

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering **hope** and **joy** in the Catholic faith.

2010 Special Lent Edition

One Minute Meditations

Not the old life

When Jesus rose from the dead, he didn't just resume his old life; he was given a new and glorious life. That is what awaits all those who follow him.



Ashes to ashes ...

To ancient Jews, wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes showed repentance and humility, and acted as a penance. Today, wearing the ashes of Ash Wednesday is meant to show our repentance but also acts as a witness of our faith. Take the opportunity to explain the practice when others ask why you wear the ashes.

A prayer for Lent

"God of all mercy and steadfast love, we do not always live the way you want us to. Forgive us. Help us during this season of Lent to examine how we can be more faithful followers of Jesus Christ, your son. Guide us in our pilgrimage of discipleship. May our words and actions truly reflect your will for us. Amen."

The Essential Catholic Prayer Book, Liguori Publications.

Make the journey back to God during Lent

Why do we begin the holy season of Lent with ashes on our foreheads – a sign of repentance? Throughout the year we may have turned from God in many small ways and perhaps significant ones, too. While God respects the freedom he has given us as his children, he urges us to come back to him to reconcile. Our wise Father knows that it's the only way we can be truly happy.

The Church has identified three tools we can use to make our Lenten journey back to God more effective: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These tools will help us to clear the static in our connection to God and help us take our places as his true children.

Prayer

"... When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (Matthew 6: 5-6)

Conversational prayer. All relationships need nurturing — even our relationship with God. It is in prayer that we can confide our deepest desires, hurts, needs.

It is in prayer that we discern God's voice. Especially during Lent, make time every day to

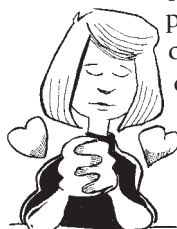
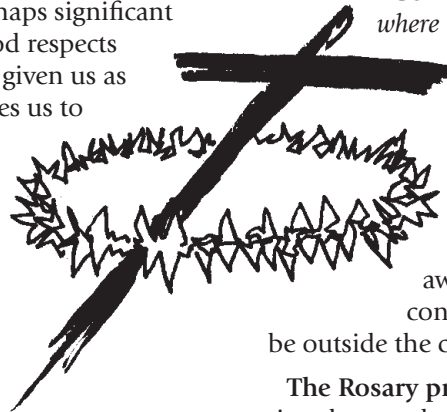
talk to God and grow in love with him. Remember, he finds everything about you interesting.

Community prayer. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Praying in a group not only brings God into your circle, it also makes members aware of the needs and concerns of others who may be outside the circle.

The Rosary prayer. The Rosary is a time-honored way to pray to Jesus and his mother. This year why not make the Rosary your Lenten prayer? If time is limited, do a decade at a time and watch them add up by the end of the day. Consider offering a special Rosary in honor of the Year for Priests. Go to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website for more details: <http://www.usccb.org/yearforpriests/prayers.shtml>.

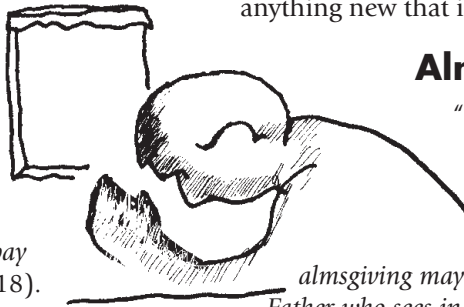
The Stations of the Cross prayers. Walking the Stations of the Cross is a powerful way to pray during Lent. If your parish doesn't offer a Stations of the Cross prayer service as a community, take a few moments each week to stop and meditate at each of the Stations displayed in your church. Reflect on Jesus' journey from judgment to burial.

Private Eucharistic prayer. Praying before the Eucharist is one of the most sacred places to pray. Consider arriving for Mass early to spend extra time in prayer before the tabernacle.



Fasting

“... When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you” (Matthew 6:16-18).



Almsgiving

“... When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your

almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Matthew 6:2-4).

Fasting from food. Voluntary fasting from food strengthens our skill of self denial. It is difficult and can be uncomfortable but it reminds us of Jesus’ suffering. Plus, fasting leaves an open space we can fill with God’s spirit. Prayerful fasting can increase our hunger and thirst for God.

Fasting from bad habits. We all have areas in our life we need to change. Maybe we watch too much television, shop too much, eat too much or drink too much. Too much of anything is an unhealthy distraction from our relationship with God and throws our lives out of balance. By fasting, we deny our own wants and open up space for what God wants. Plus, we become less wrapped up in ourselves and instead have the opportunity to focus on the needs of others.

Fasting from luxury. For many of us, putting food on the table or buying new clothing when we need it is not a huge concern. That’s not true for many people in our own communities who need our help to get even the basics. To understand what that is like, research an impoverished nation to see what people there eat in a typical day. Then spend a day eating the same foods in the same quantities.

Fasting from excess. Many of us have clothing, books, toys, or even household items in perfectly good shape that we don’t need or use. Instead of letting the



“Gimme 5.” Many organizations like Catholic Relief Services or Catholic Charities can do a great deal of good with just \$5. During Lent, whenever you have a \$5 bill, consider putting it into a jar. This includes \$5 bills you receive in change at the grocery store, the bank, the gas station, or even if you find one in your pocket, add it to the jar. At Easter, donate what you’ve collected to a relief organization and know that it will be put to great use.

Donate your labor. Money isn’t always the answer. Many of the poor need services they can’t afford. If you can paint, cook, or do carpentry, donate some time to assist an agency or person in need. Your parish or diocese may already have just such a ministry that you can join.

Offer mercy. Do one or more of the Corporal Works of Mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. Or, consider the Spiritual Works of Mercy: admonish the sinner, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive injuries, and pray for the living and the dead.

Open their eyes. During Lent, you can help a child to read, an adult to succeed in his job, a senior maintain her independence — just by donating your old eyeglasses. Lions Clubs International has a nationwide program to recycle eyeglasses and provide sight to low-income people who need it. To find a recycling center in your area, call the Lions Clubs at 630-571-5466 or visit the website: www.lionsclubs.org.

Q & A **I want to pray more, especially during Lent, but it’s hard to concentrate. What can I do?**

Ever wonder how you can be riveted by a cheap novel or mindless TV show for hours, but spend no more than a few minutes in prayer before your mind wanders?

Believe it or not, distractions can be useful in enriching our prayer life. Our minds wander to those things that are really important to us. We might as well admit to them and make them a part of our prayer.

For example, if your prayer wanders, bring it back to the point ... “Lord, thank you for the beautiful gift of my home and its comfort. Of course, I better clean out the gutters or the roof will leak all over the furniture. That would be bad, even if the furniture isn’t as nice as my neighbor’s. They have so much money. But forgive me Lord for feeling envy, and help me to be grateful for what I have. Also help me to show my neighbors the love of Christ, the only possession worth having.” And so on.

The idea is to acknowledge the distraction and ask God’s help in overcoming its source. Then use it as a tool to get back on track.

Think of prayer as a conversation between two people who love each other. So there is no one right way to pray. As in any loving relationship, it is most rewarding when you talk to your loved one as often as possible. Pope John Paul II said, “Pray any way you like, so long as you do pray.” God is always ready to listen.

Remember, prayer is not a rigid routine we have to get right. It’s a conversation with someone we love who loves us back.

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