

LENT NEWSLETTER

STEP INTO LENT BRAVELY



Beginning New Patterns during Lent.

Something all of us can do is commit ourselves to being more reflective during Lent. It just means that I'm going to make a point of being more observant, more aware of what I'm experiencing - paying more attention to what is "automatic" behavior. And, I then start paying attention to my desires. We have all kinds of desires. During Lent, I can reflect upon the desires I currently have and which of them need to be purified, which may need to be

abandoned, and which are wonderful desires that are there, but I haven't acted upon them. Naming our deepest desires will guide the choices we make to establish new patterns for Lent.



HOW TO USE THIS BULLETIN

This bulletin has been prepared by the Jesuit University of Creighton, Omaha, Nebraska. These are reflections to help us understand and practice better the season of Lent.

The most important player during the season of Lent is always our God. These forty days are gifted days to be attentive to God, to hear how God is directing and moving within our lives. This is not always pleasant and enjoyable but it is truly a time of conversion. We seek God because God is seeking us first.

Begin bravely. Choose one discipline (not a whole list of things to be done) and try to stick with it for forty days.

Keep your eyes clearly fixed on the goal: to be an Easter people, filled and living the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Printed from the "Praying Lent" site of the <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html>

Praying

Lent is the time to start new patterns of prayer. Perhaps I haven't been praying at all. This is a great time to choose to begin. It is important to begin realistically. I can start by simply pausing when I get up and taking a slow, deep breath, and recalling what I have to do this day, and asking for grace to do it as a child of God. I may want to go to bed a half an hour earlier, and get up a half an hour earlier and give myself some time alone to read the readings for the day, the Daily Reflection, or the PRAYING LENT page for the day. I may choose to go to Mass each day during Lent. I may choose to get to church on Sunday, just 15 minutes earlier, so I can reflect a bit. Lent may be a time I would want to choose to start to journal the day to day reflections that are coming, the desires I'm naming and asking for, the graces I am being given.

Eating

Lent is a great time to change our eating patterns. This is not about "losing weight" or "getting in shape," though for most of us, paying attention to what we eat, will make a difference in our overall health. This is about being more alert. Anyone who has tried to diet knows that something changes in us when we try to avoid eating. The monks in the desert, centuries ago, discovered that fasting -

simply not eating - caused a tremendous boost to their consciousness. Not only did their bodies go on "alert," but their whole person seemed to be in a more heightened state of attention. The whole purpose of fasting was to aid prayer - to make it easier to listen to God more openly, especially in times of need.

Among Catholics, only Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are named as days of fast we all do together. (And that fast is simply to eat only one full meal in the day, with the other two meals combined, not equal to the one.) On the Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent, we may want to try to fast more intentionally. Of course, always conscious of our health and individual nutrition needs, we may want to try to eat very little, except some juices, or perhaps a small amount of beans and rice. We will experience how powerfully open and alert we feel and how much easier it is to pray and to name deeper desires. Not only will I feel less sluggish and tired, I will feel simply freer and more energized.

The other powerful advantage of fasting is that it can be a very simple gesture that places me in greater solidarity with the poor of the earth, who often have very little more than a little rice and beans each day. Powerful things happen in me, when I think about



those people in the world who have so much less than I do. And, it's a great cure for self-pity.

Practicing Generosity
Almsgiving has always been an important part of Lent. Lent begins with the powerful Isaiah 58, on the Friday and Saturday after Ash Wednesday. It is important to give ourselves the experience of fasting from being un-generous. Generosity is not simply giving my excess clothes to a place where poor people might purchase them. It's not even writing a "generous" check at the time a collection is taken up for a cause that benefits the poor. These are wonderful practices. Generosity is an attitude. It is a sense that no matter how much I have, all that I have is gift, and given to me to be shared. It means that sharing with others in need is one of my personal priorities. That is quite different



from assessing all of my needs first, and then giving away what is left over. A spirit of self-less giving means that one of my needs is to share what I have with others. Lent is a wonderful time to practice self-less giving, because it takes practice. This kind of self-sacrificing generosity is a religious experience. It places us in solidarity with the poor who share with each other, without having any excess. It also joins us with Jesus, who gave himself completely, for us. Establishing new patterns of giving will give real life and joy to Lent.

