

IDEAS for Lent 2017

FASTING — PRAYER — ALMSGIVING — CARE FOR THE SICK — RECONCILIATION

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

“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.” (Mt 6: 16–18)

Lent is a time traditionally to ‘give something up.’ Perhaps some things 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, cinema, or internet usage, or iPlayer, or iPod ... or even FaceBook, or other social media!
5. It has become a tradition in our parish to make an act of ‘fasting’ together every weekend, by having a quiet end to Mass, and 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

“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 ...” (Mt 6: 5–6)

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

1. **Think seriously about 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 April 7th etc.) are good opportunities.
2. 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.
3. Regular times for quiet **Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament** are: Mon–Wed 8.15–9am; Fridays 11am–12noon; Holy Hour (Sunday 19th March, 5–6pm); First Friday (7th April, 8–9pm). Simply being present to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is a very peaceful and powerful way to pray.

4. The **CTS racks in the porch** is packed with a variety of booklets for Stations of the Cross, Lenten devotions, and 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!
5. **Half day of Recollection** to prepare us for Holy Week will take place on **Saturday, 1st April**, open to all parishioners, starting with Mass at 10am, and ending around 2pm.

III. Almsgiving

*“Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; ... 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 ...” (Mt 6: 1-4)*

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. A good way to give to charity is to contribute to our **‘Lenten Alms box’** in front of the lectern, between now and Easter. The Cardinal has decided that this year the proceeds are to be donated to his special diocesan *Cardinal’s Appeal* which manages and promotes many projects for the Youth, for Marriage & Family, and for the marginalised: there are flyers/envelopes by the Lenten Alms box itself.
2. **CaFOD Fast Day for Lent is Friday, 10th March**. 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 fact that it is not through hand-outs, but through donating tools, skills, and resources that we can turn around the lives of the poorest in the long-term, by giving them a proper livelihood.
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. You can use these at any time, but Lent would be a good time to be generous.
4. The **‘Holy Places’ collection** at the end of Lent, takes place on Good Friday. There is ongoing, untold suffering for the peoples of the Middle East at present, and the Christians are amongst the worst-treated. We owe it to these oppressed Christians to support them well.
5. The Cardinal emphasized in his recent Pastoral Letter that this Lent he also wants us to work on our **Care for the Sick**, and so, a very beautiful way of ‘giving charitably’ would be to give of our time and effort to more caring and attentive to the sick and frail members of our family and community. Please reflect on who in your acquaintance needs that extra care/visit/telephone call from you this Lent.

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, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 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 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. **Special weekday evenings for Confession:** I will make myself available on two extra evenings, **Tuesday 14th March** (6pm–7pm), and **Friday 31st March** (6.30pm–8pm) in the Confessional. I will set up the church with some candles and soft music to welcome anyone who wishes to come for Reconciliation then.
3. In Holy Week there will be two **Penitential Services: Monday 10th April**, 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.
4. 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