

Seasons of Grace

Among the Seasons
of the Church, the
great season of Lent
calls us to the grace of
perseverance.



Mar 2014

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This Month...



- Su 2 **Ordinary Time 8
Worry Not!**
- Tu 4 Shrove Tuesdsay
- We 5 **Ash Wednesday**
- Fr 7 Sts Perpetua &
Felicity
- Su 9 **Lent 1
Temptation**
St Frances of Rome
- Su 16 **Lent 2
The Glory of God**
- Mo 17 St Patrick
- We 19 St Joseph
- Su 23 **Lent 3
Living Water**
- Tu 25 **The Annunciation**
- Su 30 **Lent 4
I Can See!**

Modern family life is busy. The constant stream of events and activities shuttling kids around, work, parish or community commitments... It's a constant drone that makes it difficult to maintain our focus on the things that really matter. Our church calendar is a great antidote to the constant busyness, punctuating our year with seasons of penance and plenty, sorrow and joy.



Why do we have Liturgical Seasons?

For most of us born in urbanised city centres, we are far removed from the origins and purpose of our seasonal church calendar. Up until about three hundred years ago, most of the population lived in agrarian environments. Jesus himself lived in such a society and thus richly colours his parables and teachings with agricultural allegories. (eg, The Parable of the Sower, or the Lost Sheep).

An agrarian lifestyle is ruled by the seasons. There is a time for sowing, harvesting, birthing, weaning... all at the mercy of the timing and weather of the various seasons. Rural communities are utterly dependent on the rhythm of the capricious seasons for rain and sunshine to grow and raise crops and animals on which we city dwellers depend. The Church calendar that evolved reflected the reality of the natural seasons which dominated rural life.



Lent - a Season to Persevere

The word 'lent' means spring. At this time of year in the northern hemisphere, the food stores are running low from the dormant winter months and families grow weary of the cold days and long dark nights. As the ground begins to thaw and come back to life, a sense of quiet anticipation pervades.

Lent parallels this natural reality with a spiritual season of limited physical comfort and prayerful penance. More than any other season, Lent calls us to reconnect with our earthy reality through the tangible practices of penance, fasting and almsgiving. Although they are spiritual practices, they are experienced and expressed in and through the body.



Seasons of Parenting

As a parent, your family will go through a variety of seasons of varying lengths. A sleepless season of newborns and infants, a season of intense activity with toddlers and pre-schoolers, a season of primary school, puberty, a season of rebellion and attitude of adolescence and (hopefully) a season of maturity and adulthood as your children strike out purposefully on their own.

Each season has its own unique challenges and tests your sanity as parents, from sleep deprivation to the wild moods of teenagers that leave you baffled. They also have precious moments, good laughs, and profound conversations.

None the less, each of these moments can be missed if we are too busy to notice the change or stuck in a season that has now passed. Living the seasons of family life requires us to take things a little slower, to be a little more attentive and to live primarily in the moment.



When the children were young, the years stretched out before me as if there were no end. Sleep deprivation does that- robs us of perspective. I was impatient to move forward. Now as they graduate from school it seems like it passed in a nano second. With a twinge of regret, I lament my haste and the lost opportunities of each precious season.



Living with the Seasons

Choosing to live seasonally is ultimately a point of surrender. It means acknowledging that you are not completely in control. Surrendering to the rhythms of the Church seasons, and the seasons of your family life is actually a huge freedom. It allows us to gain some perspective when times are overwhelming, to hope that the winter will become spring. It gives us permission to revel in the good times, when the sun is bright and the leaves are green.

It allows us to reconnect deeply and thoroughly our daily, messy, earthly lives to the spiritual. After all, this is what Jesus came to show us! He is right there with us in every hardship and in every celebration.



Virtue Focus: Perseverance

The season of Lent is the opportune time to engage your family in a conscious development of the virtue of perseverance. Perseverance is the ability to persist in the face of difficulties and setback. It helps us to develop strategies for accessing deeper values to stay motivated and encourages a healthy work ethic.

