

# Holy Year Lent in Your Family

By Father Robert F. McNamara

Of late, many Catholic families have observed Advent at home with Advent calendars and Advent wreaths. Family traditions for Lent have been slower to develop.

Now we have a fine little booklet to help us make the most of Lent at home. Sister Sandra DeGidiz, OSM, has written "Re-Treat Your Family to Lent," (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1615 Republic St. Cincinnati, Ohio 42510; \$1.95).

Since Lent 1984 marks the climax of the Holy Year of Redemption, I want to pass on to you some of her recommendations. Some - not all - so that parents and teachers will buy their own copies and adapt even more of her wonderful suggestions.

Although Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, Christian tradition has for centuries made of the day before a festive celebration - a day of "farewell to meat" before the church season of abstinence begins.

The French call this Tuesday "Mardi Gras" (Fat Tuesday) for that reason. The Italians call it "Carnevale" (Goodbye, Meat!) Our word carnival come from this. The old English name was Shrove Tuesday, because people used to go to confession, to be "shriven," that day.

Sister Sandra therefore suggests that families observe "Fat Tuesday" by serving at the evening meal the favorite meat of the family (which will not be served again until Eastertide). There should also be a scrumptious dessert. During the meal, the meaning of "Fat Tuesday" and Lent will be explained to the children. After dinner, play games, pop corn, or whatever. But everything prepared for food that Tuesday should be finished off - no leftovers. At bedtime let everybody help clean up. Then keep silence. Lent, the season of self-denial, will arrive at midnight.

Ash Wednesday is a day of fasting (for adults) and

abstinence from meat (for all). The evening meal that day should therefore be meatless and plain. It will be good to gather the family afterward and have somebody read the passages on repentance from Joel 2:12-13. Then Sister Sandra suggests that a little fire be built of coals. Each person in the family will write on a slip the personal fault he or she most wants to get rid of. Each will then crumple the paper and throw it on the fire. (Last year's Palm Sunday palm can be thrown in, too.) The family can then discuss the meaning of Lent, until the fire has gone out. Then let each take some of the ashes and place it on the forehead of another. (They will already have received the "official" ashes in church that day. These are "family" ashes.)

Each week in Lent will then have its special theme, adapted to even the smallest member of the family.

Week No. 1 is the **Week of Prayer**. Sister Sandra recommends that in the corner of a main room a table be set up, and on it a crucifix, bible, and two candles. This is the "prayer corner." Here parents and children will gather read from the bible, to talk about prayer and above all, to pray together. Members of the family take turns making up their own "home-made" prayers.

Week No. 2 is the **Week of Fasting or self-denial**. Leave one place at table, set but empty, as a reminder of hungry people. At the end of each evening meal, the cook will announce the next day's menu. Each night one member of the family will decide what item will be omitted from tomorrow's meal. The money saved from that will be placed on the empty plate, and later given to the poor. (Another practical form of self-denial is to cut down a little on the use of TV, radio or stereo. Silence is golden and very Lenten!)

Week No. 3 is the **Week of Baptism**. Sister has some fine recommendations here: reading passages from the Bible



about water (Creation and the Flood in Genesis; the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus, the baptism. Who baptized me, and who were my sponsors? Who is my patron saint? This is a good time to bring out baby pictures, baptismal certificates, baptismal dresses, baptismal candles, etc. Finally, all can renew their baptismal vows, and each bless himself with holy water.

Week No. 4 is the **Week of Almsgiving**. The booklet lists many ways in which we can share the world's energy (turn off extra lights); our own energy (help another with chores); the earth (recycle cans and bottles); our time (visit a nursing home, write to a congressman); oneself (babysit free; give somebody who needs it a hug).

Week No. 5, **Springtime**. By now spring will be nearing, so closely related to resurrection. If trees are budding, take a walk and count the budding trees and flowers. If not, start some plants indoors.

If a family has focused on all these things, Holy Week will be more deeply appreciated. Home talks can deal with palms (as a symbol of human fickleness); with the Holy Eucharist (most will have gone to Confession in preparation for Holy Thursday); with why Good Friday is called "good;" with the meaning of the "new light" in the Easter Vigil.

