



IDEAS for Lent 2016

during the Holy Year of Mercy
Dec 2015 - Nov 2016

“THE SEASON OF LENT DURING THIS JUBILEE YEAR should be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God’s mercy. How many pages of Sacred Scripture are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful face of the Father!” (Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* n. 17.)

THESE WERE JESUS’S WORDS to us on Ash Wednesday, setting out our Lenten discipline:

“Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So **when you give alms**, do not have it trumpeted before you ... But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret ...

“And **when you pray**, ... go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place ...

“**When you fast** do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do ... But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.”

(Gospel of Matthew, ch. 6)

When we **fast**, giving something up, we gain the *time* to give back to God in **prayer**, and /or we gain some *money* to **help others** in their needs. This focus on God and on our neighbour also opens up our hearts to our own frailty before God, and our need for forgiveness. So our Lent is then completed by seeking the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**.

Here are some possible ideas for you, then, for how to keep a good Lent, so as to come, refreshed and renewed spiritually, to the great feast of Easter in six weeks’ time.

I. Fasting

Rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us: in this way it will be possible to contemplate God's mercy, and adopt it as our lifestyle. (Pope Francis n. 13)

Lent is a time traditionally to 'give something up' – perhaps something we could do with giving up anyway! But our fasting as Christians in Lent has altogether a deeper and more focussed meaning. To give up some food and drink, and to give up meat for a day, is a sign that we are not dependent on these things: *Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.* So, it is good to give things up – here are some reminders:

1. **Ash Wednesday and Good Friday** are compulsory days of Fasting and Abstinence: days of Penance, to start and end our Lenten season.
2. **Every Friday throughout the year** (unless a solemn feast-day) is also a day of Abstinence, on which we must eat no meat.
3. You may wish to decide to **give up meat on some other day(s) of the week** as well as Fridays. Wednesday is a traditional 'second' day of the week for some penance, so maybe think of avoiding meat on that day too.
4. In Lent we will each have **different ways of 'giving up'** which might be a particular type of favourite food or drink – sweets, chocolate, and alcohol are the usual favourites, and there is much to be said for this. But, be creative! Other possibilities for fasting might be to give up some TV, or internet, or iPlayer, or iPod ... or even FaceBook!
5. It has become a tradition in our parish to make an act of 'fasting' together every weekend, by refraining from talking in Church after Sunday Mass. Please join in with this wholeheartedly, **keeping silence in church after Mass**, so as to show our respect for the House of God, and for the Sacred Liturgy just celebrated. This immediately has the benefit of letting others stay and pray, making their thanksgiving to Jesus in Holy Communion more fully. Our chatting after Mass can take place in the porch and crypt.

II. Prayer

With our eyes fixed on Jesus and His merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. (Pope Francis, n. 8)

None of us can ever say we pray enough! There are always opportunities to pray more often. Here are some ideas:

1. **Think of coming to daily Mass!** The greatest expression of prayer is the Holy Mass, so if one can make an effort to get to daily Mass in the week, as well as on Sundays, then one is offering the best possible prayer. Our weekday Mass times admittedly are not so convenient to those working

regular ‘office hours’, but Saturday morning 10am Mass, and the First-Friday evening Mass (7.30pm on March 4th etc.) are good opportunities.

