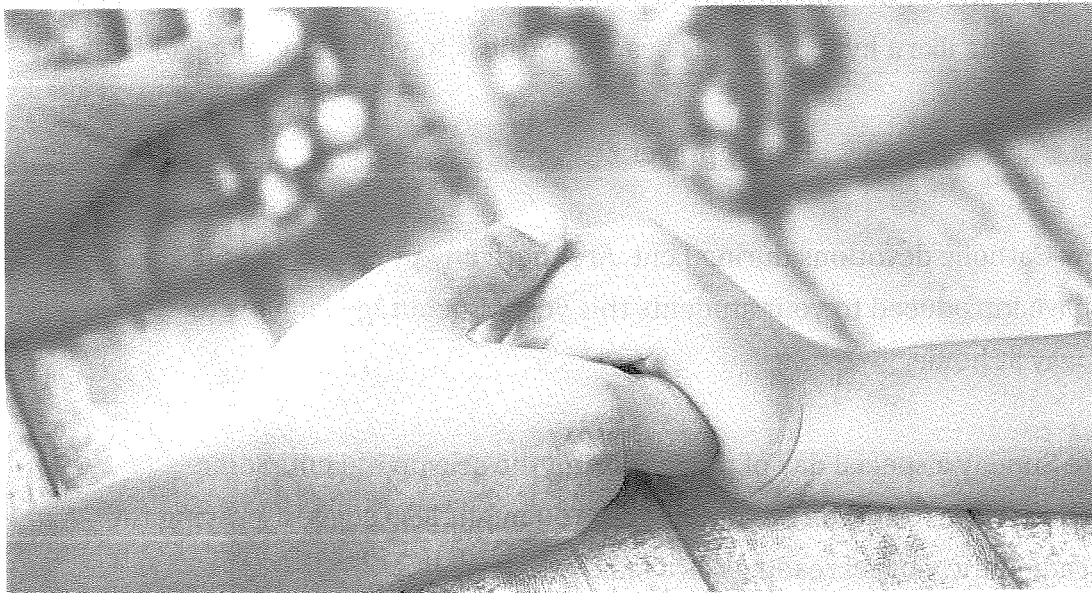


Effective Teaching: Encouraging the Three Pillars of Lent at Home

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Parent Resource



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With inspiration from St. Augustine

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St. Augustine once described Lent in a sermon as “the epitome of our whole life.” It allows Christians to make an even greater effort for 40 days to cling to the cross, which we must do our entire lives. While we can certainly introduce ways for our students to practice Lent during class, we can also work with families to come up with additional ways to embrace the cross and practice in the three pillars of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

The three pillars of Lent come from Matthew 6, which we hear proclaimed on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. The one common thread throughout Jesus’ teaching is the need to perform each pillar without being a hypocrite. A hypocrite brags about praying, fasting, and giving alms to earn admiration. Instead, we are called to do these things for God and for him alone. This is why the best way to encourage the three pillars of Lent at home is to practice them yourself.

Some families will already have ideas for their Lenten commitments. Some will welcome new ideas, while others will ignore suggestions because they have too many other things on their minds. The best thing you can do to help families practice the pillars of Lent is to extend invitations with enthusiasm, giving testimony through your own personal experience. If you really want them to take these ideas seriously, then show how you have incorporated them into your life or why you plan to do so this year. This isn't bragging like a hypocrite; it is bearing witness to your experience of Lent.

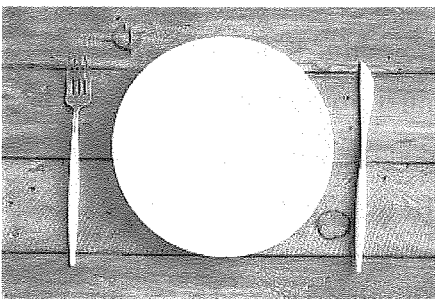
Family prayer

Help families discover new Catholic devotions during Lent. Are there any prayers that you are especially fond of or have introduced to your students this year? Encourage families to try these out in a special way at home.

Invite the families to make Sunday a special day of prayer during the season of Lent. Some families gather together to pray the rosary on Sunday nights. You might also suggest praying the Liturgy of the Hours or reading the Gospel readings as a family each week.

Invite families to any special parish prayer events occurring this season. If there are Stations of the Cross on Fridays, then commit to going yourself and extend an invitation to students' families to meet you there. Again, the key is to extend that invitation as a witness, not just a teacher.

Family fasting



Not all families are used to the idea of fasting and almsgiving. The “spiritual not religious” mentality might persuade them to focus only on prayer. Yet, as St. Augustine once said, “Fasting and almsgiving are ‘the two wings of prayer’ which enable it to gain momentum and more easily reach even to God.” Positioned in this way, families might be more willing to give fasting and almsgiving a try during Lent.

Most families are already familiar with the idea of personally giving up something for Lent. Why not challenge them to give up something together as a family? It will help them grow closer as they move along their journey toward Easter together. As a family, they might decide to give up eating out at restaurants. They might give up screen time or television at certain times during the day. They

might even decide to refrain from snacks after school or after dinner. Whatever it might be, encourage them to discern as family what to give up and welcome the challenge together.

Family almsgiving

Sometimes it is hard to convince someone to give to charity. Instead of focusing only on the money, focus on the people who need it.

“God has no need of your money,” wrote St. Augustine, “but the poor have. You give it to the poor, and God receives it.” Help your

students and their families grow in compassion toward those in need. Clothing drives and canned food drives are important, but

they can seem impersonal. Many of the charitable organizations you

might recommend for almsgiving during Lent have stories of the people they serve. Spend some time reading these stories and sharing them with the parents. Make a personal commitment to serving the poor in some way this year, and invite the families you serve to experience this too.



Jared Dees is the founder of *TheReligionTeacher.com* and the author of *Christ in the Classroom: Lesson Planning for the Heart and Mind*, which helps develop lessons that lead students into an encounter with Christ.

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