

## THE CHRISTIAN PRACTICES OF LENT

This year, I invite Catholic Christians to focus on family prayer as our Lenten practice. I do so for three reasons: to strengthen family life, to promote personal holiness, and to beg for peace and reconciliation in our world.

I firmly believe the adage, “the family that prays together stays together.” Sadly, pressures on parents and children from work, school, and other activities strain family life today.

In marriages that have suffered a breakdown, single parents and children struggle even more. Therefore, it is hard for families to find quality time together, to share meals and the events of the day, much less to pray.

Still, children who pray with their parents and siblings learn in a safe context to take their joys and fears to God. They grow in peace and confidence, a blessing that overflows to their parents. Slowly, the life of faith takes root.

Though some families manage it, the ideal of daily family prayer may not be possible for everyone. I suggest that your family set aside 15–30 minutes at least on Monday evenings during Lent. In this time, you can pray the rosary, reflect briefly on the coming Sunday’s gospel, and ask God for graces that you, your parish, and our diocese need. This will unite the whole church of Ottawa in prayer.

If prayer on Monday is not possible for your family, choose another evening or even a time in the early morning. You should pay special attention to maintaining Lenten family prayer during the “March Break,” when children are off school and some families travel.

If you live alone—apart from family—I urge you to join others from your parish, apartment building, or nursing home, to unite in prayer with fellow believers. If you are away from home due to work, travel, illness, prison, or any other reason, you may unite with family in spirit in Monday evening prayer.

A special fruit of praying the rosary is inner peace. Moreover, this can spread and establish peace throughout the world. I urge you to request it through Our Lady's intercession.

Lent's goal is to celebrate the Easter mysteries with mind and heart renewed. This means a conversion of heart. We seek the holiness of life begun in our union with Christ in baptism.

Besides prayer, Jesus commended to his disciples two other traditional biblical practices, which are fundamental to Lent: fasting and almsgiving.

The Lenten fast for Catholics means no more than one full meal as well as abstaining from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The church also asks you to remember Jesus' death on Good Friday by not eating meat on the other Fridays of Lent.

Why fast? It proclaims that we are not slaves to our appetites. Also, it leverages prayer! Prayer linked to fasting can move mountains.

You can redirect the money you saved by cutting back on meat, other food, and additional dispensable items to almsgiving—financial help to the poor. You can help the nearby poor by supporting a local charity. You can help overcome poverty in the Global South by donating to Development and Peace.

Lent has always been a special time to celebrate—in the Sacrament of Reconciliation—the forgiveness of sins Jesus won for us by His death on

the cross and resurrection to new life. Accordingly, I encourage you to benefit from the wonderful grace of a personal confession this Lent.

Please join me on this journey to Easter and the renewal of your inner self. Together, let us grow in love of Christ, who is everything to us.

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