Easter has its own home traditions to talk about; Easter lilies; Easter eggs (dye your own); the Easter Bunny; Easter clothes; Easter water. Easter ham is appropriate, and Easter breads (blessed by the priest in church).

Sister Sandra quotes Dolores Curran, "Once is a tradition for children." Try these Lenten practices in the Year of Redemption and you may well be starting a precedent that for your children will remain a precious, lifelong, holy memory.

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

## Journey Of Lent

Dear Father Hohman,

Last year, and again this year, we have been told by our parish priest that our celebration of Lent is going to be centered around the bishop's program calls "Crossroads." I have no objection to that whatsoever, but I do wonder why we made such a complete change from the traditional celebration of Lent to this particular way of celebrating it.

In the old days, we had Wednesday evening services usually with rosary, sermon and benediction; and then every Friday we had stations of the cross. Those were devotions we could count on and it seems to me that I had a better sense of having made Lent when these were available, than I do now when there is a much looser approach to Lent. I get to the end of Lent and find that I don't really know what I have actually done and it makes me feel a bit guilty. Could you explain the whole process?

L.N.

Dear L.N.

In the course of time certain observances and celebrations tend to change in character from what they originally were intended to be. The way we celebrate Lent is meant to go back to the original idea of Lent which was a time of final retreat for catechumens, as they approached their reception of the Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist.

On the first Sunday of Lent these catechumens were designated as the "elect" and began what was known as a period of enlightenment and scrutiny. The supposition was that the entire faith community would be walking along with the catechumens (or the elect) on their journey

to commitment which for those already baptized would be a renewal. Therefore the season of Lent is seen as a journey to fuller commitment and therefore the use of expressions such as Crossroads simply indicates that there would be places along the way where we would meet our shepherd.

The journey to fullness obviously involves the traditional aspects of Lent. It involves an intensification of prayer so that we might be more open to the word of God and to His will; it involves fasting so that we might eliminate those things in our lives which get in the way of our being filled with the Spirit; and it involves almsgiving so that in the giving of material possessions and of time and energy we might make room for the presence of a loving God in our lives. This way we renew our commitment and find a newness which is a kind of resurrection.

How we carry out these things is a matter of choice on the part of the faith community. It is not necessary to eliminate the old forms of Lenten devotions as long as it does not involve merely a kind of observance. I for one feel that the Stations of the Cross are an invaluable way of reminding me that all of my life is in the cycle we call death-life. It is a dying to self in order that I might rise to a Christ life. That constitutes a journey and it is that journey that I observe during the season of Lent.

One final thought: We need to do this in community because we are a people of God and do not find Him singly. Therefore to join ourselves to the faith community even though what is being done may not coincide with our personal preferences is to begin the process of opening our lives to Christ in as good a way as I can imagine. In any case, have a real good Lent.



Bishop Edward D. Head of the Buffalo diocese and Erin Countryman of Honeoye Falls at the awards banquet in Niagara Falls. (Photo by Western New York Catholic/Patrick Brennan)

## Diocesan Speaker At Niagara Falls

By Rick Fransiak  
Western New York Catholic  
Niagara Falls - "We hold the future in the palms of our hands," Erin Countryman told CYO members from throughout the Buffalo diocese at the 32nd Catholic Youth Convention at the Convention Center here Feb. 18.

Miss Countryman is from Honeoye Falls and is the new state representative to the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry.

"CYO has been an important part of my life," she said. "The words Catholic Youth Organization are the building blocks of youth ministry."

And she used these words as building blocks for her talk. The word "catholic" means universal, she said. "The Church is universal. People gather at diocesan, state and national conventions. These gatherings are a symbol of unity, a worldwide sharing of similar goals and a visible sign of God's presence."

The word "youth" means the Church of today, she said, adding that part of youth means being involved in more than oneself. "When we come together to share at conventions, we energize one another to go back to our parishes and share the spirit with others who are less fortunate than we."

"Organization," she said, "is reflected when we choose

our leaders and in the holding of many fundraising projects. But organization has its spiritual side, too."

Also speaking at the convention was Patrick B. Fox, Rochester diocesan director of youth ministry.

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