



Family Faith Formation

"I live, now not I; but Christ lives in me." Gal. 2:20

Introduction:

We live in an increasingly materialistic culture and it is easy to accumulate extra items that we just do not need, from clothes that no longer fit any of the children, to that box that has not been opened in twenty years. As our lives get bogged down in stuff, it becomes harder to respond to the invitation that Jesus gives to the rich young man in the Gospel according to Matthew to 'sell what you have, give to the poor, and come, follow me.'

Formation:

To live a life of simplicity in an increasingly secular and materialistic world demands an intentional embrace of this way of life. One must both desire the simple life and take steps to make that desire a reality. As the simple life is intentionally chosen and embraced, hidden joys start to emerge of valuing the moment, finding joy in the people we spend time with instead of the objects that can distract us. It is in the simple life that we come to know our Lord and trust in His providence.

Read Matthew 19:16-30: The Rich Young Man and the Eye of the Needle

There is often misunderstanding regarding the last portion of this passage, for it would be impossible for a camel to pass through the eye of a sewing needle. Jesus was not just using a grand hyperbole, but referencing a small entrance into the city of Jerusalem called 'The Eye of the Needle.' This entrance was a small slit which allowed pack animals to pass in and out of the city without going through the gates. However, for the city's security and protection, it was kept as small as possible. Therefore, in order to pass through, a fully loaded camel would have to be 'unburdened' and then crouch and almost crawl through this small passageway in order to enter the city.

As Jesus references the passage, his audience would immediately have in mind the unpacking of the camel as it prepared to enter the city, giving a very rich image of the person needing to be 'unburdened' in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The converse, then, is also true: the more we are weighed down by stuff, the more we can become pre-occupied by the material world and lose our focus on the life to come. As we are comfortable in our physical surroundings, we leave less and less room for God.

This program is designed to have a family work together 'to build up treasures in heaven' by shedding the unnecessary things that we have accrued over previous years. It is also designed to foster a life of simplicity and treasuring the small things in life instead of coveting the 'next big thing' that pop culture attempts to foist upon us.

There is some prudence that needs to be employed here, however. For a large family with a significant house, forty good sized trash bags should be no problem. A smaller family might be able to accomplish just as much with smaller kitchen sized bags instead of 'lawn and garden,' while a couple living in a two room apartment might struggle to fill forty grocery bags. Take your situation and apply as necessary.



Activity:

The Forty Trash Bag Challenge!

Every day during Lent this year, empty one bag of 'stuff' that is no longer needed from your house, totaling a loss of *forty bags of stuff!*

- 1) Taking a look at the size of your family and household, with an acknowledgement of how much 'stuff' is present, make a prudential choice on the size of bag to be employed during this challenge. Bag size should be small enough that the goal of 40 bags during the season of Lent is able to be accomplished, while not being too big that you are left with nothing. We must still live in the world, after all!
- 2) If smaller children are a part of your family, a 'gauge' may be helpful to keep them engaged and help them keep track of progress. As part of your preparations, make a 'paper chain' of forty numbered links. As each new bag is started, place a new link in the bottom of the bag. This way, as the chain gets smaller, there is a greater sense of accomplishment.
- 3) This challenge necessarily involves sacrifice. Each member of the family should be encouraged to give something to each bag, or there could be designated bags for each member of the family.
- 4) Instead of just throwing things away, recycling is a great way to encourage good stewardship of the gifts we have been given, as it symbolizes that we are passing along our gifts to others. Families with children are encouraged to pass along clothes that no longer fit or toys that sit dormant in a closet to families in need instead of just throwing them away.
- 5) Units of count need not necessarily be trash bags, either; however they should be equivalent. For example, a box of gently used toys or clothes could equate one bag off the chain. A stack of books donated to the parish library is another easy equivalent.

As the family accepts this challenge together, bonds will be created that will last a lifetime. Lessons are also learned not just by saying, but by putting it into practice. Here, the simple lesson will last throughout life that having fewer things can lead to a greater contentment in life.