

✧ A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR ✧

Practical Ways to Keep a Holy Lent

Dear Friends,

Lent is almost here. Most people, I've found, want to keep Lent as a season of penance and renewal, but they really aren't sure how to do it. So, while we still have some time to think and pray and plan for it, I think that concrete suggestions are a lot more helpful than general guidelines. So here are ten concrete, specific suggestions that can help you truly turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel this Lent, and not let this season pass by without receiving all the graces God wants to give us. We'll publish 10 more next weekend!

1. Fasting: Fasting is an ancient practice that teaches us discipline which uses our hunger to turn our minds to the Lord. Fasting should never be extreme or threaten our health, but for most of us, skipping a meal is a powerful form of sacrifice which is too often ignored. Fasting is also a kind of prayer that we can offer for someone in need.

2. Reading Sacred Scripture: It is amazing that many people don't use the Bibles that they have right in their home. As St. Jerome said, "Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." It's not a matter of reading the Bible from cover to cover during Lent, but maybe you want to read one of the Gospels from start to finish, or one of the books of the Old Testament. The Bible is a source of light and truth that cannot be ignored. You can find the readings for Mass every day online at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>

3. Abstaining from pleasures: Our lives are filled with little pleasures that we enjoy constantly. We have our favorite chairs, our favorite TV shows, our favorite foods, our favorite restaurants. We've surrounded ourselves with good things that give us comfort, but it is easy to become enslaved to them. Using the season of Lent to be a little less comfortable in this life, will help us appreciate all that we have and to become a little less dependent on these comforts – and more dependent on God.

4. Confession: One of the most powerful ways to uproot evil in our lives is to ask God to forgive us from our sins, and to receive his healing in the Sacrament of Penance. Confession is not an optional part of our faith, it is a necessary and beautiful part of our life in Christ. If you think you have no need to confess your sins, then you are living a deceived life -- period. If it has been a while, use this Lent to come home to the Lord and receive his healing mercy and grace.

5. Concern for the poor: In addition to prayer and fasting, Lent is a time for almsgiving. Our prayer and fasting always should turn our hearts to those who are less fortunate, and we should be especially moved to care for their needs. Many people skip lunch and donate the amount that they would have spent to some charitable organization so that their sacrifice can touch the life of someone in need.

6. Praying as a family: During the season of Lent, we make a special effort to build up the presence of God in our homes and families. In recent years, faith has been driven from our homes, but during this holy season, it is time to try to bring it back. Pray before meals, pray for peace in the world, pray the Rosary together-- but somehow bring prayer into your home.

7. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament: Jesus Christ is present in the tabernacle of the church, and people do come to the church throughout the day to visit the Lord. It is our belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist that brings us here to worship Him. Make time in your day to come and visit the Lord during Lent. Our church is open each day.

8. Daily Mass: In the Sacrifice of the Mass, Christ is made known to us in all his power. The Mass is our highest expression of prayer, for it is the prayer of Christ himself. It is offered every day around the diocese in every parish. Mass will be celebrated every weekday at 6 p.m. this Lent. Why aren't you there?

9. No snacks: During Lent we discipline our bodies and our souls. It is a long-standing practice to try to avoid eating between meals. This practice helps us to keep from indulging ourselves, and teaches us to be temperate in our appetites and not just eat whatever we see.

10. Stations of the Cross: This traditional Lenten devotion helps us enter into the sufferings of Jesus Christ and to be strengthened by his sacrifice and example in trial. Remembering his sacrifice is the reminder of his love. Stations of the Cross will be prayed each Friday of Lent here at 6:45 p.m. And/or consider offering the stations privately at your convenience.

As mentioned above, we'll publish 10 more next weekend. With God's grace, may this Lent be truly transformative for each of us.

To be continued....

God Bless You!
Father Marcello

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Practical Ways to Keep a Holy Lent

Dear Friends,

Lent begins this coming Wednesday, with Ash Wednesday. In my column last week, I mentioned that, in my experience, most people really want to keep Lent as a season of penance and renewal, but they aren't quite sure how to do it. I also think that concrete suggestions are more helpful than general guidelines. So, in addition to the ten I offered last weekend, here are ten more concrete and specific suggestions that can help you truly turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel this Lent. Let's not allow this season to pass us by without receiving all the graces God wants to give us!

11. Forgiving past offenses: During Lent we not only ask for forgiveness, we should also be generous in offering forgiveness to anyone who has offended us. Shouldn't we offer to others the same gift of forgiveness that we ask from God for ourselves? Letting go of past hurts and grudges is a powerful way to live the days of Lent. Mercy for others can set you free.

12. Donating time: In addition to making monetary sacrifices for those in need, each of us can do a lot of good for the Kingdom of God by freely giving of our time to help those who need a hand in life. Charity like this shapes the Christian heart, and it makes us feel the joy that comes from sharing the love of the Lord.

13. Exercising: This one surprises a lot of people, but Lent is a time to trim away excessive living, and re-focus our minds and hearts on God. Excess in life has an effect on our flesh, and by exercising we show respect for the gift of our body. Exercise also relieves the stress that can lead us to anger, aggravation, impatience, depression, lust, despair, and other troubles of the soul.

14. Spiritual reading: One great way to feed the spiritual life is to read something that will open your heart and mind to the workings of grace in the world. Many people gain great inspiration from reading about the lives of the saints or books on prayer and the spiritual life. Find some sound religious literature (there are plenty of options on the kiosk in the vestibule of the church) and let the words soak into you during this Lent.

15. Visiting the sick: If you have members of your family who are infirm, think about how you have treated them in their need. Visiting the sick is a corporal work of mercy which brings comfort to those who are suffering. While it is easy to shrink from being present to those in need, your visit may be the only light they get to see.

16. Cleaning up your act: It is amazing how much impurity seeps into our lives -- in word, in thought, in attitude, and in action. And when it gets lodged in us as a habit, it is especially difficult to uproot. Use the season of Lent to start purification in your life by watching what you say, what you see and watch, how you think, and what you do.

17. Be thankful: One of the most fruitful cornerstones of prayer is thanksgiving, because when you count your blessings and thank God, you realize how much has been freely placed into your hands. Without cultivating thanksgiving in our hearts, we become ungrateful before God, and may even begin to question God's very existence! Before you do anything else, start your day by taking a few minutes to praise God for his goodness.

18. Examine your character: Every once in a while, it is a good idea to look at yourself with honesty and see if you are the kind of person that God wants you to be. What flaws or weaknesses have you allowed to find their way into your behavior? Have you become jealous, vengeful, selfish, hurtful, proud, envious, lazy, greedy, bitter, angry, lustful, uncaring, arrogant, or rash? The season of Lent is the perfect time, with God's grace, to make a fundamental change in your character.

19. Learn about your Catholic faith: There are a lot of ways to do this. First, you can get a copy of the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH and read about what we believe. The full text of the CATECHISM is available online at <http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism/index.html>, so you don't even have to buy the book! You can also find sound Catholic material on many subjects at <https://aleteia.org/>.

20. Make a pilgrimage or a retreat: Sometimes the best way to rediscover the presence of the Lord is to get a change of scenery. Look into the possibility of a weekend retreat -- many are offered throughout the diocese or in neighboring states. Or maybe take a day to walk through the Lourdes Shrine in Litchfield and find consolation in the quiet of that holy place, or one like it. God wants to offer you his hope and strength. Listen for his voice.

With God's grace, may this Lent be truly transformative for each of us. And off we go!

God bless you!
Father Marcello