Practicing Penance

When I sprain my ankle, part of the healing process will involve physical therapy. It's tender, and perhaps it is swollen. It may be important to put ice on it first, to reduce the inflammation. I may want to wrap it and elevate it and stay off of it. Then I will need to start moving it and then walking on it, and eventually, as the injury is healed, I'll want to start exercising it, so that it will be stronger than it was before, so that I won't as easily injure it again.

Penance is a remedy, a medicine, a spiritual therapy for the healing I desire. The Lord always

forgives us. We are forgiven without condition. But complete healing takes time. With serious sin or with bad habits we've invested years in forming, we need to develop a therapeutic care plan to let the healing happen. To say "I'm sorry" or to simply make a "resolution" to change a long established pattern, will have the same bad result as wishing a sprained ankle would heal, while still walking on it.

Lent is a wonderful time to name what sinful, unhealthy, self-centered patterns need changing and to act against them by coming up with a strategy. For example, if the Lord is shining a light into the darkness of a bad pattern in my life, I can choose to "stop doing it." But, I have to work on a "change of heart" and to look concretely at what circumstances, attitudes, and other behaviors contribute to the pattern. If I'm self-indulgent with food, sex, attention-seeking behaviors and don't ask "what's missing for me, that I need to fill it with this?" then simply choosing to stop the pattern won't last long. Lasting healing needs the practice of penance.

Putting It All Together - Alone and With Others

In the end, the prayer of St. Augustine places us in the right spirit for Lent:

O Lord, our Lord, you have created us for yourself

and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

Lent is indeed how God draws us home, as individuals. But, it is also a very communal journey. We never journey alone, no matter how "lonely" we may feel. We are always journeying together. If we can experience our journey in communion with others, it makes it so much clearer that we are on a journey together. When I can share my experience with even one other close friend, or with my regular worshiping community, I can enjoy and share the support and environment that allows grace to flourish.

Let us pray for each other on this journey, especially those who need and desire a change of heart on this pilgrimage to Easter joy.





LITANY FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

Eternal God, maker of heaven and earth,

have mercy on us.

Incarnate Word, redeemer of the world,

have mercy on us.

Abiding Spirit, giver of light and life,

have mercy on us.

For turning away from your presence,
for disobeying your word and commandments,

forgive us, Lord.

For trusting in our own strength instead of yours, for betraying your trust and the trust of others,

forgive us, Lord.

For resisting your grace and refusing your blessings, for holding back from proclaiming our faith in you,

forgive us, Lord.

For damaging this earth and exploiting its creatures, for neglecting and wasting the gifts you have given us,

forgive us, Lord.

For failing to forgive as we have been forgiven. For judging others and bearing grudges,

forgive us, Lord.

For skimping on our commitments and relationships, for failing in hospitality,

forgive us, Lord.

For tolerating oppression, injustice, and wrong, for keeping silent when we should have spoken up,

forgive us, Lord.

For turning away when others have offered us love, for closing our hearts when others have needed compassion,

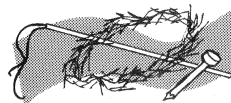
forgive us, Lord.

For all we have done unkindly, unjustly and dishonestly, for our careless speech and hurtful words,

forgive us, Lord.

Most merciful God,
we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
and in what we have failed to do:
we have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;
we repent, and are sorry for all our sins.

Father, forgive us.
Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



THREE PRAYERS FOR LENT

1 *We pray for your forgiveness as a nation which does not know how to distribute the wealth you have given us. We pray that you remove our pride and turn us compassionately to one another. O God, hear our prayer. Lord, have mercy.*

2 *In baptism, you found a family, yet we do not know how to acknowledge that we are kindred to one another. Let Jesus, our brother, teach us to share with one another openly and generously and repent for the times we refuse to care. O God, hear our prayer. Lord, have mercy.*

3 *In our weakness, you show us your strength. We pray for those who are sick or afflicted in any way. Let the apostle's example help them never to lose heart. As dying, yet eternally alive; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. O God, hear our prayer. Lord, have mercy.*