

April

World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Every year the Church unites in prayer to beg God for religious and priestly vocations. This practice springs from the Lord's words: "The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Beg the Lord of the Harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest." The numbers of men and women following vocations to the priesthood and the religious life are on the increase in the world. The increase is especially seen in Third World Countries.

It is important to introduce boys and girls to the possibility of a religious vocation, especially by exposing them to the personal witness of those who have been called and who have followed such a vocation. Inviting priests or sisters over for dinner at a house or to a classroom party makes the children feel more at ease. Have the children research the number of priests and sisters and the total population of the United States and through a little math discover how many people each priest or sister is expected to minister to. Take a tour as a class or a family of a convent or monastery. If permitted take pictures along the way and put together a virtual tour afterwards or make a class scrapbook. Participate in the liturgy periodically at a religious house. Have a class pen-pal who is a missionary in another country. Practically any religious community you contact here in the states has sisters in other countries that they could contact for you. Let each child write a prayer for vocations, place them in a basket before a statue or picture of Jesus and pull one out for each day of April to read before religion class. Sponsor an essay or picture contest (depending on age): What I would do if I were a sister/priest. It is never too young to start introducing religious vocations since most sister and priests (though they may enter in their late twenties) had their first "inspiration" in grade school and high school.

Lent

by Trudy Hermes

Sometimes during Lent we tend to get caught up in the idea of giving something up instead of getting caught up in the idea of what Christ gave up.

Over the past several years our oldest, Afton, now 6, has been introduced to the practice of giving something up during Lent. The first year she gave up small things sporadically--but at least she gave some thought throughout the 40 days. Last year, she gave up "Rug Rats" on Tuesdays (yes, this was a sacrifice for her!) and she gave up chocolate milk everyday except Fridays at lunch. She was so excited about her sacrifice that she told her school administrator. I will never forget the Wednesday morning Afton went to school and stated she would like to have chocolate milk for lunch. With a smile on his face the administrator looked at Afton and said "I didn't realize Lent was over yet." Stunned, she quickly remembered her sacrifice and replied, "Oh, orange juice please!" How special it was for us, and how rewarding it was to her, to be able make her sacrifice to God in return for His sacrifice for her.

This year upon mentioning that Lent started next month my husband asked Afton what she was giving up this year. Afton wasn't sure. She pondered for awhile. I finally decided to share my Lenten idea with my family. They approved. I began to think that if you and your children might be stumped about what to "give-up" for Lent, here is my idea:

First, you will need to make a cross out of construction paper and hang it on the wall. Then, cut out 39 colored eggs and one black egg (for Good Friday). On each egg write a prayer, activity, sacrifice or discovery--I have provided 40 ideas, please feel free to use them. Each day have your child, or your

children take turns, taking one of the eggs out of a basket. Most of the activities are "family related" which will give you the chance to experience Lent as a family. After the activity is completed have someone place the egg (preferably with sticky-tack) at the bottom of the cross.

In another year or two we will need to make a second set of eggs for our youngest, since most of these activities will be too advanced for her for several years.

I am not suggesting this activity should replace the practice of sacrificing, however, this option may give you and your family a chance to truly experience the Lenten season and the sacrifice Christ gave us.

LENTEN CROSS ACTIVITY

Prayers

Say three Hail Marys

Write and pray your own special prayers for the Holy Souls in Purgatory

Pray one decade (9 years and younger) or the entire Rosary (10 years and older)

Go to church and pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament

Read the Palm Sunday story

Read the Easter morning story

Read the gospel of the day

Spend 10 minutes in prayer or reading the Bible

Attend confession this week

Start a novena for something special

Activities

Clean one room for your parents without being asked

Donate canned food to your Parish food supply

Visit an elderly person

Baby-sit (no charge) for a young couple

Take a prayerful walk with someone you are close to

Pick a saint and read his/her story (Are you named after a saint??)

Do something special for a sibling or parent

Write a letter to the Pope

Sacrifices

Candy

Soda

Telephone (to be assigned to two different eggs representing two different days)

T.V. (to be assigned to two different eggs representing two different days)

Radio/Records/CDs (to be assigned to two different eggs representing two different days)

Computer games/internet (to be assigned to two different eggs representing two different days)

Dessert

Catholic Discoveries

Miraculous Medal - Origin of and purpose

Relics - 1st, 2nd, 3rd classes

Saint Helena - Who she is and what she had to do with Our Lord's Cross

Brown Scapular - Origin of and purpose

Pope John Paul - Short overview of who he and what his job is

Stations of the Cross - Introduce you child/children to this prayer

Crucifix - Origin of

Indulgences - What they are

Rosary - Origin of and why this prayer is so special to the Church

Good Friday (the Black Egg)

One hour of peace (play quiet games, read the Bible or a life of a saint, watch a movie about Jesus) between 12:00 and 3:00.

