

The Three Pillars of Lent



PRAY



FAST



GIVE



Praying

Lent is the time to start new patterns of prayer. Perhaps I haven't been praying at all. This is a great time to choose to begin. It is important to begin realistically. I can start by simply pausing when I get up and taking a slow, deep breath, and recalling what I have to do this day, and asking for grace to do it as a child of God. I may want to go to bed a half an hour earlier, and get up a half an hour earlier and give myself some time alone to read the readings for the day, and just talk with the Lord about those readings or about the stuff of the day. I may choose to go to Mass each day during Lent. I may choose to get to church on Sunday, just 15 minutes earlier, so I can reflect a bit. Lent may be a time I would want to choose to start to journal the day to day reflections that are coming, the desires I'm naming and asking for, the graces I am being given.



“Prayer is a matter of love. We express love through prayer, and if we pray, it is an indication that we love God. If we do not pray, this indicates that we do not love God, for the measure of our prayer is the measure of our love for God”. ~Archimandrite Zacharias *“The Hidden Man of the Heart”*

When do we spend time in quiet reflection? Do we remember that prayer is not only a time to speak to God, but also a time for God to speak to us? In our times of silent prayer and listening to God, we can hear God asking us to recognize the needs of those around us. Our prayer leads us to compassion and community.



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.



Fasting is not just something we give up in order to receive praise, nor is it meant to provide us with the opportunity to complain. Fasting is a physical act and commitment we make with the hope of becoming a better person. Fasting should help us realize that "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:1-4). It is not the material things in life that bring true happiness and comfort, but in living, growing, hoping, loving, and giving thanks to God that our hearts are nourished. Fasting reminds us that we are not ruled by the things we want; it also reminds us that we are blessed to have even the basic necessities of life that many do not have, such as food, water, and shelter.



Practicing Generosity



Almsgiving has always been an important part of Lent. Lent began with the powerful Isaiah 58, on the Friday and Saturday after Ash Wednesday. It is important to give ourselves the experience of fasting from being un-generous. Generosity is not simply giving my excess clothes to a place where poor people might purchase them. It's not even writing a "generous" cheque at the time a collection is taken up for a cause that benefits the poor. These are wonderful practices. Generosity is an attitude. It is a sense that no matter how much I have, all that I have is gift, and given to me to be shared. It means that sharing with others in need is one of my personal

priorities. That is quite different from assessing all of my needs first, and then giving away what is left over. A spirit of self-less giving means that one of my needs is to share what I have with others. Lent is a wonderful time to practice self-less giving, because it takes practice. This kind of self-sacrificing generosity is a religious experience. It places us in solidarity with the poor who share with each other, without having any excess. It also joins us with Jesus, who gave himself completely, for us. Establishing new patterns of giving will give real life and joy to Lent.



Our prayer and fasting should call us to a greater awareness of the needs of others; then we must act on that awareness. We can give alms by sharing not only our money, but our time and talents as well. By giving to the poor we are saying, "I realize that you are there. You are a child of God and you are important." From almsgiving comes respect, care for the poor, and friendship that stretches our minds and hearts for love of God's creation.