

Trade pleasures for prayer this Lent

On Ash Wednesday, we began Lent. Lent runs from Ash Wednesday until the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. Pope John Paul II, our late great pope, made the following statement. "Lent is a time of profound truth which brings conversion, restores hope and by putting everything back in its proper order brings peace and optimism."

Each person has the opportunity during Lent to embrace the truth. The truth is that each of us is imperfect. We are all sinners. But, we are loved sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus our Savior.

For each of us conversion needs to be an ongoing process. Sometimes, our lives get out of the proper order. Lent is a 40-day opportunity to get our lives back in the proper order. We examine how we are living. Are we doing what God wants us to be doing? If not, how do we correct the situation?

The two chief characteristics of Lent are: 1) the penitential significance and 2) the relation to baptism.

Lent is a penitential season of 40 days. Jesus fasted for 40 days. During Lent we are asked to fast for 40 days.

Lent is a special season of the liturgical year where we focus upon the love Jesus has for each of us. Love is proven in sacrifice. We reflect upon the sacrifice, which Jesus made to bring us salvation.

St. John of the Cross once said: "Love is repaid by love alone." During Lent we try to give more of our time to Jesus. There are 168 hours in the week. How much of that time do we give to Jesus?

Attending daily mass is a wonderful Lenten practice. On the Fridays of Lent the Stations of the Cross are an excellent opportunity to walk with Jesus on the way to His crucifixion. Praying the Stations of the Cross is a profound spiritual and highly emotional experience. The Stations of the Cross help us to appreciate the totality of the love Jesus has for us and the enormous sacrifice He made for our salvation.

Lent is the season when we make sacrifices to show our love for Jesus. People give up pleasures, which they enjoy. People decide not to eat candy, not to eat desserts, not to drink alcohol, and to watch less television. Some people do not snack between meals.

We try to eat less, drink less, and pray more. Quitting smoking is a good idea for Lent and a good idea for our health.

Almsgiving is an important part of Lent. Instead of buying a candy bar, or a six-pack of beer, or cigarettes, put that money in the poor box or give it to the local pregnancy center. By doing so our sacrifices are helping other people.

The readings for masses during Lent reflect the themes of baptismal renewal and penance. We are preparing to celebrate the Paschal mystery.

The catechumens are preparing for the celebration of the sacraments of Christian Initiation. The faithful will renew their baptismal promises.

Lent is an ideal time to make significant decisions concerning our lives. If a person has a problem with alcohol, join Alcoholics Anonymous. If a person has a problem with drugs, join Narcotics Anonymous. If a person has a problem with gambling, join Gamblers Anonymous.

If a person wants to lose weight, join a support group. If a person has a problem with Internet pornography, have a filter installed on the computer. This Lent, let us keep our eyes focused on the crucifix and reflect upon the love Jesus has for each of us.

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