



# Finding God®

Our Response to God's Gifts

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Special seasonal issue by Marcos Gonzalez Villalba.

## Reactivate Your Faith

### *What Is God Calling You to Do for Lent?*

What is God calling you to do for Lent? Before we answer that question, let's pause for a moment and think about it as we learn together with your family what the season of Lent is all about. Lent is a fast of forty days preceding Easter where "the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert." (CCC #540)

Think of Lent as a gift from our heavenly Father to his children every year that helps us start over and grow closer to his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In this newsletter, you will discover that there is much more to Lent than giving up a favorite snack. Rather, it is an exciting adventure that begins on Ash Wednesday and culminates in the three holy days known as the *Triduum*: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.

So, now that you know a little bit more about the season of Lent, take a leap of faith and use this newsletter to help answer the following question: How will my family take this opportunity to reactivate our faith during the season of Lent? ✝



### THE FIGHT BETWEEN CARNIVAL AND LENT

Reflect on Pieter Bruegel's painting "The Fight Between Carnival and Lent" (1559). Look for three images in the painting: the two people jousting, the woman at a well looking into a bucket, and a man and woman being led away by a jester. What do you think these images tell you about Lent? Where do you see God at work in this chaotic scene? Where do you see yourself? ■



## Ash Wednesday

Lent begins with one of the most popular days of the year for Catholics worldwide: Ash Wednesday. It is a day of fasting, in which Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59 are permitted to eat one full meal, plus two smaller meals that, when taken together, are less than another full meal. Ash Wednesday is also a day of abstinence, in which Catholics aged 14 and older refrain from eating meat.



On Ash Wednesday, we are reminded of God's words to Adam after being expelled from the Garden of Eden: "For you are dust, / and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19) In other words, the ashes remind us of our mortality. Yet, the message of Ash Wednesday is not morbid, as we are graciously reminded by Joe Paprocki in his ebook [7 Ways to Practice Lent](#): "It is a joyful reminder that, with God's life within us, we are so much more than dust and ashes!" ■

### Video Reflection



Use the QR code to [view a video reflection](#) on this painting.

## Prayer

*When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. . . . But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

—Matthew 6:5,6



If you would like to increase and reactivate your own prayer life, look to Jesus who is the perfect model of prayer in the Bible. After all, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray the Lord's Prayer "Our Father..." (Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 18:9–14) Read a few of the examples below in your own Bible to discover the various ways that Jesus prayed:

- Matthew 14:23; 26:36–44
- Mark 1:35; 6:46
- Luke 3:21; 5:16; 9:28–31; 22:41–45; 23:24; 27:47
- John 17

### Lectio Divina



The Church has given us a beautiful way to pray with the Scriptures called *lectio divina*, or "sacred reading." Use this method to pray the Scriptures from the upcoming Sunday Mass. Use the QR code above to [learn more about lectio divina](#). ■

## Fasting

*But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.*

—Matthew 6:17

Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights right before beginning his public ministry. (Matthew 4:1–2) What did Jesus do when he was tempted by the Devil to turn a stone into bread to take care of his hunger? Jesus remained steadfast on what truly sustained him: the Word of God. (Matthew 4:4)

In a similar way, fasting is a spiritual practice that reminds us to focus our attention on the one thing that sustains us: God's love. Fasting can be the missing key to reactivating your faith life. Almost anyone can take on these simple food-related penances almost any time of year:

- Save sweets for Sundays and feast days.
- Avoid snacking between meals.
- Practice simple eating practices by not adding sweeteners or salt to food and beverages.
- Pray a blessing for everyone involved in preparing your food.
- Choose to drink water instead of soft drinks, coffee, or energy drinks.

## Almsgiving

*But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

—Matthew 6:3–4

Almsgiving is the natural outflow of prayer and fasting, which is an essential ingredient of the Christian life. Through almsgiving, we put our needs aside to tend to the needs of others without expecting anything in return. "Prayer with fasting is good. Almsgiving with righteousness is better than wealth with wickedness. It is better to give alms than to store up gold, for almsgiving saves from death, and purges all sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life." (Tobit 12:8–9) Here are some other ideas for almsgiving, inspired by Susan Vogt in her book, *Blessed by Less* (Loyola Press, 2013):

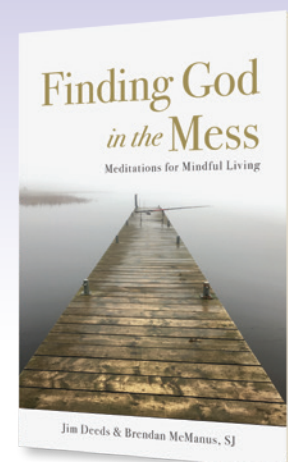
- Identify one thing you have that is more than you need and let it go.
- Educate yourself about people living at or below the poverty line.
- Try buying nothing for a week (except for essentials like food, transportation, bills, and emergencies).



