P H K J E U Y A N D T D
J Z A L S X O M I H Z H V G Q
S R O E M D Z B I K A H C K G
E E K I C S G E I Y L E N T B
C Q H D X S N R A W V V C R A
P A M S I U X R Q E S M D K E
U H T V A S P B V H E M O N N
O E J W W E E W E W H B H U R
J W N J B J X I L N T M F Q H
Q A G M D G A X P S K Y K D W
Q J E J O I G I F C D L B H
Y T E L O I V T X W H Q S V

ALMS
ASHES
JESUS
LENT
LAZARUS
PRAY
PREPARE
REMEMBER
VIOLET