

Lent and Jesus

Lent begins with the encouragement to turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel. Central to our belief in the Good News is the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Often enough we approach Lent with resolutions to do better. We want to be more patient and more loving. We want to draw closer to God but we are not always sure how to do this. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are all good methods to help us open our minds and hearts to God but how we use them is of equal importance.



The purpose of any Lenten practice is not self-improvement. The purpose is to become more the person God made us to be by a deeper intimacy with Jesus Christ. We are most ourselves when we accept the love Jesus has for us. In order to do this we need to become immersed in Jesus, not in ourselves. Jesus Christ is the most beautiful person ever to walk the face of the earth. He is the Son of God. He is love incarnate in our world.

Thus, whether we give something up or do something positive, whether we are involved in prayer, fasting or almsgiving, the goal of Lent is to become immersed in Jesus. The danger is that we become preoccupied with ourselves. We can give something up to prove to ourselves that we can do it. We can give alms to feel good about what we do for others. We can fast simply because we want to lose weight. None of these reasons are worthy of this beautiful season of Lent.

Lent is an opportunity to get caught up in God, not in ourselves. This is the true sense of self-denial. Self-denial does not mean putting ourselves down or beating ourselves up. Self-denial means forgetting about ourselves so we can find our true identity and worth in Jesus Christ and through His love.

However, our tendency today is not self-denial. It is self-absorption. Our culture, our commercials, our soap operas all point us inward to self-absorption. Thus it becomes all the more critical that we move beyond ourselves if we are to grow spiritually. People often wonder if they are simply talking to themselves when they pray. The best way to move beyond this and to move beyond self-absorption is to begin prayer with a passage of Scripture. You might take the Gospel for the following Sunday.

After quieting down by saying a decade of the Rosary, you might ask Jesus for the grace you need in order to pray. Prayer is not a matter of our achievement or accomplishment. Prayer is our response to the action of God. You might ask for the grace of openness or courage or listening. Then read the passage through slowly. Return to the grace you asked for in order to pray. You may still want to ask for that grace or you may realize you need something else from Jesus in order to pray.

Now you should read the passage again, this time stopping wherever you find movement in yourself. You may be challenged by this living Word of God or comforted or encouraged. Use your imagination to enter into the scene. Be there with Jesus and enter into conversation with Him. Picture the scene.

Imagine the people and the surroundings. If Jesus is speaking to an individual, be that person. If Jesus is speaking to a crowd, put yourself in the crowd.

Remember you are not simply reading words. You are meeting a person: Jesus Christ. In addition to talking with Jesus about what He is saying, you want to get a better appreciation and knowledge of Jesus as a person. In your conversation with Jesus do not try to force some profound meaning. Don't try to run faster than grace. Simply talk with Jesus as you would with a trusted friend. Let God be God. You are the creature not the one in control. Allow the Word of God to sit within you and enter into conversation with Jesus about your reaction to what He is saying.

You may get distracted during the prayer. Simply return to your focus on Jesus. Finally, this time of prayer should end in some formal way. You may pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary, a Glory be to the Father or some words that come from your heart. Enjoy Jesus this Lent.

May the Lord give you peace.

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