Palm Sunday

The Sunday before Easter is the first day of Holy Week--the holiest week of the year for Christians. On Palm Sunday at each Mass Catholics remember and dramatize the entrance of the Messiah into Jerusalem. (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-16) The Church celebrates Christ's entrance into Jerusalem to accomplish his paschal mystery. At each Mass there is a re-enactment of this event with a procession and the giving of blessed palms. The priest recalls: "Christ entered in triumph into his own city, to complete his work as our Messiah: to suffer, to die, and to rise again. Let us remember with devotion this entry which began his saving work and follow him with a lively faith. United with him in his suffering on the cross, may we share his resurrection and new life."

Palms

Call the parish and find out at which Mass the solemn procession will take place. Try to participate in this Mass with your whole family. Bring home the blessed palms and place them behind holy picture or crucifixes in your home.

Holy Thursday

On Holy Thursday, Christians recall what Jesus did and said on the night before he died. Parishes usually have an Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper which is a beautiful liturgy to participate in. The meaning of this special liturgy can be summed up in the opening prayer for that Mass:

"God our Father,
we are gathered here to share in the supper
which your only Son left to his Church to reveal his love.
He gave it to us when he was about to die
and commanded us to celebrate it as the new and eternal sacrifice.
We pray that in this Eucharist
we may find the fullness of love and life."

The love that Jesus showed us to the end in his sacrifice on the cross is perpetuated forever in the gift given on the night before he died. The Last Supper became a memorial of his voluntary offering to the Father for our salvation. With the words: "This is my body.... This is my blood,,,,," Christ institutes the Eucharist--a sign of his love for us even until now.

If you can't go to the Memorial of the Lord's Supper

Before beginning supper, read from the Bible the account of the Last Supper:

End the reading with the prayer:

Almighty God,
we receive new life
from the supper your Son gave us in this world.
May we find full contentment
in the mean we hope to share
in your eternal kingdom.
Amen.

Good Friday

There is no Mass on Good Friday. On this day the Church mourns Jesus' death and reverences the cross on which he died. Many Churches have three hours of prayers and preaching between 12 and 3. Every Church has a Celebration of the Lord's Passion at 3:00 in the afternoon. During the celebration the passion is read, those present can come forward to reverence the cross on which Christ died for our salvation, and receive the Eucharist. In remembrance of Jesus' three hours on the cross, there should be a sign in the house of a recognition that this day is different from every other day of the year. Putting a cross in a prominent place with a vigil light burning in front of it is one idea. Playing soft music during the three hours and playing quiet games inside is another. Reading the passion from a Bible Stories, the Bible or watching a life of Christ on video would be an excellent way to mark this day as special.

Alleluia Water Music

"We are Easter people, and Alleluia is our song!" St. Augustine declared centuries ago. Add a musical Alleluia to your table grace this season with pretty water chimes. Fill four glasses (glass tumblers, not plastic!) with water to different heights, and add a different colored drop of food coloring to each. Strike them gently with a spoon to sound a tone, and make up melodies for a sung Alleluia after dinner. Use the water to make pretty ice cubes afterwards.

Pentecost Wind

Pentecost symbols are wind and fire, and the color red (representing love--the Holy Spirit is the love joining the Father and Son--and the fire of enthusiasm for the Gospel). Experience some of the power of the wind--and "feel" the force of the Gospel which is spread around the world by apostles and missionaries--by flying kites during the Pentecost novena! Imagine the word of God being "carried on the wings of the wind" to the farthest off places! Name some far away places, and look up information on them when you get back home. An on-line Catholic encyclopedia can be a good place to start.

Happy Birthday Cake

Pentecost is a great day to celebrate the Church's birthday, so make a cake and decorate it with Pentecost symbols: hearts on fire with God's love, a dove to represent the Holy Spirit (who came upon Jesus at His baptism in the form of a dove), flames to represent the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Don't forget the candles!

