

# Failing and succeeding and praying through Lent

I love Lent. I look forward to it. Going into Lent, I always have plans and ideas for how it could be an amazing journey.

Then Lent starts and someone gets sick—every year—and things steadily fall apart. I wonder how I ever thought I could make it to an occasional weekday Mass. I realize we still haven't made it to the Stations of the Cross. And I have to admit that I can barely help my children remember not to eat pepperoni on Fridays.

To be fair, though, some things have gone well. The Lenten prayer journal I ordered through Blessed Is She has been lovely, with a few pages of beautiful, thoughtful reading and prayer and reflection each day.

And we've been working our way through our Lenten prayer basket, pulling out an intention every morning and praying for that person or couple or family that day. It is such a simple thing. But it's the thread that has been guiding me through Lent.

The boys take turns picking the intention for the day, and I can really appreciate that in the midst of the morning craziness—homework and backpacks and lunches and breakfasts and socks and brushing teeth and forgotten forms for school—we have to stop and think of someone who isn't part of our chaos. It pulls us out of ourselves somehow and makes the daily tasks seem a little less important.

The boys are happy when it's someone they know—cousins or teachers or friends. They think some of my choices are odd—"Why do we have to pray for our whole parish?"—but they are mostly thrilled to see who comes out of the basket each morning.

My favorites are the people their father has put into the basket, people who are no longer living but who are still important to us. My husband has an amazing memory, and at dinner he entertains us with stories of his grandparents and other relatives and friends who are in the basket. Who knew that Aunt Marion was a speed skater? The boys and I sit and listen and laugh and learn about the people who are in our

prayers.

I've botched this Lent in many ways. I can't even remember what I gave up because Lent has come at me this year with its own tests and challenges, not the ones I thought I was taking on. But I keep telling myself that even Jesus fell while carrying his cross. And I remind myself that preparation doesn't mean I will be perfect on Easter Sunday. Growth isn't easy. Progress isn't obvious. Maybe Lent shouldn't be smooth and easy and tied beautifully with a bow.

And, on the days when I feel I am truly failing at Lent, I find myself noticing our prayer basket. I remember how it was overflowing with intentions on Ash Wednesday, weeks ago, back when Lent looked like this golden opportunity for growth. I think of how many people we have covered in prayer since then.

Prayer is the most ordinary and yet extraordinary thing we can do. And sometimes it's all we can do.

"For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart," said St. Therese of Lisieux. "It is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus."

As we look toward Holy Week next week and Easter Sunday, let's pray for one another. Let's pray that we will grow in remarkable ways in these final days of Lent, and that on Easter morning we will be filled with love and hope and joy.