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# The Lewis County Catholic Times

A Weekly Bulletin for Saint Patrick Catholic Church, Weston, West Virginia

Established 1848

## ASH WEDNESDAY

### The Shape of Our Lent

Lent, the forty-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter, was historically a period of preparation for "catechumens," those persons seeking baptism into the life of the church at Easter. Quite soon, however, it became and it continues to be a time of self-examination, penitence and special devotion for all Christians as they prepare for the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Lent is more than just a season of fasting and abstinence; it is a positive opportunity for significant spiritual growth. The Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, describes Lent as "the school of repentance which alone will make it possible to receive Easter not as mere permission to eat, to drink, and to relax, but indeed as the end of the 'old' in us, as our entrance into the 'new' life we have in Jesus."

Lent, then, is rooted in an essential aspect of what it is to be a Christian: repentance, metanoia in Greek, turning one's life around, putting off the old self and putting on of the new self, which is made real by the resurrection of Jesus. It is an intensification of that movement which should be the spiritual rhythm of our lives: a continuous turning away from sin and reorientation toward God. Lent is about conversion.

While we typically think of Lent as a time of fasting and self-denial, we should also approach it as an opportunity for the renewal of those things which form us as believers and strengthen our faith. When we become Christians, we

assume a variety of spiritual disciplines so that we will better follow Jesus - we go to Mass, say our prayers, study the Bible and other spiritual classics, make a regular confession, and devote ourselves to good works and reaching out to serve others.

During Lent, we should re-dedicate ourselves to these disciplines and make them a bit more stringent as a means to restore vibrancy, life, and passion in our relationship with God. In short, we are hoping to make our hearts and souls bigger, to create more space for God in our lives.

In Lent, we follow Jesus into the wilderness where he was tempted, and we attempt through spiritual discipline to resist temptation ourselves. We pray and proceed with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and to his Cross on Good Friday. Throughout Lent we focus also on our own wilderness of temptation while keeping an eye toward the Resurrection. Again from Fr. Schmemmann, Lent is a time of "bright sadness." Sadness, because we focus on the passion and death of Jesus and on the sins of us all which brought him to the cross. And bright, for the promise of Lent is the glory and joy of the Lord's Resurrection at Easter.

One aspect of Lent which is rarely mentioned nowadays is the communal. In earlier times, Lent was a discipline taken on by the entirety of a community or even a society. It was something which everyone did together, and the rhythm of life in society was adjusted to support this common discipline. Everyone supported everyone else in the Lenten discipline, and society was so ordered as to make this mutual support

possible. One might think of this as a kind of spiritual teamwork, and like anything done as a team it bound people together and helped create community.

In the 21st century world in which we live, this has been completely lost. Christianity, since the Reformation, has become a plurality of "christianities," not bound by common belief or practice. Society has become almost entirely secular, and the rhythm of contemporary life is most often counter to spiritual practice. The communal aspect of Lent has, again, been entirely lost. I encourage families, small groups, and indeed our entire parish community to recapture this beautiful and necessary practice.

BEST LENT EVER

DON'T GIVE UP  
**chocolate**  
FOR LENT

We all know the things that make us happy, but we don't always do them. Lent is an opportunity to change that. This year we invite you to do something different.

Join Dynamic Catholic for Best Lent Ever, a free, video-based email program featuring internationally acclaimed speaker and *New York Times* bestselling author Matthew Kelly. From Ash Wednesday to Easter, Matthew will help you identify what stands between you and happiness . . . and what to do about it. Are you ready for your best Lent ever?

TO SIGN UP, VISIT **BestLentEver.com**

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Seven Steps to a Good Lent

By Sam Guzman

Lent is a season of penance and ascetical warfare. The enemy is concupiscence, the world, and the devil. The goal is pure hearts so that we can joyfully celebrate the resurrection of our Lord at Easter, the greatest feast of the liturgical year. In a way, Lent should be a microcosm of our entire struggle on earth, just as the Paschal feast of Easter is a microcosm of our heavenly triumph in Christ. Yet, a good Lent takes focus and discipline, and it can easily be wasted.

1. **Have a plan** – The fastest way to ruin Lent is to have good intentions but no plan. Be specific. “I’m going to pray more,” isn’t good enough. Download this helpful worksheet to get started. Once you’ve determined what you are going to do, stick to it every single day. One word of advice: Make it doable. Often, we are overly ambitious and commit to way too much. When we fail in our Lenten goals, we grow discouraged and give up completely. This is a victory for the devil. Make your commitments modest and practical, and your Lent will be the better for it.

2. **Read a good book** – The saints are constantly exhorting us to read good spiritual books, and there is no better time to begin this practice than during Lent. Reading Scripture or the writings of the saints is a great place to start.

