Get your family ready for Lent

When my fourth child was born, it didn't sink in that he was going to be a "Lent kid." I wasn't raised Catholic, so, to be honest, it never really occurred to me.

Until this year…

…when his *birthday* is on *Ash Wednesday*.

At age four, he's not going to really feel the pinch. But as he gets older, I'm sure he'll start noticing it more. Lent – a season that I love to hate – is going to be a different kind of reality for him.

This year, I find myself thinking of getting ready for Lent in a different way than I have in the past. We still have a couple of weeks before Lent starts, and I've been thinking of how to get myself and my family ready.

1. Prepare my mind, heart, and calendar.

Lent will come, whether I'm ready or not. Every year, this means that there will be struggles.

Though I'm not an athlete, I'm the mom of a whole crew of them. I've noticed something as they've gotten more serious about their sports: They prepare for their games. It's not just about practice. It's not just about being in shape. It's also a state of mind.

As I get myself mentally ready for the "big game" of Lent, I also need to make sure I'm open to the work the Spirit will do within me. Preparing my heart is trickier; it's harder to articulate and put into a checklist. Mainly, I'm going to be praying to be open to the Spirit and trust that he'll guide me from there.

Part of the guidance will, without a doubt, have to do with my calendar. I need to make sure I'm allocating time for Lent: for the extras, yes, but also for the usual things. In fact, I may not actually add a lot to my calendar, and nor will I take a lot off of it. But knowing that Lent is coming and will soon be here is a preparation for my calendar and I pray that it will be a way for me to use the opportunities I have to bless the time I spend running around, working, and doing the usual.

2. Accept my failures.

Wait, you say, *aren't you calling this a failure too soon? Lent hasn't even started!* You might think so, yes. However, I have a long history – nearly two decades – of failing at Lent. Part of what makes Lent a "failure" for me is that I can't do it all. I can't make my family do all the things we should, or could, or would. I can't control that someone will get sick, or someone will ruin prayer time, or someone will…well, someone *will*.

And that someone may very well be *me*.

I call these failures, but in reality, they could just as easily be considered successes. If Lent is about getting over myself and trying to lean more into God's grace and will for my life, than knowing ahead of time that it's not about me or my plans is the right approach for me.

3. Open myself to God's grace.

In some ways, there's not a lot to say about this. There are lists to make, and there are many ways to be prepared. For example, this great guide we've put together takes you from Mardi Gras through Holy Week. And Lacy at Catholic Icing has put together a checklist with many great Lent prep ideas for your consideration.

But.

Lists only get me so far. There's a choice I have to make, and

that choice is to cooperate.

Confession: I'm not so good at cooperating with things I don't want. In fact, I'm as bad as any (all?) of my kids when they have to do dishes, or laundry, or homework.

4. Set the tone with music.

I spend large chunks of many days with music going in the background. During Advent, I found myself exploring various Advent playlists on Spotify. During Lent, I'm going to be doing the same for Lenten music.

I am, for sure, going to be listening to *Lent at Ephesus*, the beautiful music of the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles. (It's on Spotify, and in many other places that stream music.)

5. Involve my kids.

Many years, Lent has been a mostly private affair for me. Oh, the kids know it's Lent, but how can I invite them into the season in a way that allows *them* to be open to the graces God has for them?

What devotion should we try? (I've had this in my heart for some time now, and it's going to be part of Lent, oh YES it is!) Some ideas I'm going to propose:

- A decade of the rosary each day (maybe with coloring involved, maybe not)
- Stations of the Cross, perhaps using *Stations of the Cross for Children* with the younger ones

I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments.

How are you getting ready for Lent?

Do you have a link or resource to share? Send it to us at takeout@osv.com so we can share it in a future issue!