

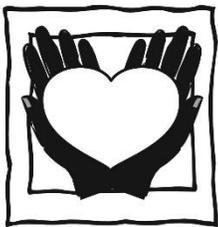
Preparing For The Season of Lent



Anything worth doing is worth preparing for.

Just imagine that this Lent is going to be different from every other Lent we've experienced. Imagine that there will be many graces offered us this year. Let's even imagine that God is going to help transform our lives, with greater freedom, greater joy, deeper desires for love and service.

Preparing our hearts.



Lent will be this wonderful season of grace for us if we give ourselves to it. So, in these days before Lent, we need to prepare our hearts. We need to prepare by realizing how much we want to grow in freedom, how much we need to lighten our spirits and experience some real joy, and how much some parts of our lives really need changing. Preparing our hearts is a process of preparing our desires. This means practicing our sense of anticipation. If we imagine Lent as an "ordeal" or a time we dread in some way, then we've already pre-disposed ourselves to not get very much out of it. These days before Lent are a time to start anticipating something wonderful that is about to happen.

Focusing on what God wants to give us.

Our sense of excitement and anticipation will grow more easily if we begin to imagine what God wants to give us. There is really something coming that we can truly look forward to. If we get too focused on ourselves, and what we are going to do or not do, we could risk missing the gift God wants to give us. We have to keep aware of the fact that grace comes from God. This is about God's great desire to bless us. Then, it is easier for us to imagine that what we really *want* to do is place ourselves in a space to *receive* what God wants to give us.

Getting ready for Ash Wednesday.

Taking some time to get ready for Lent will ensure that we aren't going to miss the first week or two of Lent, because we are just getting started. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, but we want to be ready to really take off on that day, rather than just beginning to think about Lent on that day. Part of what makes a vacation or a special anniversary so special is the build-up to it. ***Before we get to Ash Wednesday, we should start asking ourselves some questions*** and we should start with some preparations. ***"What does God want to give me this year?"*** This question may require that we *slow down a bit and listen to our inner spirit*. For example, even if we're very busy, we realize we're hungry when we hear our stomach start "growling." ***"What am I going to be doing on Ash Wednesday?"*** Too often, Ash Wednesday is like every other day, except that we manage to get to church and get ashes on our foreheads. Is there anything else we can do on Ash Wednesday? How will fasting and abstaining happen for me, for my family on that special day?



Planning our journey with others.

If you have a spouse, or children, or some close friends, or distant e-mail companions, you can begin now to talk about how we will support each other in this Lenten journey. The anticipation and the preparation is transformed with the companionship of family and close friends. Let's begin now to tell others about our desires. Let's help support others' expectations. Let's help others see that Lent doesn't have to be something we avoid, and certainly can't be reduced to "giving up candy." We can help our loved ones to begin to imagine what they could receive from God in these days.

Getting ready means getting our homes ready too.

We need to choose to let our homes be a place that will help raise our minds and hearts to God. Our world is full of so many images that lure our minds and hearts elsewhere. Some of the following symbols put in a prominent place in our home could help us on our Lenten journey:

- A Crucifix in a central place in our home. Even a child's drawing of Jesus' death for us can be a powerful, stirring reminder of God's love.
- A Candle to represent the gift of our Lord's Light in the midst of all darkness. If we light this candle whenever we feel tempted away from the Light of Jesus, whenever we need special graces, imagine how powerful experiencing the lighting of the New Fire will be at the Easter Vigil.
- A Bible to remind us how important the Word is for us during Lent. Imagine when we feel a new inspiration or a softening of our heart, or just a sense of God's love we pick up that Bible and reflect on God's Word – God's love for us.
- A simple bowl (a symbol for almsgiving) on our kitchen table can help us be in solidarity with those who have so much less than we do. The key is to give a focus

to our sacrifices as a family - eating or living more simply during Lent - in a way which directly connects those sacrifices with the needs of others.

- Other symbols could be water, an ongoing reminder of our journey to the font of baptism for the renewal of commitment and life in Christ; or sand, a reminder that God led the people in their journey in the desert. Jesus himself reenacted that journey to face his own temptations. The desert can be a place of retreat for us, where there is a freedom from distractions.

The symbols in our home, and the concrete choices we make can *shape* the way we will begin Lent, as individuals and as a family.

Preparing doesn't take much time.

It doesn't take a lot of time to prepare for the beginning of Lent. It just takes desire and focus. God can do so much with that. We can give God more of a space to touch our hearts if we begin to establish some simple patterns. We could wake up each morning, and for something like a half a minute to a minute, stand by the edge of our beds, and just ask the Lord for specific helps or graces to get ready to begin Lent. Whatever we try to say, our Lord can understand the Spirit trying to speak through our simple words. And each night, in the days ahead, we can practice giving thanks to God before we go to bed. This simple pattern, in the morning and evening can stir our spirits to look forward to and prepare for Lent as a season of grace.

Culled from Praying Lent – Creighton University Online Ministries