2. **Morning Pilgrimage to the diocesan Door of Mercy** (Westminster Cathedral) will take place on Thursday 25th February. We will depart c. 10am from Broxbourne station, enter the Holy Door of Mercy at the Cathedral c. 11am, and follow the specially prepared ‘Way of Mercy’ within the cathedral’s chapels. Afterwards, there will be time for private prayer, a visit round the beautiful interior, or the opportunity for Confession, in the cathedral. Together, then, we will attend the 12.30pm cathedral Mass.
3. **‘24 Hours for the Lord’** is an initiative of the Holy Father for Lent in the Year of Mercy – and locally this will take place in the beautiful church of the Immaculate Conception & St Joseph, Hertford. It will take the form of 24 hours’ adoration from 12.15pm Mass on Fri 4th to noon on Sat 5th March.
4. The **Stations of the Cross** are a beautiful and fitting devotion for Lent, moving our hearts to be united to the Passion of the Lord in His suffering and death. Each Friday at 12.30pm, after Mass, and each Saturday at 9.30am, before Mass, the ‘Way of the Cross’ is followed. Each week a different set of meditations is used, to bring variety to our reflections on Jesus’s path to Calvary.
5. The **CTS racks in the porch** will be refreshed in the coming days, so that there is a variety of booklets for the Stations of the Cross, and also a whole host of **other easy reading on spiritual subjects**. If everyone just bought one booklet and read it in Lent then our parish would have grown in knowledge and love of our faith! Of particular relevance are the various booklets on understanding, and keeping, the ‘Year of Mercy’ well.
6. **Half day of Recollection** to prepare us for Holy Week will take place on Palm Sunday, 20th March, open to all parishioners, starting 3pm in the crypt (coffee available from 2.30pm), ending with the Sunday Holy Hour 5-6pm.

III. Almsgiving

Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognise that we are compelled to heed their cry for help. (Pope Francis, n. 15)

Giving charitably is the third ‘pillar’ of our Christian Lenten practice. I’m sure than many of us give regularly to charities through the year, and it might seem hard to reach into one’s pocket again, and deeper, come Lent. But we are urged to give alms by Our Lord, so that we show care for our neighbour who is in greater need.

1. An easy way to give to charity is to contribute to our **‘Lenten Alms box’** which will be in front of the lectern, in the sanctuary, from now until Easter. The Cardinal has decided that this year the proceeds are to be donated to

our diocesan *Caritas* which manages and promotes many projects for the needy: see the flyers that are available in the church porch.

2. **CaFOD Fast Day for Lent** will be this coming Friday, 19th February. As usual, the idea is to give up some meal, so that the money saved can be given to CaFOD for the help of the world's neediest. This year's campaign focuses on the desperate need still for clean water for much of the world's population.
3. **The parish wall-boxes** in the porch allow for donations also to be made at any time to CaFOD, or to 'The Poor,' or to World Missions (APF) which supports the poorest dioceses in the world to help them spread the Gospel.
4. At the end of Lent, on Good Friday, we will make our annual collection for the '**Holy Places**'. There is ongoing, untold, suffering for the peoples of the Middle East at present, and the Christians are amongst the worst-treated. Cardinal Sandri has appealed to the whole Church for this Good-Friday collection to help support the venerable Christian communities in the Holy Land, the sites of Our Lord's life, death and resurrection: "the collection for the Holy Land reminds us of an ancient duty, which the history of recent years has made more urgent." We owe it to these oppressed Christians to support them well.

IV. Reconciliation – Sacrament of Confession

Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God's mercy with their own hands.
(Pope Francis, n. 17)

Having fasted, prayed, and given alms generously, we should be hearing the Lord speaking in our consciences. The final duty of Lent, then, is to receive the Lord's forgiveness for our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Shortly, I will prepare a sheet to help you with Confession, but here are some ideal opportunities:

1. **After each Sunday (and Saturday evening) Mass** in Lent I will offer to hear Confessions. Please make use of these opportunities, as Lent continues, since I cannot hear all the Confessions in Holy Week!
2. In Holy Week there will be two **Penitential Services: Monday 21st March**, one at 11.30am and another at 7.30pm, when several priests will be available to hear confessions after a brief introductory service. This would be an ideal time to come to experience God's mercy together, and receive forgiveness.
3. As Easter draws nearer **I will make other times available**, especially in Holy Week, and these will be advertised in the Newsletter. Also, I will let you know the times of other parish's Penitential services. It doesn't matter where you go, as long as you do go! Every Catholic needs to include Confession in his/her regular practice, so as to grow in holiness as the Lord would wish.

MAY YOU EXPERIENCE A TRULY BLESSED LENT – Fr Philip