

A Lesson from *The Crafty Contemplative* for Orthodox Christian Children at the Beginning of Great Lent



The first day of Great Lent is called Clean Monday. It is the beginning of a journey to Pascha, and we need to get ready for our trip! We clean our homes of the foods we won't be eating over the next weeks. We may clean the whole house, so we can have extra time this week to focus on prayer. Most importantly, we begin to clean our thoughts and hearts of the things that separate us from God.

If you have a deck of cards, a set of flashcards, or just a group of index cards, you can try this demonstration. Drop and scatter the cards on a small part of the floor until the area is completely covered. If I had never seen your floor before, would I be able to know what color it was? It would be really hard to see, wouldn't it? Now, pick up half the cards and put them in a pile. Is it easier to see now? Again, pick up half the cards that are left. Is it even easier still? Finally, pick up all the cards. Now, you can see the floor clearly. There's nothing in the way.

Life gets complicated. We have lots of things that distract us and take our attention. They pile up, one after the other, until they seem to cover everything. We can't see anything underneath. Lent is that time where we put things back in order. We go to church and pray at home more often. That's like the first time we picked up cards. Then, we fast some and learn to sin less. That's like the second time we picked up cards. Finally, we do things for other people and put the last of the things in order in our lives. As in our example, things will be clear. We will see everything underneath. By the end of Lent, if we work and concentrate, all those distractions and extra things will be removed one by one from our lives. And underneath, we will see God clearly. Like the floor, He was there the whole time. We just had too much of a mess in the way to see Him.

Orthodox Christians will frequently greet each other during this time with the words, "Blessed Lent!" Why would we do that? It's a hard time when we have to give things up, right? How is that a blessing? Yes, it will be difficult to do some of the things Lent asks of us. Difficult in a good way. The blessings of God are so worth the work! Just wait and see!

As we begin Lent, make the following craft to hang in your home as a reminder of the blessings coming our way. Lent is a tough, difficult, challenging time. But if we let it, it can be a joyful, bright, blessed time. It's here now. Let's get started!

May each and every one of us have a truly blessed Lent!