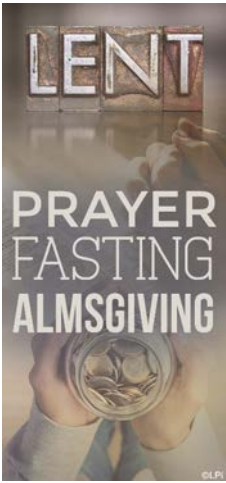


## LENT



This Wednesday, March 2, we as Christians will begin the penitential season of Lent. It may sound odd to say this, but I believe that it is correct to say that we should look forward to Lent because I think we should look at Lent itself as a *gift* to us from the Church.

Many of us have looked at Lent in the past as a time of sacrifice or as a time to do (or not do) things that we like. In other words - it's hard.

But I believe it's the fact that it's practices can be "hard" is what makes Lent a gift!

The entire season of Lent gives us a structure, a guideline, or a roadmap, if you will, to help us to better ourselves. That should be our whole rationale for doing what we do during Lent - making ourselves better persons, and as a result becoming more of the person that Jesus has called us to be.

Sure, there are sacrificial elements to Lent. But as in many other parts of our life these sacrifices are practiced in order to get some hoped for result. The result we want out of Lent is to become closer to Jesus. And we want to be properly disposed to celebrate the greatest feast of all - the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter.

The "gift" is - we don't have to reinvent Lent. The traditional disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are already in place. All we have to do is decide how we will practice each one of these virtues.

Let's look at them individually starting with prayer. Lent affords us the opportunity to increase our prayer life. There are numerous ways that we can do this.

We can start with the greatest prayer of all - the Mass. In addition to Sunday Mass, we can perhaps attend Mass on a daily basis during Lent.

There are also many devotional activities that we can participate in here at St. Elizabeth of the Trinity and elsewhere. Devotional activities can include attending Evening Prayer (Vespers) each Monday at 6:30 p.m. Stations of the Cross is another popular Lenten devotion. You can partake in these communally on Fridays at 6:30 p.m. in English or 7:30 p.m. in Spanish, or you can even pray them on your own.

You can also decide to pray more on your own, or as a family or as part of a group. You can pray the rosary, you can spend quiet, contemplative time before the Lord during Adoration (Tuesdays between 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.). You can read and meditate on the Bible. You can read spiritually focused books. In short, opportunities for increased prayer are only limited by your imagination.

The same is true for the fasting element of our Lenten practices. Usually this involves "giving up" something. We might refrain from eating certain foods, or drinking certain beverages. Fasting can take the form of abstaining from activities that give you pleasure - like maybe watching TV, going to movies, going out to eat, playing video games, spending time on your phone or computer, etc., etc., etc.

Yes, fasting can be difficult, but that's the whole point of it! That is what makes it worthwhile. That is what helps us to grow! Fasting has a purpose. Think of the one hour Eucharistic fast we partake in each time we receive our Lord in the Eucharist. Through this fast we are preparing our body to receive our Lord. We are really helping to make our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, our Lenten fasts help us to prepare to celebrate Easter. In a way, fasts leave a hole in our bodies or in our hearts. We need to welcome this emptiness because it is there where the Lord can come to be with us.

Finally, Lent affords us the opportunity to enhance our almsgiving efforts. This activity usually involves giving donations, of either time or money to various charities. Here at St. Elizabeth we make it easier for you since we have provided an almsgiving opportunity for you to participate in - Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl. Know that 25% of what we collect here will go to our very own St. Vincent de Paul Society. Our entire Ash Wednesday and Holy Thursday will go to them as well so that they can carry out their mission of serving those who are in need. There are also a myriad of other ways to give charitably during Lent - from giving to those looking for help on the street to...you name it!

At the beginning of this article I stated that Lent is a penitential season. To help you get ready for Easter, seriously consider partaking in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We'll have a special service on Monday, April 4 after Evening Prayer. We also offer confessions every Tuesday evening from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., Friday evening from 7:00 to 7:30 p.m. (bilingual), and Saturday afternoons from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The sacrament of Reconciliation is yet another gift offered to us through Christ Himself. For it is here that our sins are forgiven. Please use the season of Lent as a reason to unburden yourselves of your sins

Hopefully you can see why I think Lent is a gift. It is a way to better ourselves and a way to ultimately bring ourselves closer to Christ, which again, is why we have Lent in the first place.

Jim Madura