How to teach about Lenten sacrifice

An important lesson of Lent is sacrifice. So often, this lesson is lost in the cacophony of our consumer world.

Sacrifice is not easy. It’s more than giving up a bad habit. It’s about recognizing what distracts you and surrendering that yearning for what you think you want. Sacrifice can be emotionally painful and demands commitment. But doing something difficult helps us understand ourselves in a deeper, more meaningful way.

Through giving up our distractions and desires, we learn we have the strength and courage to go without and that we can survive that emptiness we think we are going to feel when we don’t have what we think we want or need. We realize the place in our identity where we thought the new phone, video game or designer jeans should go is really more joyously filled when we are focused on family, experience, peace and generosity.

How do we parents find a way back to the lesson of sacrifice? How do we instill the importance of this message when we are bombarded daily with the counter message of consumption and instant gratification?

Model Sacrifice.

The first step is recognizing the model we set for our kids. Their eyes are always on us, even when we may not realize it. Take time this Lent to carefully reflect on what you value. What do you believe you can’t live without? What have you been coveting that you think you would be miserable not having? Pray about this in the quiet, after the kids are in bed, or during Mass. Ask God to help you shed distractions and

yearnings so that you may be more present and connected to what really matters.

Provide Opportunities.

As a parent, it is also important to provide your children opportunities to make sacrifices themselves. Be upfront with them about what you will be sacrificing this Lent. Choose something that will make your whole family collectively exclaim, “Oo-o-o-o-oh, that’ll be hard for you, Dad.” Tell them why you have made this choice, and tell them, “Yes, it will be hard, but I am ready.” Then, throw the challenge to them. They will be courageous when you show them how.

Share.

Last, throughout this season of Lent and sacrifice, be sure to share your experiences with your family. Ask for help, especially from God. Experience this time with a full heart, always mindful of the model Jesus’ death and resurrection first set for us.