

Lent: A time of greater discipline

Lent is a 40 day period of time where we Catholics are to practice greater self-discipline. It is a time to ask ourselves whether we are living the values of the gospel and our Catholic faith. If not, we may need to make some changes in our lives, and this will take some discipline. Spiritual disciplines are meant to call us into our deeper, better selves.

Lent is not all about “giving up” things. Lent could very well be a time of “doing more” the things we need to do, but maybe neglected in the past. For instance, during Lent you may promise to be on time for school or work or appointments. Being punctual will take added discipline to set the alarm a bit earlier, or hurry up in your preparations to leave your house.

Whatever you “give up” or “do” the goals of Lent should be these: **1) A deeper walk of faith.** Lent is to be a spiritual renewal. Our Lenten practice is meant to deep our relationship with God. **2) A greater understanding of Jesus Christ.** During Lent we are to meditate on the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord. Reading your Bible, praying the Stations of the Cross, studying the Catholic Catechism are good practices to keep. **3) A deeper generosity to those in need.** Christianity is all about reaching out to the least of our Lord’s brothers and sisters. Lent is a time of greater charity.

There are a few basic practices that traditionally have been associated with Lent. These are fasting, almsgiving, and prayer.

The Catholic Church expects its members age 18 to 59 to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, unless a physical condition prevents it. This means only one full meal is permitted in a fast day. The Fridays of Lent are days of required abstinence, meaning meat, and soups or gravies made of meat, are not permitted. Abstinence is required of those aged 14 and older.

When we “give up” something during Lent, we are to put something positive in its place. Let’s leave no vacuum. The best way to remove vice is to cultivate virtue. The money we save from “giving up” desserts should be given to help the poor. This is alms-giving.

Prayer is our communication with God. Our Catholic Catechism says: “Prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father. #2565” During Lent you may want to return to a devotion that you put aside, like the rosary. Or, you may read some spiritual material, or google it on line. There is a lot of good things on line. Or, you may try spending more time in silence with the Lord.

Webster defines *discipline* as a training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character. Our Lenten discipline is to do just that. We are to grow in virtue and charity. Whatever you decide to give up or do for Lent, may it bring you closer to God.

The Lord loves you so much He suffered and died for you. May this season prepare you to enter fully into the Easter Triduum—Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday--when we celebrate Jesus’ journey from death to new life.