

LENT NEWSLETTER

WHAT IS IT TO DO FASTING AND ABSTINENCE?



What is it to do fasting and abstinence? ----- And, when do I do it?

What does it mean to “fast”?

To fast is to do without food. Its purpose is to experience the effects of not eating. It also serves to be a penance or a sacrifice - for the purpose of strengthening us. When we don't eat, for even a little while, we get hungry. When we get hungry, we have a heightened sense of awareness. If, when we eat too much, we have a sluggish feeling, when we fast, we have a

feeling of alertness. Fasting is a wonderful exercise whenever we want to sincerely ask for an important grace from God. It is not that our fasting “earns” God's attention, but by fasting, we clarify our thinking and our feeling. It is purifying and prepares us to pray more deeply.

When do I fast?



HOW TO USE THIS BULLETIN

This is the third week of Lent. Perhaps our determination to follow a spiritual discipline for Lent is slacking off.

This week we want to deepen our understanding of why we are encouraged to fast.

Today we are being challenged to view fasting beyond something just physical. In brief this means that this is beyond giving up chocolate and beer for Lent.

We are encouraged to give up being critical of the weaknesses and faults of other people. We are called to fast from criticizing the members of our family.

We are encouraged to give up watching TV and move out of our house to visit the loneliest person that we know. We give up our own leisure to lighten the hours and days of the shut-in who cannot get out to visit their friends.

All fasting leads to greater love and charity. Are you up to this challenge for the forty days of Lent?

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Catholics, as a group, are required to fast on only two days of the year - Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On these days, fasting means something very specific and limited. It means that one eats only one full meal in a day, with no food in-between meals. It is understood that two other meals, if one eats three meals a day, should not total one full meal. One might fast in a more complete way, i.e., eating only a portion of a single meal.

Of course, anyone is free to fast at any time that it is helpful for their prayer and reflection. It is not recommended that anyone with impaired health should fast in any way. It is also important to note that everyone who fasts should drink enough fluids on a fast day.

What does it mean to "abstain"?

To abstain is to not eat meat. Its purpose is to be an act of penance - an act of sacrifice, that helps us grow in freedom to make much bigger sacrifices. Of course, it would not make sense to make the sacrifice of not

eating meat, and then eat a wonderful meal I might enjoy even more. Many people eat a vegetarian diet, for a variety of reasons, and eating meat is not even an issue. It might be possible to abstain from a non-meal that I really like, on all the Fridays of Lent. It should be noted that many people in this world cannot afford to eat meat or do not have access to it. Part of our abstaining from meat can place us in solidarity with so many of our sisters and brothers around the world.

When do I abstain?

Catholics, as a group, abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and on all the Fridays of Lent.

What about "giving up something" for Lent?

When many of us were children, we might remember our giving up candy for Lent. And, it seemed like a real sacrifice. As we grew up, it was often more difficult to decide what special thing to do, to make Lent a special season - to get our attention and to prepare ourselves for deeper sacrifices.

What would help me grow in freedom? That's the question to ask. For some of us, it could be, committing ourselves to give up judging others, every single day of Lent. For others, it could be giving up a bad habit we've

developed. For still others, it is obvious what seems to be the important choice for me during Lent.

For many of us, the choice may not be to give something up, but to add something to our daily lives during Lent. We may commit ourselves to extra prayer time. We may decide to do some service to the poor, once a week during Lent. We may choose to increase our almsgiving to the poor - perhaps related to something we choose not to do, e.g., some might choose not to go out to eat one night a week, and to give that total amount to the poor.

Whether it is fasting, abstaining or other acts of penance, the whole desire we should have is to use these means to help us grow closer to our Lord and prepare ourselves "to celebrate the paschal mystery with minds and hearts renewed." (First Preface of Lent)

May our Lord bless us all on this journey ahead.



Family Conversion - Relationship Conversion

Lent can be a good time to reflect on the people who mean the most to us and the relationships we hold most dear. For those of us who live in industrialized countries, it can be jarring to realize that our time together as a family might amount to no more than a few minutes a day. Our lives are independent as we scatter in different directions each day for work, school or childcare.

This season of reflection and renewal might be an appropriate time to pray about our family lives and how we can be more thoughtful and prayerful about Lent as a family.

Perhaps we could hold a family meeting over dinner or some other relaxed place. We could discuss Lent and the symbols of the season using the resources here. We might want to talk about how our faith life is not a journey we make alone, but one we are in as a community, as a family.

One Lenten family practice might include a daily act of love for our family. Can we look around and see some small thing that needs to be done to make our lives together better? Is there laundry to sort or dishes to be washed? Is there a floor that needs sweeping or a room that needs dusting? Just one effort by each of us each day can make a dramatic difference in sharing the workload in the family. The grace we are reaching for goes beyond getting the garbage taken out, for example. We know it is a grace when my experience of taking the garbage out, feels to me like an act of love, an act of solidarity as a family. Perhaps the simplest way to prepare for this grace is to pray:

Dear Lord, may this simple, ordinary sacrifice of my time for the sake of those I love, draw us closer together as a family whose hearts you are drawing to yourself in the togetherness of our family love.

One of the real graces of Lent has to do with forgiveness and reconciliation – mercy and healing. This is never simply a matter between Jesus and me. It always has something to do with my family and with my relationships – how we are with each other. What in us needs mercy and healing? What patterns that we have need our reflections and common family choices and actions this Lent?

THREE PRAYERS FOR LENT

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.

L: The season of penance opens the gates of paradise.

All: Therefore let us put on the new man, who has been created according to God, in justice and holiness that stream from truth.

L: let us pray:

Almighty, eternal God, who desire not sinners to die but to repent and live,

All: Grant us in this sacred season, to fight with Christ, that, sharing his trials and penance, we may also partake of the glory of his resurrection.





**PENITENTIAL LITANY FOR
LENT**

BY Lucien Dies

Gospel of Luke

With the publican of the Gospel,
let us say

All: O God, be merciful to me,
a sinner!

L: You come to look for the lost
sheep;
joyfully you carry it on your
shoulders,
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me,
a sinner!

L: You go out to meet the
prodigal son;
you clasp him in your arms and
kiss him -
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me,
a sinner!

L: You choose as your apostle
Matthew the tax-collector;
you have not come to call the
righteous, but sinners--
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me,
a sinner!

L: You enter the house of
Zaccheus the tax-collector
in order to seek out and save
what was lost -

we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me,
a sinner!

L: You accept the ointment of the
sinful woman;
because of her tears you pardon
and defend her -

we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me,
a sinner!

L: To the good thief who
implores you,
you open the gate of Paradise --
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me,
a sinner!



**BRING MORE OF WHAT I
DREAM"**

Prayer - Meditation

*O God, who out of nothing
brought everything that is,
out of what I am*

*bring more of what I dream
but haven't dared;*

*direct my power and passion
to creating life*

where there is death,

*to putting flesh of action on
bare-boned intentions,*

*to lighting fires against the
midnight of indifference,*

*to throwing bridges of care
across canyons of loneliness;*

*so that I can look on creation,
together with you,*

and, behold,

call it very good;

*through Jesus Christ My
Lord.*

*"Bring More of What I
Dream" by Ted Loder,*