

# Introduction

Here we are, two months into 2012, and we're already facing Lent, one of the major seasons of the Church year. With everything already on your plate, how might you give top priority to these six weeks of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving? Here's a thought to make it easier. Maybe it's time to stop focusing on "giving up" things or filling your days with extra prayers and good deeds, and instead focus on Lent as a new way of looking at life—with a Lenten outlook.

A Lenten outlook doesn't worry about piling up good deeds, but rather seeing each family chore/activity as an opportunity to ask God's blessing on it and on each family member. It's not about "accomplishing" everything on a Lenten to-do list but rather about seeking God in the everyday things we do.

Each of us is already imbued by the Holy Spirit with a Lenten heart that radiates outward toward our family, home, community, and world. It's what helps us slow down and savor the wondrous signs and mysteries of Lent. (The Latin adverb *lente* means "slowly.") Discovering God in what is already there can bring deeper joy in prayer, more meaningful sacrificial acts, and more joyous giving and sharing. Lent is an opportunity to let God renew and transform us, and thus bring our families closer. This little book can help. Each page has a short quote from the day's readings, a brief reflection for you as a parent, a family prayer ritual, and a simple activity you can do with your children.

I wrote these words as I juggled carpools, homework, sports practices, and the usual daily family crises. I believe that it is in all these things that I will find God during the Lenten season. I pray that you will find God there too in the busyness of your family life. Now this is something we can all fit in our daily schedules!

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## FEBRUARY 22 ASH WEDNESDAY

Joel 2:12–18 ■ 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2 ■ Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

# Hello, Lent!

*Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart.*

JOEL 2:12

Saying goodbye to my son as he boarded the bus for sixth-grade camp wasn't supposed to be easy. But I wasn't prepared for the stream of tears that flowed after the bus chugged away.

As goodbyes go, the Lenten ones are a little easier. We part with comforts like sweets or soda. At Mass, we bid farewell to the Gloria and the Alleluia verses, recalling our exile from our real home in heaven. Each of these small goodbyes strengthens us for the Lenten journey and our greater expedition, with its many crosses and trials. So hello, Lenten goodbyes. Welcome, Alleluia farewells. Bring us closer to Jesus. Amen and Godspeed.

### Family Prayer

PARENT Jesus, be with our family this Lent. Help us love each other as you, Mary, and Joseph did.

ALL Be with us, Jesus.

PARENT Jesus, our family can't be together every minute. We go to work, school, practices, and play dates. When we say goodbye to each other, stay with us.

ALL Be with us, Jesus.

PARENT When we come together again, bring us your peace. Amen.

*Pray together in silence for a while.*

**Family Activity** Help your children print the word “Alleluia” on a sheet of paper. Invite them to decorate it with crayons, markers, or stickers. Place your Alleluias in a fancy envelope or a gift box and together put it away until Easter Sunday. Then open it with praise and shouts of “Alleluia, Jesus is risen.” Later, use your Alleluias to decorate your home for the Easter season.

## FEBRUARY 23 THURSDAY

Deuteronomy 30:15–20 ■ Luke 9:22–25

# Crosswalk Lessons

*If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose himself? LUKE 9:23, 25*

We're late for school again. I'm turning right at the stoplight, but three teenagers remain in the crosswalk, moving at tree-sloth speed. I'm tempted to teach them a lesson with a few choice words out the window, but I'm conscious of my carload of impressionable youngsters. I remember a mnemonic a Dominican priest taught me:

F-A-M-I-L-Y: Forget-About-Me. I-Love-You.

I picture these teens at my own kids' ages. I find myself smiling... and waving at them. (This actually makes them speed up—who is that crazy lady?) Still, though, they smile. I think to myself, what would I have gained by yelling? More importantly, what would I have lost?

### Family Prayer

PARENT Jesus, we want to follow you more closely this Lent. Help us accept whatever crosses await us.

ALL Jesus, we follow you.

PARENT Jesus, help us carry our crosses with patience and love.

ALL Jesus, we follow you.

PARENT Help us look beyond our own wants and needs so we can really see you in others. We love you. Amen.

*Bless each member of your family with a small sign of the cross.*

**Family Activity** Lenten promises can be tough when reality sets in. Talk to your children about strategies they can use to help them avoid temptation. (Examples: think about something else, read a book, etc.) Look at a calendar and note the events that might try your Lenten resolve. Plan to give yourself and your family some extra time on those days to pray and gather strength from the Holy Spirit.