

LENT NEWSLETTER

BEYOND GIVING UP CHOCOLATE: GOING DEEPER IN LENT



From the time we were children, our first question for Lent was often, "What are you giving up for Lent?" Giving something up for these 40 days is a custom that, when we were younger, helped us enter into the season with a sense of purpose and a greater awareness.

As adults, we might want to consider looking at Lent in a deeper way. We are probably much more settled into our behaviors and patterns of life and sometimes giving up something is where we begin -- and end -- our reflections on Lent. It can be

tempting to say "I am giving up chocolate" or beer or even all sweets and all alcohol. But without more reflection, it can become simply a way I show God how much willpower I have. It is more about me than any conversation with God.

Lent isn't simply about us "giving up" something. The real grace is when we recognize that Lent is a season in which God wants to give us something. God wants to help us transform our lives and make us free-er as people, not just free-er with God, but in the way we live our lives

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 this season of Lent.

This is the second week of Lent. Each year we want to deepen our understanding and our participation in the spirit of Lent. This is not a time to 'add' one more thing to our spiritual spring training but a time to deepen how we live and share in the attitude of repentance and turning more and more toward God.

There will never be a time when we have completely turned our life over to God. This is serious training so that we are responding to the movements of the Holy Spirit in 2013.

Keep up the spiritual practices. We tend to slacken down in this second week.

This is the time that God is calling you to turn with all your heart and soul to Himself.

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and love our families.

In some ways it is easy to simply choose something to give up and then we can dismiss Lent. "I am giving up TV for Lent." "I am giving up movies... Snacks... Soda pop." We give it up and exercise our willpower for 40 days to prove to ourselves and to God that we can do it. And at the end of Lent we can return to what we gave up.

We might reflect and ask the deeper question: What is God inviting me to change this Lent? How do I know what God might be stirring in me? I begin my listening to the movements in my heart. Where am I feeling uncomfortable with the choices I am making? With the things I have done? With the habitual ways I respond? The Lord will be speaking to me in those small nagging moments of discomfort in my heart.

It might be that we know deep down that we drink too much and

that giving up alcohol would make us less irritable each night. Then giving up alcohol would be the right thing. Asking what we would like to change about ourselves this Lent requires a little reflection. What pattern of behavior in my life needs changing? What do I need more of in my life? Patience? Unselfishness? More loving behavior toward my spouse or children?

But each of us can think of something that gets in the way of our being loving and self-sacrificing. Too often the ordinary conflicts, divisions and difficulties in our family life result from simple selfishness on my part. I choose to fight. I choose to defend my opinion. I choose to use things I know about my partner, my children, my parents against them. I choose to hurt them.

The results of that behavior are never good and always divisive. We can imagine a Lenten practice in which each of us would tell members of our family – those whom we have most offended in these ways, that we are sorry and ask them to help us to work with us to bring more unity and peace to our family life.

We can ask: What would it cost me to change this behavior? What would it mean if I didn't

walk around my family acting crabby all the time? What if I decided to be much more loving and patient with my spouse this Lent? What if I did decide to "give up" something really destructive in my life, like alcohol, pornography or on-line friendships. As I reflect, I might realize that changing a particular way I live is coming to me as a call from God and I don't have to do it alone. And the God who is moving my heart to reflect on these changes, will remain faithful and help me to stay open to the grace God offers me for change.

I need help. It may be something that I don't want to change or acknowledge. I don't think I can change it. But that's where talking to God can make the difference. I am not doing this alone; I am doing it with God.





When I look at challenges with my spouse, I might discover that one of the barriers to communication in my marriage is that I interrupt and disagree. In some place in my head I know that is an annoying habit, but I am not free enough to simply listen without objecting. Maybe I am unable to receive what my spouse says without coming to the conclusion that my spouse is wrong. What if sharing a different point of view was not about winning an argument but to advancing communication between us?.

In asking God for help, we might ponder one of the many healing gospels, like Mark 2: 1-12. In this story, a group of friends carried a mat with a paralyzed man to Jesus, who was teaching inside a house. So many people crowded around the outside of the house that the friends were unable to get the mat inside. So they went up to the roof and moved aside the tiles and lowered the mat with their friend from the roof to Jesus was below. The words to this gospel say that the friends on the roof had “broken through” the tiles to lower their friend into the house for healing. Their breakthrough led directly to the healing.

Where do we need a breakthrough? What is the barrier that keeps us from asking for healing? In our own lives, we need to break through our denials, defensiveness and our unwillingness to look at ourselves. Discovering what the barrier is in my life is critical. If we don't know what the barrier is, these weeks of Lent are a great time to reflect upon it. When we identify the barrier, we have made the breakthrough. That's when Jesus can heal us of it.

Why is this a good Lenten penance? Because it gets my attention where I live every day. It allows God's grace into my soul and into the place where my real life exists. That's where Jesus stands with me every day, waiting for me to be lowered from the roof so he can touch me and heal me.



GOD'S CALL TO REPENTANCE

L: Almighty, eternal God, through your prophet you have said: “In an acceptable time I shall hear you, and on the day of salvation I shall help you. Now we pray to you.

All: Open our hearts to your voice that calls to us in this holy season.

L: For forty years you dwelt among your people in the desert.

All: We pray you, be with us also during these forty blessed days.

L: Our fathers hardened their hearts and tempted you the in the desert, And none of them entered into your rest.

All: Grant that we may repent of our sins now, Lest suddenly overtaken by death, we seek time for penance and be unable to find it.

L: Your beloved Son did penance for forty days and was tempted in the desert.

All: Make us steadfast in self-denial, persevering in prayer, and generous in good works.

L: In sackcloth and ashes your Church keeps vigil during this holy Lenten season.

All: Cleanse us, O Lord, from our sins, and give us the grace to prepare for the glory of Easter.



A litany for the season of Lent

L: God of life, of community of reconciliation, of compassion, we come to You today in a spirit, of praise and thanksgiving. We praise You for all of creation: the living earth entrusted to our care, and people of every race, religion and nation.

Allow us to embrace, respect and love all You have given us.
All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.

L: We thank you, for each breath we take, every colour we see, every moment we make. Strengthen us to be grateful for every minute of our day, every person we meet, and every opportunity You give us.
All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.

L: We praise You, because all good things have been given to us in love. Help us to know and feel every day, every minute that You love us, and You trust us,

that we are to live in this love. Help us to help others to know your love.
All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.

L: We thank You, for our families, our friends, our country. Teach us to honour those who have gone before us, to walk with our seniors, to love and protect our children, and to foster compassion in our communities.
All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.

L: Make us ready to come to the aid, of those in danger from violence, addictions, disruptions and discrimination in our homes, in our institutions, on our streets.
All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.



L: Help us to find signs of hope, in times of joy or pain or challenge, Guide us to use our gifts, of time and talent to restore and affirm all that is good, heal that which is weak and avoid that which is sinful and destructive in life.
All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.



L: Nourish our spirits, so we will be ready to welcome the stranger, the immigrant, the refugee, the handicapped, the poor, the street person. Unbind and set free your sons and daughters, to recognize Your One Spirit in one and in all.
All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.