

Easter Sunday.

5. READ SCRIPTURE TOGETHER: This season is a great time to read the Gospel accounts of Christ's Passion. Surely you will hear them at Mass, but at home you will be able to discuss questions your children might have.

6. VISIT THE SICK: If you don't have an elderly family member nearby, go to a convalescent hospital and adopt an elderly person as a grandparent. Make a family commitment to keep up your visits to this person throughout the year. During visits you can share photos, play cards or board games, or just talk. It is amazing how attached your family will become to your new family member.

7. PLANT A GARDEN: Plan for a garden in honor of Our Blessed Mother. Fr. Weiser's *The Easter Book* describes flowers that honor Mary and also discuss the history of this custom.

8. FAMILY PRAYER TIME: I can't stress enough the importance of prayer. If you have given up the television or computer games, why not fill that time with conversation with our Lord and Savior? Children have so much to share with their parents and God the Father. We have found our family prayer time before bed has grown from just a few minutes to almost an hour. The great thing is that the children now have a true friendship with Christ; the reality of His life, passion and death is so much more real to them. It is awe-inspiring to see their love.

9. ATTEND CONFESSION TOGETHER: The Church encourages going to Confession during Lent or Easter, and it is a great opportunity to go as a family to receive this sacrament.

10. SING TOGETHER: Bring a missal home and make a point of singing a Lenten song together. Singing before, during or after any family prayer is a good reminder that Lent is

passing and the time for rejoicing is nearer than the day before.

11. PALM SUNDAY: After receiving palms at Mass, bring them home and place them behind a crucifix or statue, or in some other prominent place.

12. HOLY WEEK: The first days of this week are traditionally cleaning days, hence the phrase "spring cleaning." It is a great time to rally the troops to deep clean the home. It is also a good time to pack up unused clothing and toys and give them to the poor and needy. If you haven't gone to Confession yet, Holy Week is also a great time to do that last minute housekeeping of the soul. This is the week to reflect on Christ's passion and death.

13. HOUSE BLESSING: The wonderful tradition of blessing the home with Easter holy water, along with many more ideas and information, can be found in Fr. Weiser's, *The Easter Book*.

I would like to note that these ideas are just that—ideas. Prayerfully consider what might work best in your family. Try to formulate your own family traditions. The key is consistency. Don't try to do too many; better to do just one or two and do them faithfully and well, than to try to do many halfheartedly. In this way, the activities will form a lasting impression on your children and teach the fundamentals of our rich Catholic Faith.

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Lenten Traditions Within the Home

The Catholic Church has designated the liturgical season of Lent to be a period of 40 days, not including Sundays. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends with Holy Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday. It is a period of fasting and self-denial, for we imitate Christ's fasting for 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation by the devil (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 538-40). Pope Gregory I described Lent as "the spiritual tithing of the year."

The liturgical season of Easter begins with the Feast of feasts, Christ's resurrection. St. Gregory of Nazianzus writes, "This highest Feast and greatest celebration so much surpasses not only civic holidays but also the other feast days of the Lord, that it is like the sun among the stars".

In *The Easter Book*, Fr. Francis Weiser, S.J. simply states, "From the very first, the resurrection of Christ was celebrated as the greatest and most important festive day of the entire year. In fact, every Sunday is a little Easter, consecrated to the memory of the Risen Christ".

DISCUSSION: "Either we live the liturgical year with its varying seasons of joy and sorrow, work and rest, or we follow the pattern of the world," writes Helen McLoughlin in *Advent and Christmas in a Catholic Home*, commenting on the challenge Catholics have to be "in the world but not of the world" throughout the year.

Lent begins on "Ash Wednesday," a name officially introduced by Pope Urban II in 1099. Ashes are obtained from burning the blessed palms of the previous year's Palm Sunday. The foreheads of the faithful are anointed with blessed ashes in the sign of the cross, while the priest pronounces the words, "Remember, man, that

thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return” (cf. Gen. 3:19). The Catholic Church has always taught the faithful to abide by certain guidelines of behavior on certain days and through certain seasons. Catechism, no. 1438 states:

“The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church’s penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).”

