

Lenten Reflection

Lent: we get the word Lent from the old English word for spring. What is Lent? Lent is a forty day period before the celebration of the great solemn feast of Easter, when Jesus died and rose back to life again. Victory over our sins was achieved and the gates of Heaven were opened. We get ready for this occasion in order that we won't forget the significance in our lives of the death and resurrection of Our Lord.

Why is Lent forty days? In Scripture, numbers mean something. For example, the number three, three is for the Trinity. Seven is a complete number because in it are all the days of the week. That is why the devil's number is 666 because he is perfectly incomplete. In six days God created all things and on the seventh He rested, meaning that the seventh day was set aside for worship of God, to remind creation where it came from. The devil has creation without the worship of God, which makes him incomplete. He also has no rest, like many people today. The number twelve is important because it is a complete year. There were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve Apostles. The number forty in the Bible was always used as a time of purification so that new life can happen, just as the earth was flooded forty days and nights in the time of Noah. Israel wandered in the desert for forty years to prepare for the promised land. Forty weeks is also the time for a baby to grow. So, forty is a time to purify and to grow new life.

What are we doing during Lent? We are looking at our lives and purifying ourselves in order to live our lives more in conformity to the way Jesus created us to live. We are casting out our false idols, the things we should not be bowing down to and do. We are looking for freedom from slavery and learning a more radical trust in God.

Traditionally in Lent, we focus on three things: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. Why these three things? Because these are often the areas we are not so free.

Prayer takes time and most of us probably feel there is a shortage of time, especially to do the things we want to do. We often guard our free time jealously because it is the only satisfaction we may feel we get. Praying puts one major thing in order, that is that our satisfaction and our joy come from the Lord. Maybe you have never experienced satisfaction or joy in prayer because most of us have only prayed for people and have never experienced the most important part of prayer and that is union with God. Yes, friendship with the most high God, dialogue and teaching from God. If you are not in the habit of it, I recommend reading a chapter of the Gospels each day. Set aside ten minutes at least. Pray and ask God to inspire your hearts. If you have questions, ask them to God. As you read, know that everything in there was put there for a reason. So, ask questions as you read. If a verse does not make sense, sit with it and ask the Holy Spirit to instruct you, then keep reading. See what answers you get. See what instruction you get and consolation or encouragement. Remember this Book is written personally to you, to help you meet, know and love the living God and to experience His love. It is important for us to know this great God who we could spend all eternity with.

Fasting is when we give up legitimate things so that we have the power to give up illegitimate things. Many people give up something for Lent, but be sure and ask yourself why you are doing this? How will this make me grow closer to God? How will this purify my life? Lent is not a period of Catholic dieting. The fasting is meant to order things in our life. For example, we have made a switch in the world where in we pursue pleasure for its own sake. That makes the pleasure not so enjoyable. The truth is pleasure is suppose to be a by product of doing things well. When we seek to do things in order, there is pleasure in that. If we eat for pleasure, and not for the purpose of fuelling our bodies, it will quickly become

unhealthy. If we try to let small things comfort us and seek comfort, we will end up unfulfilled. Drugs are a shortcut to pleasure and the user of them never ends up happy. However, our body produces many of these same drugs and releases them when we live rightly. We are to do what is right and often there is a reward, and a double reward, because we live well and the pleasure is real and more satisfying. When we fast we should fast from seeking pleasure alone, and let it be by a product of living well. We must cast out the idol that pleasure is to be pursued at all costs because the cost of that will be everything and we will end up with nothing. We must pursue Christ at all costs because then the reward will be everything. When you are fasting, ask yourself why and make sure it draws you closer to God. You don't have to give up food- you can give up a pillow or longer showers - and make your life with God your satisfaction. Ask Him through your fasting to hunger more for Him.

Almsgiving is where we try to remove our trust in money and material things and give that trust back to God. In this day and age, we have much, even the poor have many possessions. To get to Heaven we must learn to trust in God. Money is a terrible idol and a cruel taskmaster. It is a shaky foundation and all who put their trust in it for security will be very sorry. With money there is the law of 25%. If you have a person who relies on money they will always say they need 25 % more to be secure, no matter how much they have. Almsgiving says, "These gifts and talents from which I made this money, come from God and I will trust Him to keep me secure. You and I are not here to build material dynasties but to build up the Kingdom of God. Whatever earthly thing you build will one day disappear. However, if you lead one person to Christ, that can last many generations. Many of us are from old Catholic families, mine on both sides is generations old, perhaps some thousand years old. At one point, someone brought faith to my ancestors and they have handed it on down to me. There is no business that old, except faith. What does it matter if we gain the whole world and lose our souls? Our money won't save us. Our comfort now could end up condemning us. Only our trust in God will save us and build a lasting legacy. They are many things we could do in this area. You will see great miracles as you make sacrifices and put God as your strong hold. One lady I know got rid of one thing each day for Lent. It is wise to ask God what to do.

There will be a temptation to only expect what is earthly possible in Lent, what we can do ourselves. If we want to have a successful Lent, we have to look to what God can change in our lives. My recommendation is to follow a Lenten program. Here are programs:

<https://praymoreretreat.org/>

<https://dynamiccatholic.com/best-lent-ever>

<http://lentreflections.com/>

Since we are trying to see what God can accomplish in our lives, I encourage you to get a journal and reflect on these three things each day:

God, how are you showing me love today?

God, how are you wanting to instruct me today?

God, which areas of my life do you want to bring more healing to?

You will note by making this prayer that God will often allow things to happen that make you react. Take these things to God, ask Him to heal and reveal what is necessary to become a active person instead of a reactive person.