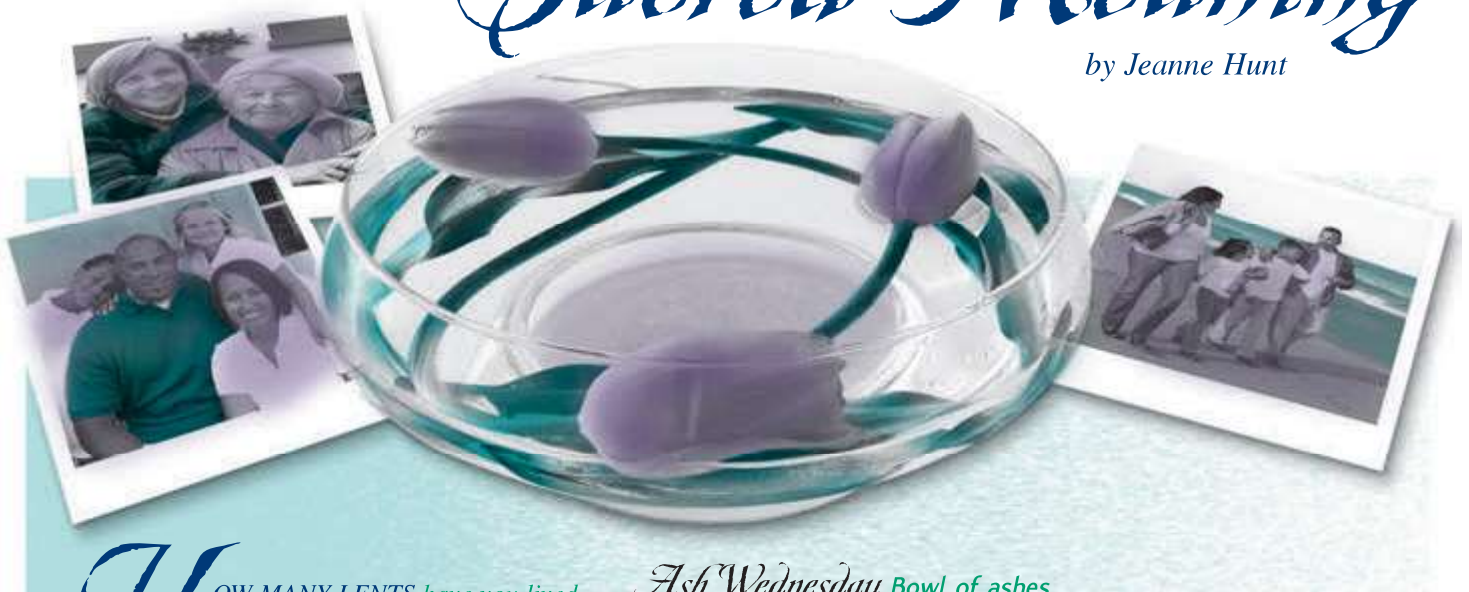


DAY BY DAY THROUGH LENT

Ordinary Things *Sacred Meaning*

by Jeanne Hunt



HOW MANY LENTS have you lived through? Each year we begin with the highest hopes—only to experience what may seem like dismal failure in a few days! The key to good Lenten practice might be right under our noses, in our homes and beyond.

The people in our everyday lives—family members, neighbors, co-workers and friends—can provide a graced “desert experience.” In that “desert” of Lent, that space outside of the ordinary where we examine things more closely, we can find the sacred in the ordinary things of life.

We can enrich our understanding of the ancient signs, symbols and rituals of the Lenten season. We can see our home or community as our holy place. This Lent, let us use the ordinary things of each day to help us rediscover our faith. This Update will offer some practical suggestions. Feel free to pick and choose, move them around or adapt them as you go! Also, the Scripture references are to the lectionary readings for that day—a key to making the connection between the activity and its Lenten theme.

Ash Wednesday Bowl of ashes

Jl 2:12-18; Mt 6:1-6, 16-18 “Remember you are dust,” the invocation goes. To keep our memory sharp, place a bowl of ashes or dirt on the family coffee or dining table. Throughout these 40 days, let us not hesitate to sift through the ashes as a gesture of remembering.

Thursday Family photos

Dt 30:15-20; Lk 9:22-25 Choosing life takes an attitude adjustment in this culture of death. Find baby pictures of family members. Spend some time looking at the pictures and reflecting on each person’s potential, vision and dreams. Pray for each person.

Friday The meat platter is missing

Is 58:1-9a; Mt 9:14-15 With the first Friday in Lent, abstinence from meat comes to the family table. Serving a meatless meal is meant to promote sacrifice. So, let’s not eat lobster this night! Create a simple menu which proclaims that we are curbing our appetites with a little self denial.

Saturday An offering jar

Is 58:9b-14; Lk 5:27-32 Try to live this day focused on others by avoiding using “I” or “me.” When we catch ourselves or others using these pronouns, invite the self-centered soul to put a nickel, dime or even a quarter into a jar or bowl. Put the money in the Sunday offering basket at our parish.