3. **Examine yourself** – Lent is an excellent time to take an inventory of the state of your soul. What are your predominant faults? Do you have any hidden idols in your life? What is keeping you from following the will of God with all your heart? Use a thorough examination of conscience to help you assess your spiritual health. Remember, Lent is not ultimately about giving up sweets or other things we enjoy, it is first and foremost about repentance, which means giving up up sin and returning to God, our loving Father. While taking inventory of your sins may be painful, it is a healthy pain that restores the soul.

4. **Confess your sins** – After examining your conscience, the logical next step is to go to confession. Normally, it can be hard to find a parish with confession readily available (thirty minutes on a Saturday isn’t enough!), but the good news is, many parishes have increased confession times during Lent, so it’s a great

time to go. Before receiving the sacrament of penance, though, remember the five requirements for a good confession: 1) Examination of conscience 2) True contrition for having offended God 3) Firm resolution to sin no more 4) Clear confession (don’t hold any sins back) 5) Penance for the sins you have committed

5. **Pray** – Let’s face it, we can all pray more, and Lent is a great time to plan and implement a daily prayer rule that can guide you the rest of the year. During this season, however, we should especially focus our prayers on repentance and contrition for our sins.

6. **Fast** – I’ve written before about the importance of prayer and fasting, so suffice it to say that it is something we should be doing all year round, not just during Lent. Still, Lent is a very good time to refocus our efforts and renew our commitment. We should especially focus on fasting from things related to our predominant sins. Are you addicted to Instagram or Facebook? Fast from them. Maybe you’re binge watching shows on Netflix. Give it up. On the other hand, maybe you’re addicted to criticizing others. Make a special effort to fast from negative speech. The point is, while fasting from certain foods is an excellent ascetical practice, we do not have to limit our Lenten fasting to things we eat. Remember the words of Jesus: “If your eye offends you, pluck it out.” Nothing should stand between us and the heavenly kingdom, and we should be intentional about cutting off those things that are causing us to sin.

7. **Give alms** – During Lent, we especially remember the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. This is the greatest act of generosity in history, for Jesus died not just for his friends, but for his enemies. “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The generosity of God in Christ should impel us to be generous and merciful to others, especially those poor and in need.This Lent, find a way to give, whether it is supporting a religious order or helping at a homeless shelter. Remember the promise of Jesus, “And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”

YOU CANNOT FAIL

This Lent, do your best. Strive to root out sin and cultivate holiness. But when you fail, real-

ize that even those who can be considered righteous fall seven times daily (Prov. 24:16). Let your failure be a lesson in humility that drives you back to the grace of God flowing from the pierced heart of Jesus—for that is the true heart of Lent.

The Sunday Exception?

Much ink has been spilled over the years concerning the Sundays of Lent. Internet battles have been waged, and it seems that there is so much misinformation out there that I feel it is time to set the record straight once and for all.

Sundays *are* a part of Lent. In fact they are such an integral part of the Season that no Feast of Solemnity can ever take their place! Sunday is the preeminent day of Resurrection, a day on which the Church recalls the joy of the Risen Lord. Yet, in the Season of Lent that joy should be tempered and viewed in the context of our Lenten observance. In other words, we should rejoice in the Resurrection not so much as a foregone conclusion so much as the goal to which we all aspire, and see our Lenten penance as the means of purification by which we can draw closer to attaining the salvation that is won for us in the Great Paschal Mystery.

Regarding one’s personal Lenten observance, Sundays are not days of fasting. This is the because prior to the reform of the Code of Canon Law in 1983, ALL days of Lent were days of fasting: days on which only a single meal was taken, and extravagances such as dessert and expensive meats were abstained from. Sundays, because of their festive character throughout the year, were regarded as the day of the week on which one could take more than a single meal in order to help fortify the person for the week’s work ahead. But even the breaking of the fast on Sunday was done in moderation without the addition of items from which Catholics would normally abstain: desserts, expensive meats, and other extravagances.

Sundays of Lent have never been—and continue not to be—days on which one may gorge himself on food, commit sins that were avoided during the week, or completely undo all of the graces gained through weekly penance and fasting. Sunday, as a day of rest, should be a day on which we relax our practices in order to have the strength to take them back up on Monday.

For those who undertake serious and diffi-

cult penance during Lent, Sunday is intended to be a respite to fortify the body and soul. For many, however, whose Lenten practices are meager and (sometimes) childish, one must seriously ask himself if the penance is so severe that he really needs a break in order to persevere, or if it is just a matter of one being mildly uncomfortable. Our Lenten penance should be an affliction, one which we actively feel and experience throughout the 40-days, and not merely a passing sensation of mild-to-moderate discomfort.