## Meditations for Mindful Living

How do we carve out time for mindful contemplation and prayer? *Finding God in the Mess* is the perfect tool to help us learn to pause, to take time to be with God, to contemplate our lives, and to recognize God's presence in all of it, especially the hard times. You can use the meditations within *Finding God in the Mess* independently or in a parish group setting and at any point during your day. ■

*Finding God in the Mess* by Jim Deeds and Brendan McManus, SJ (Loyola Press, 2020).



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# The Stations of the Cross

Catholics often pray the Stations as a way of drawing closer to the Passion of Jesus. As your family prays the Stations, invite your children to reflect on the questions provided.



- I. Jesus Is Condemned to Death:** How do I act when I am unfairly punished even though I did nothing wrong?
- II. Jesus Takes Up His Cross:** What can I do when I am asked to do something hard?
- III. Jesus Falls the First Time:** How do I act when I fail to do what I am expected to do?
- IV. Jesus Meets His Sorrowful Mother:** What can I do when my parents are sad or worried?
- V. Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross:** What can I do for others at home or at school who need some help?
- VI. Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face:** What can I do when someone gets hurt or is suffering?
- VII. Jesus Falls a Second Time:** What can I do when someone needs help with schoolwork or chores?
- VIII. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem:** What can I do when an elderly person needs help?
- IX. Jesus Falls the Third Time:** How do I act when I feel tired and grouchy?
- X. Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments:** What can I do to find clothes for those who need them?
- XI. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross:** How can I help someone who is being bullied?
- XII. Jesus Dies on the Cross:** What can I do to forgive someone who has hurt me?
- XIII. Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross:** What can I do when a friend needs help?
- XIV. Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb:** What can I do to help someone who is sad?

**Closing Prayer: Jesus Is Risen!** Lord Jesus, on the third day after your death, you rise again, conquering death forever! Who helps me in times of need? (This can be included as a 15th station.)

### Stations of the Cross



Scan the QR code to [view an online presentation](#) of the Stations of the Cross that you can pray with your children. ■



## Reconciliation

“I am a sinner” are the words of Pope Francis that ring true for all of us. None of us can live perfectly in this life, so conflict is inevitable. If we have the insight to see that “all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)—and more specifically, how we have fallen—we’ll see we have no reason to hold a grudge.

When we choose to humbly admit our failings, we break down the walls that divide us and create space for

reconciliation. We might be spurned, or we might be forgiven. The other person may take responsibility for their fault, or they may not. But either way, we rest secure in God’s forgiveness. “God never tires of forgiving us,” Pope Francis wrote in *The Joy of the Gospel*, “we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy.”

Have you offended someone? Have you neglected to confess your sin and seek forgiveness? Reconciliation is a picture of what God has done for us. Be a peacemaker by seeking and offering forgiveness. ■



# Holy Week

Did you know that the word *holy* means “set apart”? For centuries, Christians have set apart an entire week—Holy Week—to recall the events surrounding the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday, when we recall Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem. We receive blessed palms, and we listen to the reading of the Passion of Jesus. The climax of the liturgical calendar of the Church is the *Triduum*—meaning “the three days”—which begins at sunset on Holy Thursday with the celebration of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. At this Mass, we recall the Last Supper that Jesus ate with his Apostles. Following the Gospel and the homily, a solemn washing of the feet takes place to symbolize Jesus’ washing of the feet of the Apostles.



On Good Friday (at 3 p.m.), we once again listen to a proclamation of the Passion of the Lord, this time from the Gospel of John. Part of the Good Friday service is the Veneration of the Cross, during which the members of the assembly are invited to come forward and show reverence or respect for the Cross of Jesus by either touching it or kissing it. On Holy Saturday, we are led from the Death of Jesus to his glorious Resurrection by attending the Easter Vigil at sunset. The priest lights and blesses a bonfire outside the church to symbolize the light of the risen Christ, which is then spread throughout the darkened church to the people holding

taper candles. Following the homily, we celebrate the new life of Jesus in those who are celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist).

So, how can we enter fully into Holy Week and reactivate our faith for the rest of the year? Why not start by applying the principles and habits we already possess? More than likely we have set aside time for certain things that are important to us—such as a workout, a run, connecting with others on social media, or even a short siesta. We can do the same thing with our spiritual lives by setting aside part of each day to be with Christ. These times can include moments of prayer like the Daily Examen or lectio divina; they can be spent performing works of mercy for others, or they can be spent silently resting in the Lord’s presence. ■

## Celebrating Holy Week as a Family

**Set up a family altar with a crucifix and a candle.** On each day of Holy Week, gather around the altar as a family and read a portion of Jesus’ Passion. Allow children the opportunity to ask questions and respond to the Gospel.



The Passion as found in Mark’s Gospel might be read throughout the week as follows:

- **Sunday:** Mark 11:1–10 (Gospel at the Procession with Palms)
- **Monday:** Mark 14:1–11
- **Tuesday:** Mark 14:12–26
- **Wednesday:** Mark 14:27–52
- **Thursday:** Mark 14:53–72
- **Friday:** Mark 15:1–41
- **Saturday:** Mark 15:42–47

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