Lent is the perfect time to focus on this virtue by adopting a new spiritual discipline.

It's also a great time to develop a family based spiritual discipline. Lent provides a closed time frame which is long enough to establish a habit and is clearly marked with a beginning and an ending. This makes it less threatening to reluctant teenagers who may be reassured by the defined commitment period.



How to Establish a Family Lent Tradition

Plan Ahead

In the week leading up to Ash Wednesday, start talking together about what you might do for Lent. Remember the goal is to grow close to God so think a bit creatively about your fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

CathFamily: '10 Things to Give Up'

Catholic All Year: 'Outside the Box: 66 Things to Give up or Take up for Lent'

Ending

Easter Sunday marks the *first* day of a whole season of feasting and rejoicing. Don't forget to mark the end of lent with 50 party days!

CathFamily: Stations of Glory

CathFamily: Lord of Joy!

Beginning

Just as we mark birthdays with a ritual celebration (cake, candles, cards, gifts), Lent needs to be begun with a memorable in the first week.

CathFamily: Mardi Gras Prayer

CathFamily: Ashes Prayer

Family

In addition to individual things, make a commitment to do one thing as a family. It might be fasting from screen time on Fridays, starting a new habit like family prayer time or serving at a community soup kitchen.

Example

Set the example! As parents, make a commitment to be clear role models of perseverance. Let them see you struggle and falter and get back to it. Your example will teach your kids more effectively than any words you might use.

Persevere

Stick at it. No new spiritual discipline will happen without effort or temptation. Failure and lapses are to be expected but don't let them overwhelm you. Recommit each day or week. Perseverance is forged in circumstances like these. So encourage each other as if in a spiritual marathon.

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Seasons of Marriage

Byron & Francine Pirola

Marriages are in perpetual transition, growing, evolving, and cycling through periods of plentiful intimacy and barren despondency. In many ways, these are just like the seasons.





Spring...

...is the season of growth and hopefulness. It's when a couple can feel most optimistic about their relationship because it is growing vigorously and the future promises luscious fruitfulness. In this season, couples invest heavily in their relationship and are generally happy to do so because they are riding a wave of increasing intimacy and closeness. Couples often rush through this season in their haste to harvest the goods of their growth but in doing so, often shorten the Summer season.

Summer...

...is the season of abundance. Husband and wife enjoy a deep sense of closeness and can feel invincible as their connection is so strong. Love and marriage can seem effortless as the harvest of the summer fruits is abundant and easily accessible. Couples can become lazy in this season, neglecting further growth as it seems unnecessary. In truth, there is often a hidden fragility that only becomes evident when an unexpected challenge or crisis hits the marriage and the couple suddenly finds the Summer fading into Autumn.



Autumn...

...is the season of uncertainty. Doubts begin to creep into the relationship, little 'stings' of misunderstanding or carelessness and the feeling of declining connection pervades the relationship. Spouses are often a little defensive in this season, a result of feeling bruised by a clumsy comment or a drifting intimacy. There are occasional bright patches of colourful joy but it is often short-lived and somewhat fragile, just like autumn leaves that delight us ever so briefly with their vibrant hues but soon fade to brown and decay.

**For the full article, head over
SmartLoving.org**

Winter...

...is the season of bitterness. It's easy for couples to feel hopeless about their future and powerless in their relationship. Just like frozen foliage, spouses tend to be brittle and hyper-sensitive, reacting defensively to every perceived affront. The Wintering marriage can be cold and distant with the spouses leading parallel, unconnected lives and their marriage effectively in hibernation. Some couples can get stuck in Winter, inadvertently prolonging it with unhelpful reactions, self-pity and a loss of motivation.

Things for Every Season!

CathFamily has a whole host of resources for every season. Have a look and let us know what you tried or found helpful and inspiring!



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Find out more about Catholic marriage and how you can enjoy deeper intimacy and spiritual connection.