We are required to fast and abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In his 1966 Apostolic Constitution on Penance, Pope Paul VI reorganized ecclesiastical discipline with regard to fasting and abstinence. He declared all Fridays and Ash Wednesday as obligatory days of penance. Abstinence was to be observed on every Friday that did not fall on a holy day of obligation, and fast as well as abstinence was required on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. He further declared that, for just cause, bishops’ conferences could transfer the days of penance, always taking into account the Lenten season. In this way, he empowered bishops’ conferences to substitute abstinence and fast wholly or in part with other forms of penance and especially works of piety and charity.

Following Pope Paul VI’s directives, the U.S. Bishops decreed norms for U.S. Catholics in their November 1966 statement on penance. [1] The bishops maintained the traditional law of fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and abstinence from meat on the Fridays of Lent [2] They also rescinded the traditional law of abstinence under pain of sin for other Fridays. However, in accord with Pope Paul VI’s directives and Canon, no. 1249, the U.S. faithful

must do some sort of penance on every Friday, excluding Solemnities or a dispensation by their diocesan Bishop.

The Church teaches that “all members of the Christian faithful in their own way are bound to penance in virtue of divine law; in order that all may be joined in a common observance of penance, penitential days are prescribed in which the Christian faithful in a special way pray, exercise works of piety and charity, and deny themselves by fulfilling their responsibilities more faithfully and especially by observing (days of) fast and abstinence. . .” (Code of Canon Law, no. 1249).

The following activities, which the reader may consider adopting, combine new ideas and old traditions. All are provided to help families better live the Lenten season, imitate Christ’s 40 days, and ultimately better understand and celebrate the great feast we have in Easter. Under the guiding inspiration of the Church, popular observances were molded; in addition, natural customs were ennobled through the spiritual power of Christianity:

1. **FAMILY OFFERING:** Decide as a family to give something up for Lent. This could be anything from desserts or sweets to watching television.

2. **LENTEN CANDELABRUM** (for Stations of the Cross): This is easy to make! Find a piece of wood about two or three feet long, preferably a two-by-four. Buy 12 wooden candle holders at a craft store and space them evenly on the two-by-four. After gluing or screwing them in, stain or paint the candelabrum. Another nice touch is to find small pictures of each station and glue them beneath the appropriate candle. The idea here is to say the stations as a family on Fridays in Lent. You begin with all the candles lit, and then a family member blows out a candle after each

station is recited. The last candle is extinguished after the 12th station because the Light of the world is gone. Finish the last two stations with a small flashlight. The symbolism is great and children love the candles. We also learn how we are in the dark when we don’t have Christ illuminating our daily lives.

3. **LENTEN CENTERPIECE:** This idea is very similar to the advent wreath. Make a cross-shaped centerpiece with six candleholders, with a candle to be lit for each week in Lent. This centerpiece will visually remind your family of its progress through Lent, keeping the family focused on its preparation for Christ’s resurrection at Easter. It is ideal to use the trunk of a Christmas tree as the cross. The tree symbolizes the fullness of Christ’s incarnation, coming to us as a humble baby and saving us humbly on the cross 33 years later. If you don’t have your tree, any wood will do. Just cut two pieces and nail them together to form a cross. Next, screw in six wooden candle holders, four down the vertical piece and one where each of Christ’s hands were nailed to the cross. Finish by tying a purple ribbon where the two pieces of wood cross. Another nice touch is to place a purple tablecloth on the table to correspond with the liturgical colors in the Church.

4. **PURPLE LIMA BEAN POSTER:** This activity is especially good for young children. Just dye a pound of lima beans with Rit dye (liquid is best). When dry, store beans in a glass bowl or jar. On a poster board, draw a large wide cross. In large letters print, “We help Jesus carry his cross” or personalize it with your children’s names in place of “we.” The goal is to teach the children to do works of mercy and good deeds. Every time they do or say something for Jesus, they earn a bean. Each should have a glass or jar in which to collect beans. On Fridays, everyone will glue their beans to the cross in hopes of filling it in by