First Sunday of Lent **A new coffee table book**

Gn 9:8-15; Mk 1:12-15 We are invited to repent and believe the Good News. The Gospels proclaim the Good News that Jesus is our savior. Put your Bible—the family Bible if you have one—on the coffee table and spend some time reading Mark 1:12-15. Leave the Bible on the table throughout Lent and keep reading.

Monday The closet

Lv 19:1-2, 11-18; Mt 25:31-46 In the spirit of Matthew 25, give away or throw away three or more unneeded things each week for the rest of Lent. When Easter arrives our house will be cleaned out and only blessed sheep will abide within!

Tuesday Off button

Is 55:10-11; Mt 6:7-15 Let us spend some time in silence today. During that time, or beyond, turn off the television, radio, computer and cell phone. Just being with God is good enough. No words are really necessary. After all, he knows what we need before we even ask.

Wednesday The calendar

Jon 3:1-10; Lk 11:29-32 Jonah's story reminds us what's coming. Look ahead to your calendar and reserve the Triduum dates—Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil—so that you will be available to watch and pray at your parish.

Thursday Bread

Est C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Mt 7:7-12 At the family meal serve some really good bread and talk about your heart's desire. God is listening. God doesn't want us to eat stone soup when bread gives life.

Friday Thermostat

Ez 18:21-28; Mt 5:20-26 What can you or your family do to take the law "up a notch"? Jesus shows us to go beyond the minimum and do more than is required. Perhaps we could add a day of abstinence, up our Sunday tithe, work in a soup kitchen?

Saturday An unwelcome guest

Dt 26:16-19; Mt 5:43-48 Who do you "love the least" right now? Let us spend this day praying for our least favorite person and the grace to love him or her.

Second Sunday of Lent **Water glass**

Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Mk 9:2-10 If God really is for us, that changes everything. For the believer the glass is half full. Let's take a moment to fill a glass half full of water and put it on the kitchen table with a note from St. Julian of Norwich, which says, "All shall be well!"

Monday A measuring cup

Dn 9:4b-10; Lk 6:36-38 Measuring brown sugar takes skill. We must pack it down almost to overflowing to get a good measure. Just so, God wants us to be generous when we measure out a dose of mercy. Today, be merciful to someone who needs our forgiveness and compassion.

Tuesday Junk drawer

Is 1:10, 16-20; Mt 23:1-12 In the spirit of Isaiah, clean out a junk drawer, car trunk or toy box. While we clean, have a long talk with the Divine One concerning how we can clean up our lives.

Wednesday Apron

Jer 18:18-20; Mt 20:17-28 "I'm Jesus and I'll be your server," says today's Gospel. We are invited to put on an apron of service as we try to imitate Jesus. Try to put others' needs before your own throughout this day.

Thursday Watering can

Jer 17:5-10; Lk 16:19-31 Water your houseplants today and pray for the grace to trust God with your health, your money, your children...whatever is heavy on your heart.

Friday Cornerstone

Gn 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Mt 21:33-43, 45-46 Jesus wants to be the cornerstone, the primary building block in our lives. Let us say a Morning Offering prayer—and mean it.

Saturday Reach out

Mi 7:14-15, 18-20; Lk 15:1-3, 11-32 The story of the Prodigal Son fits in every family's tale. All of us have someone who is a black sheep in the family. Today, try to reconnect with that person. Let him or her know your door is always open.



Third Sunday of Lent *A dirty spot*

Ex 20:1-17; Jn 2:13-25 Every house has a dirty spot (the attic, the basement, the garage). Visit that dirty spot in the house and pray about how Jesus would challenge us to clean up our lives.

Monday Medicine chest

2 Kgs 5:1-15b; Lk 4:24-30 Is your medicine chest full of over-the-counter pills that may not be cures? Take a moment to clean the shelves of outdated medicines and ask the Divine Healer to strengthen your faith.

Tuesday Credit cards

Dn 3:25, 34-43; Mt 18:21-35 Make today a “no-credit, cash-only” day. Each time you use cash instead of credit, think about the servant in today’s Gospel. How much do we depend upon the Lord’s mercy?

Wednesday Lightbulbs

Dt 4:1, 5-9; Mt 5:17-19 Look for burnt-out lightbulbs to replace today. As you replace them, think about how God’s law functions in our lives. Like a light, the laws guide us on the Way.

Thursday Rock

Solemnity of St. Joseph

2 Sm 7:4-5a, 12-14a; Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a St. Joseph had rock-solid faith. Carry a rock in your pocket today to honor Joseph. Pray for your own father today.

Friday Neighbors

Hos 14:2-10; Mk 12:29-34 Loving your neighbors requires a choice to reach out to them with compassion. Take a moment today to do a kindness for a shut-in or lonely person in your neighborhood.

Saturday Comfortable chair

Hos 6:1-6; Lk 18:9-14 Find a comfortable chair in a quiet corner of your home and put some prayer things there: a rosary, prayer book, Bible, devotional reading. Make a date with God and go to the chair often.

