

Ash Wednesday Celebration

Purpose

To identify actions that each family member can take to enter into the sacrificial spirit of Lent.

Materials

Candle, clay or play-doh, and a Bible

Introduction

Create a prayerful atmosphere. Many families sit around a table and light a candle to remind them of God's presence and sing an opening song, or the leader may offer a simple opening prayer.

Reading **Isaiah 58:6-11**

If possible, have someone other than the leader do the reading. If the reader is a child, or if participants include young children, you may want to rephrase some of the reading to make it more understandable.

Reflection

Ask the family to take some quiet time to think of two special things each person wants to do during Lent to make themselves a better person and to help them come closer to God. Perhaps one commitment could be something to give up (desserts, TV, video games, an entertainment, etc.) and the other commitment could be something positive to make the world a better place (do a regular favor for a family member, pick up litter daily around the school, donate money to an organization that feeds the hungry, clothes or shelters those in need, do extra praying or spiritual reading, etc.)

Note to Parent: It's often helpful during this quiet time to darken the room and ask participants to raise their hand when they have decided their two commitments. This way, after a reasonable time, if a young child is having a difficulty thinking of something, a parent could quietly advise the child.

Activity

When everyone is ready, the leader explains that commitments are often easy to make but difficult to keep. Bring out the clay. To help us remember out

commitments, we're going to form this clay into symbols of our two commitments. Let each person take some clay and gradually form it into symbols of his or her commitments. (For example, if someone is going to give up TV, he or she might mold a TV shape; if someone else plans to say a daily compliment to another family member he or she might make a heart to remind them of the love they are trying to build.)

Discussion

During the molding time encourage informal discussion such as:

1. Which is easier for you -- "giving something up" or "doing something positive?" "Giving up" is not just a method of dieting or gaining time but rather a concrete reminder to us of all the people in the world who do not have the material goods, food, homes, peace, etc. that we enjoy. When we feel the urge to break our commitment, it can be a reminder to pray for or act to help these people.
2. Can we connect a giving up action with a positive action? For example, giving up desserts could be linked with donating the money saved to a hunger fund. Giving up TV could result in using the time saved to play a family game or read to a child.
3. Does our family wish to do a common sacrifice or action during Lent? Perhaps a letter to a prisoner, a visit to a nursing home, attending a religious service together, or making a joint contribution to a charity would be possible.
4. The leader might also comment about how it feels to be able to shape the clay into a new form. Our actions during Lent are ways that we are shaping ourselves into fuller human beings.
5. As family members finish their molding ask each person to explain what he or she sculpted and how it connects with their Lenten commitments.

Closing

The leader can offer a spontaneous prayer asking God to help us keep our commitments. Close by asking each person to find a special place (perhaps a dresser in his or her room) to put their symbol so that it can be seen daily.