**Grow in Holiness This Lent**

*by Donna-Marie Cooper O’Boyle, Register Correspondent* *Sunday, Mar 02, 2014 6:25*



The Church provides the faithful with a marvelous opportunity and a distinctive journey for spiritual growth and conversion during the penitential season of Lent. Pope John Paul II said, "The time of Lent is a special time for purification and penance, as to allow Our Savior to make us his neighbor and save us by his love" ("Message of His Holiness John Paul II for Lent," 1982).

Pope Benedict XVI reminded us what Lent is for: "It means accompanying Jesus as he travels to Jerusalem, the place where the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection is to be fulfilled" (Wednesday audience, March 9, 2011).

In his first message for Lent, Pope Francis concentrated on the poverty of Christ in becoming man, underscoring our duty to give equal loving witness in our care for the poor in our midst.

Pope Francis explained that "Lent is a fitting time for self-denial," and "we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty."

He also reminded us in his 2014 Lenten message, "Let us not forget that real poverty hurts: No self-denial is real without this dimension of penance. I distrust a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt" (Feb. 4 press conference).

I am reminded of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, who also made note of the pain and suffering endured in wholeheartedly loving and serving. She said to me once, "I know it is not always easy to love. But when you love till it hurts, there is no more hurt, but only more love."

Parents are called by God to be the first and foremost educators of their children and can tremendously help to spiritually guide their domestic churches throughout Lent. You will participate more fully with the rhythm of the Church by setting examples for your family’s Lenten spiritual practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Try your best to retreat from the busyness of the world and carve out meaningful prayer time within your domestic church. Gather your family each day, and set the tone with simple prayers and activities. Encourage your family to make this Lent their best ever by taking more time to reflect on Church teaching, put their faith into practice and retreat from the culture as much as possible during these 40 days of spiritual growth.

Give children practical suggestions they can carry out to fulfill Pope Francis’ encouragement to reach out in love to the poor. Explain to your children that the poor are not merely the homeless or poverty-stricken people; they might be people at school or in the neighborhood who are starving for love. Ask children to venture out of their comfort zones to offer a kind word or gesture.

Discuss ideas together that you’ll carry out as a family, calling to mind that, together, you can collectively grow in holiness as you accompany Our Lord during these Lenten days.

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*(which contain Lenten suggestions for families).*

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