

Finding a new focus this Lent

We're driving to school, and my mind is focused on the day that lies ahead. For once we remembered both the lunchboxes and the trumpet, and I think we are going to make it to school on time.

Suddenly a voice comes from the backseat.

"Mom, that commandment about not wanting what other people have? That's a really hard one."

The interesting questions don't always come when we're sitting at dinner or walking through the neighborhood or relaxing on the couch with all the time in the world. They come in the check-out line just as I'm reaching for my credit card or in the carpool line at school minutes before the door opens and my children vanish into a sea of students with their backpacks.

I have a small window of time for my answer, so I'd better make it good.

"That is a hard one," I said. "There are so many people who have things we would like to have, too. I guess that's why it's great that we have confession so we can talk to the priest about it?"

Who knows if that was a good answer—or if he even heard me. He and his brother have jumped out of the car and are sprinting toward the school door.

As I'm driving away, I think how much more I could have said. I could have been much more helpful with thoughtful advice. I have to admit that I'm surprised that my child is thinking deeply about this particular commandment. But it makes sense, especially for this moment in his life.

He has friends with more exciting video games. He has a wish list full of toys he dreams of owning. He and his brother spend time trading items back and forth, exchanging stuffed animals and Pokemon cards and small plastic figures that look like rotting groceries.

His possessions are important to him. Mine are important to me. But when I do an

examination of conscience before I go to confession, I have to admit, I usually skip right over that tenth commandment—thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods. But if I'm being honest with myself, I know it's a commandment I still need to consider. And it's one I have struggled with in the past.

I don't recall ever wanting a bigger house or a fancier car or even a nicer vacation. But I have certainly been jealous of those whose lives came together on schedule, women who didn't have a challenging path to motherhood, and those for whom life just seems to fall into place. And maybe, especially when I consider all I've been given, coveting those things might be worse than wishing I had my neighbor's car.

Following the Ten Commandments isn't always easy. Sometimes it takes a child to remind you of the challenges God places before us, the ways He wants us to refine ourselves more and more so we can be all He wants us to be in this world.

During Lent as we try to be more loving or giving or penitential or sacrificing, we aren't necessarily spending time focusing on each of the Ten Commandments in turn. But my son's question has inspired me to view them as the challenges they are—and especially to spend a little extra time thinking about the tenth.

I'm going to try to turn it into a positive, rather than a negative.

"You will never be happy if your happiness depends on getting solely what you want," said Venerable Fulton Sheen. "Change the focus. Get a new center. Will what God wills, and your joy no man shall take from you."

So during this season of abstinence and sacrifice, I will also try to be truly grateful for all I have, cherish each moment of the full life I lead, and thank God for walking with me on every step of this journey. It isn't always easy. It isn't always the way I envisioned it. But even with the challenges I encounter along the way, it's the path He's set just for me—and I wouldn't want it any other way.