



# Prayer

Today, we are all living in a time and place of intense spiritual battle. Only in taking up spiritual arms will we alleviate the spiritual disease that is at the root of so much of the physical and mental suffering in the world today. Most especially we must take up the spiritual arm of penance, for it is a powerful weapon in our spiritual arsenal that we have woefully ignored for far too long.

The Church asks us to make a bodily fast during Lent: to abstain from all meat on all the Fridays of Lent, and to both abstain and fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. (That means eating only one full meal with no more than a small amount of food permitted two other times during the day).

## Why fasting? What did Jesus tell us?

Every year on the first Sunday of Lent, we hear the story of Jesus going out into the desert, fasting for 40 days in preparation for His public ministry, where He is tempted by the Devil.

The Devil wants to trip us up. He is in battle for our souls, so we must arm ourselves with spiritual weapons, with the weapons of charity, prayer and yes fasting. Certainly, it's a spiritual discipline that helps us learn to resist temptation in other ways. But even more importantly it is a call to join in a small way in the bodily sufferings of Jesus Christ the day He was crucified.

Practice makes perfect. Learning how to join our own sufferings with those of Jesus on the Cross takes perseverance. In fasting, we experience in our bodies a small deprivation that we can turn to the service of the Lord. **Remember:** those who never fast, cannot feast!



# Alms giving



When I met with Pope Francis in Rome last January, the Holy Father reminded me and my brother bishops that our first job as bishops was prayer. Perhaps like me, you have many busy responsibilities in life. We all live in a culture which offers many distractions and entertainments. So let's together firmly decide to take these 40 days of Lent to re-commit ourselves to prayer: to contemplating and praising God, to asking for His help, to express our sorrow for our sins, and to offering gratitude for all that we have been given.

What does our Blessed Mother consistently ask of us in all of her apparitions? Prayer and penance, in order to turn our hearts more perfectly toward her Son. This Lent pray not only for yourself but for all those in need: the homeless, the poor, the orphaned, the addicted, the mentally ill, those feeling lonely and abandoned by the world. Above all this Lent, join me in putting first things first: Pray to the Lord!



# Fasting




How do people know we love them? When we love, we act: we comfort, we help, we show we care. As Jesus said "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15).

I would invite all of you good Catholic people, to see the season of Lent as a teaching tool of the Church that instructs us on how we can live virtuous Christian lives all throughout the year. We redouble our efforts during Lent, in a very focused way, in order to develop our spiritual stamina for living our faith well throughout the year. This is how we show both Jesus and our neighbor we love them.

Almsgiving or charity can take many forms: An additional weekly gift to your parish poor box, extra canned goods for your local soup kitchen.

One Catholic told me she stocks extra clean socks to give to the homeless, which they tell her they need even more than food! You can visit an elderly neighbor, reconcile with a difficult family member, or just remember to exercise special kindness for those who irritate us: pray for the driver who cuts us off in traffic! Almsgiving is love in action.

The season of Lent is a great gift to us from the church. Let us persevere in observing it seriously, so that we might experience more profoundly the joy of Christ's Resurrection that we celebrate at Easter. That gift is, indeed, the culmination of our entire Christian life.

  
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