Fourth Sunday of Lent *Refrigerator notes*

2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23; Jn 3:14-21 Write the words of John 3:16 on a card and mount it on the refrigerator. We all need a reminder of the Good News.

Monday The backyard

Is 65:17-21; Jn 4:43-54 It’s time for a little “new creation” in the backyard. Look for new plants or flowers to remind the house that God is always up to something new.

Tuesday Doormat

Ez 47:9, 12; Jn 5:1-16 Replace or revitalize your doormat and promise to walk into spiritual and physical health. Let us take some action—just like the handicapped man of Bethesda.

Wednesday Planner and checkbook

Is 7:10-14, 8-10; Lk 1:26-38 Look at your planner and your checkbook. We are saying yes to whatever we spend our time or money on. Like Mary, say yes in some new way today to God’s will.

Thursday Act of Contrition

Ex 32:7-14; Jn 5:31-47 Say a heartfelt Act of Contrition today. Is money, food, sports, clothes—anything—getting in the way of our discipleship?

Friday The doorknob

Wis 2:1a, 12-22; Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30 Jesus took a risk going to the Feast of Tabernacles. What is God daring you to do? Put your hand on the doorknob and walk out into a world that dares you to be Jesus’ disciple.

Saturday Soup pot

Jer 11:18-20; Jn 7:40-53 Get out the soup pot and make a batch of good soup. Let the aroma incense our domestic church, our homes. At supper, with soup and bread, talk about who Jesus is to you.

Fifth Sunday of Lent The clock

Jer 31:31-34; Jn 12:20-33 “The hour has come....” In which areas of our lives are we in denial? The clock reminds us that we are living these hours of life not just for ourselves but also for Jesus Christ. He is drawing us to himself at this very hour.

Monday Pickles

Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62; Jn 8:1-11 Susanna and the woman caught in adultery are featured in today’s reading. Both found themselves in a terrible pickle, and God rescued them. Think or write about the times in your life when God’s mercy saved you. Eat a pickle in celebration of God’s compassion.

Tuesday Duct tape

Num 21:4-9; Jn 8:21-30 When we whine, the world looks dark. Put an imaginary piece of duct tape over your mouth and try not to complain today.

Wednesday Family tree

Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; Jn 8:31-42 Who are those people who passed on the faith to you? Say a prayer for them today and thank them for their witness.

Thursday Shower

Gn 17:3-9; Jn 8:51-59 Everyone needs a place to be alone. A good, hot shower, or some other retreat, can do wonders for a troubled soul. Enjoy a visit to your hiding place and rest awhile.

Friday Today’s news

Jer 20:10-13; Jn 10:31-42 Take in today’s news and listen to it with a critical mind. Who is performing good works in our world? Make a list of those “workers” and pray for them.

Saturday Cleaning rags

Ez 37:21-28; Jn 11:45-56 It is time to prepare for Holy Week. Make it a family affair to clean the house for Easter, as a holy sign that we are God’s people.

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Palm Sunday Empty walls

Is 50:4-7; Mk 14:1—15:47 Plan time for the coming week to pray, go to the parish rituals and spend family time. Also, empty your home of your religious art until Easter. Jesus leaves the ordinary for the extraordinary.

Monday Air freshener

Is 42:1-7; Jn 12:1-11 Mary’s oil filled the house with fragrance. Bring some sweet smell into your house today and think of some way you can lavish your love on Jesus.

Tuesday Piggy banks

Is 49:1-6; Jn 13:21-33, 36-38 Judas kept the money bags and that seemed to get him in trouble. Consider your use of money today. Do you share with the poor? What would Jesus do?

Wednesday Dining room table

Is 50:4-9a; Mt 26:14-25 Get your dining room table set for the meals of the next few days. Bring out the very best dishes because Jesus is your unseen guest.

SACRED TRIDUUM

Holy Thursday Bread

Ex 12:1-8; Jn 13:1-15 Making bread with your family is a wonderful way to understand the Last Supper. If you’re not up to the task, you can buy a loaf of good unsliced bread, and break it together, with passionate faith.

Good Friday Water tap

Is 52:13—53:12; Jn 18:1—19:42 Fast and pray this Good Friday. During the hours of the crucifixion keep silence in the house and, if you can, refrain from drinking. Jesus said, “I thirst,” and he received nothing but hyssop. A fast from water can help us to appreciate receiving living water.

Holy Saturday Candle

Ex 14:15—15:1; Mk 16:1-7 Attend the Easter Vigil with your entire household, if possible. If you have children too small to stay long, just watch the Easter fire. Then decorate an Easter candle at the center of your table. Pray the prayer of Christians everywhere: Alleluia! Jesus is risen!

Easter Sunday Bowl

Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Jn 20:1-9 Place a bowl of water on your table today, amidst all of the Easter eggs, flowers and trimmings. Bless the water, then bless yourself with the water as a reminder of the new life that your Baptism brings to you, every day and all day. Happy Easter!

Jeanne Hunt is a popular free-lance writer and speaker. She has an M.A. in religious studies from the Athenaeum of Ohio. She is author of Holy Bells and Wonderful Smells, from St. Anthony Messenger Press.

