



"Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."

Lent is Coming, Are You Ready?

Wednesday, February 14, 2024 is Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of the Church's liturgical season of Lent. Lent is the time set aside by the Church during which we try to rid ourselves of all things that pull us away from God. We remember and unite ourselves to the 40 days that Christ spent in the desert, the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in search of the Promised Land, and the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus gave us on the cross to redeem our souls.

We want to use this time to seek God with our whole hearts. How do we do this?

Throughout the centuries the Church, based on Jesus' preaching in the Sermon on the Mount, has practiced three forms of penance for Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. They are penance because we repent of all the ways we've put other things above God's rightful place in our lives. At the same time, we can look at them as opportunities to "create space" for love in our lives—space for us to love God and our neighbor. Explore the three disciplines of Lent and how one might choose to practice them this year.

Prayer

Prayer is, simply put, the turning of our minds and souls to God, who dwells in our hearts. It is a conversation with Him in which we re-center ourselves on Him and His will. We create space for Him by giving of our time to work on the most important relationship we will ever have!

Kinds of Prayer: Adoration, Thanksgiving, Contrition, Intercession and Praise.

Forms of Prayer: Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, Singing/Praise and Worship, Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Divine Mercy Chaplet, Liturgy of the Hours, Silence, Reading and Meditating on Scripture.

For prayerful reflection:

- When do you pray? Is prayer part of your everyday life or only in bad times?
- What do you pray for or pray about?
- Why should prayer be an important part of life?
- How could you improve/grow in your prayer life?

"He is waiting for you when nothing else satisfies you." ~ St. John Paul II

Fasting

Fasting is the practice of giving up things (not just food!) in order to put God first. We can look at this in three ways. First, we can give up things that are not good for us; things that pull us away from God (bad habits, negative TV shows, etc.), which will help us to keep the Lord alone as our God. Second, we can give up things that aren't necessarily bad or negative. Giving up something that you like (for example, chocolate) is a way to strengthen your will. Every time we have to say no to ourselves, it should make us think of God. Finally, we can give up things in order to "offer it up" for the good of someone else. Being participants in the Communion of Saints, the Body of Christ, means that we have the opportunity to help one another toward heaven. An offering is like a deposit into a big spiritual "bank", and God can choose to pay forward the grace from our action to someone else in need!

For prayerful reflection:

- What does fasting mean to you? Do you ever fast (outside of Lent)?
- What is the number one thing keeping you from growing in your relationship with God?
- What is one way you will fast this Lent?

"There is no resurrection without the cross. " ~St. Paul

Almsgiving

Almsgiving is the practice of providing for the needs of others by recognizing the ways in which one has been blessed, and becoming a blessing for others in need. We traditionally think of almsgiving to include money for the poor, which it does, and yet we need to understand it in a broader sense: any act of love done for the good of another is almsgiving. In our world today, there are material needs which can often be filled through money and/or service. However, there is also an even greater spiritual poverty; people all around us are crying out for meaning and love in their lives—they need God, and we can be instruments of God's love to them. Practicing both the Corporal Works of Mercy and Spiritual Works of Mercy are excellent forms of almsgiving.

For prayerful reflection:

- How are you or your family involved in serving others?
- What is one way you serve members of your family?
- What is one way you can practice almsgiving this Lent?

"When you can do good, defer it not, because "alms delivers from death."

~St. Polycarp of Smyrna

Fasting & Abstinence Observances for Lent

In union with the Church all over the world, Catholics observe the following Lenten practices:

- Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, all Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence.
- "Fasting" indicates partaking in only one full meal. Two other lesser meals may be taken, but together they should not equal the main meal. Days of fast also imply abstinence from meat.
- The norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until 59.
- The norms concerning abstinence from meat are binding upon Catholics from age 14 onwards.

*Reasons of ill health and pregnancy would excuse one from observing these practices.