

Practicing Lent

We should view this season of Lent as an opportunity for us to reflect on the significance of Christ's death, examine our hearts, and confess our sins. It can be a time of spiritual cleansing and renewal. It is not a "law" that we must follow, and there is a great variety of practices that we can try out. Based on the historic practice of Lent, let us try doing something in each of these three categories:

Lent has traditionally been marked by *penitential prayer, fasting, and almsgiving*. Some observe a rigid schedule of fasting on certain days during Lent, especially the giving up of meat, alcohol, sweets, and other types of food. Other traditions do not place as great an emphasis on fasting, but focus on charitable deeds, especially helping those in physical need with food and clothing, or simply the giving of money to charities. Most people focus on Lent as a time of prayer, especially penance, repenting for failures and sin as a way to focus on the need for God's grace. *It is really a preparation to celebrate God's marvellous redemption at Easter*, and the resurrected life that we live, and hope for, as Christians.

1. **Fasting:** Give up something for God. Fasting is not a means to "earn" something from God, but rather a way to learn to curb your appetites and focus more completely on God.
2. **Prayer and Meditation:** Read over the Gospel accounts of Christ's arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Reflect on His suffering, and the tremendous love that it represents. Reflect on your own sin and what it cost Him. Take out some time for prayers, avail the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) and pray with self-reflection the 14 Stations of the Cross.
3. **Almsgiving:** How can you show the love of Christ to others?

Lent is a way to confess our total inadequacy before God, to strip ourselves bare of all pretenses to righteousness, to come before God in dust and ashes. It is a way to empty ourselves of our false pride, of our rationalizations that prevent us from seeing ourselves as needy creatures, of our "perfectionist" tendencies that blind us to the beam in our own eyes.

Through prayer that gives up self, we seek to open ourselves up before God, and to hear anew the call "Come unto me!" We seek to recognize and respond afresh to God's presence in our lives and in our world. We seek to place our needs, our fears, our failures, our hopes, our very lives in God's hands, again. And we seek by abandoning ourselves in Jesus' death to recognize again who God is, to allow His transforming grace to work in us once more and to come to worship Him on Easter Sunday with a fresh victory and hope that goes beyond the new clothes, the Spring flowers, the happy music.

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