Ultimately, we are all responsible for setting our own parameters for our Lenten practices. They can be as light or as severe as we deem appropriate for our spiritual lives. Because Lent is a time in which we should seek to grow in holiness and devotion, the manner in which one does that will be different for every individual. But the results of Lenten penance should be the same: increased prayer life, increased holiness, a better relationship with God and the Church, and a renewed fervor for living the Faith in a radical way.

RECOMMENDED READING FOR LENT

• Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, vol.2 Holy Week*

• Stanley Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven LastWords.*

• Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha.*

• St Francis de Sales, *The Sermons of St Francis de Sales for Lent.*

• *Meditations for Lent* by Jacques-Benigne Bossuet

• *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis

• *Divine Intimacy* by Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene

• *Humility of Heart* by Fr. Cajetan Mary da Bergamo

• *True Devotion to Mary* by St. Louis de Montfort

• *The Spiritual Combat* by Dom Lorenzo Scupoli

• *A Lenten Journey with Jesus and St. Paul of the Cross* by Fr. Victor Hoaglund

• *Happy Are You Poor* by Fr. Thomas Dubay

• *Letter to Friends of the Cross* by St. Louis de Montfort

• *Love of Eternal Wisdom* by St. Louis de Montfort

RECOMMENDED PRAYERS TO INCORPORATE INTO YOUR LENTEN DEVOTIONS:

• The Prayer of Manasseh

• The Seven Penitential Psalms

• The Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary

• The Stations of the Cross

• The Divine Mercy Chaplet

• Prayer before a Crucifix

Various Goings-On During Lent

• **Stations of the Cross**, every Friday at 6:00 p.m.

• **Fish Fry**, every Friday from 5:00 p.m to 7:30 p.m. in the school cafeteria. Carry-out available. Sponsored by the Knights of Columbus.

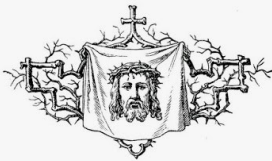
• **Eucharistic Adoration**, every Wednesday from 5:00 p.m., concluding with Benediction at 5:55. Rosary will be prayed at the normal time.

• **Sacrament of Confession/Reconciliation**, every Wednesday, 5:00-5:45 p.m.; Saturday, 5:00-5:45 p.m.; Sunday, 8:45-9:15 a.m. & 11:45 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

• **Lenten Penance Service**, Monday, March 12, 7:00 p.m.

LENT IS COMING

Lent is a season of prayer and penance set apart by the Church to prepare us for Easter and to recall Our Lord’s fast in the desert (cf. Matt 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). This season of preparation and sanctification can be fittingly accomplished through voluntary amendment of life, acts of penance, and works of charity. Lent is a time to learn to love our souls more than our bodies. Thus, every Christian should make a special effort to practice mortification and strive for holiness during the forty days of Lent.



DO NOT LET THIS TIME TO GROW IN HOLINESS PASS YOU BY!!

Consider the following categories on what you should do for Lent.

1. **VOLUNTARY AMENDMENT OF LIFE:** Give up those things that you need to give up sooner or later, namely bad habits. Your goal here is to break a bad habit for ever and Lent is a good time to do it. Love your soul more than your body! Examples: Gossiping, surfing the web without real need, watching T.V., overeating, eating between meals, eating and drinking junk foods (e.g., soda), bad drinking habits, complaining, saying vulgar words, not getting up on time, using a snooze alarm, wasting time playing video games, going to movies, listening to base music, useless chattering on facebook, blogs, and the like, etc...

In this category I am going to do \_\_\_\_\_

2. **ACTS OF PENANCE:** Perform some kind of penance. Your goal here is to train yourself to say "no" in little things so that you can say "NO" to big temptations later. You may resume doing the things you have given up here once Lent is over. Love your soul more than your body! Examples: Avoid eating or drinking something that you enjoy, such as desserts. Give up eating out, taking hot showers, drinking alcoholic beverages, etc...

In this category I am going to do \_\_\_\_\_

3. **WORKS OF CHARITY:** Perform some good and holy action(s). Your goal here is to strengthen your relationship with Christ and His Beloved Church. Ideally what you start here would continue in some way even after Lent is over. Love God more than yourself! Examples: Pray the Rosary every day, attend daily Mass as much as possible, read the Sacred Scriptures \_\_\_\_\_ minutes a day, spend \_\_\_\_\_ additional time every day with my family, read a life of a saint or saints, increase spiritual reading, make a daily visit to the Most Blessed Sacrament or some shrine of Our Lady.

In this category I am going to do \_\_\_\_\_

I plan on making a good confession by this day during Lent \_\_\_\_\_