

# WHAT THE HECK IS LENT, ANYWAY?

Youth and Family Resource for Lent 2021



**W**hat the heck is Lent anyway? An old, dusty tradition without much modern meaning? A ritual you partake in because you're Catholic, and well, that's just what Catholics do? A good excuse to give up chocolate and get into shape? I believe that Lent shouldn't be any of those things, and if it *has* become like that for you, perhaps it's high time be to recover its true meaning and significance.

Lent is above all **an intentional season for intensifying your relationship with God**. Typically thought of as a kind of wilderness experience, Lent is a period of purposefully denying yourself your typical go-to comforts, in order to bring out a much-needed **hunger for God** instead. Lent involves deliberate discomfort, through the removal of superficial "blankets," in order to receive *spiritual* comfort from the One whose comfort is real and everlasting. The paradigmatic story for Lent is of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Let's take a look:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, **command these stones to become loaves of bread.**" But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city, and **set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down;** for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him **all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."** Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Take note of the 3 specific temptations that Jesus faces. First, to turn stones to food and satisfy his hunger. Second, to jump off the temple top and have his angels rescue him. Third, to rule the world, but with the devil as his master. Here's a useful way of interpreting these temptations, so as to see them as our own temptations too. The first, turning stones to bread, symbolizes the urge of giving in to bodily **pleasures**.

The second, calling to aid the majestic display of a heavenly parade, symbolizes the desire to be **honored** and noticed. The third — the temptation to **power** — symbolizes our obsession with getting what we want, often using others as a means to our selfish ends.

**T**hese types of temptations should all sound familiar, but before we talk about how to tackle them, I think Jesus himself offers some very sage advice. Just a few verses later, he says the following:

Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, **when you give alms**, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And **when you pray**, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. And **when you fast**, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

In his speech, Jesus is cautioning “religious” people who like to wear their religion on their sleeves a bit too much, those who like to show off their piety.

Instead, he says, when you give, don’t tell people; when you pray, do it privately; when you fast, aim to appear healthy and well-fed. What a good way to practice humility and authenticity! Even more interestingly, Jesus here has provided exactly the antidotes to our 3 temptations to *pleasure, honor and power* which we just outlined. These antidotes are *fasting, almsgiving and prayer*. Can you see the connection?

**Fasting** means that you deny yourself certain *pleasures*. **Almsgiving** means that instead of seeking **honor** for yourself, during Lent you intentionally seek the good of others. And **praying** means that instead of focusing on what *you* want, you ask God what *his* will is for your life.



**S**o there we have it! Three very practical ways of getting closer to God during Lent. What I especially like, is that according to these Bible verses, Lent should be a time to focus not only on what to give up, but also on what to *take up* — for 40 days. In that sense, Lent can be a very positive experience, as you develop excellent spiritual habits that help you to “get outside” of yourself, and focus more deliberately on God and others.

If you want to go the extra mile and crush Lent this year, I encourage you to be super Christ-like, brilliantly Biblical, and try something creative in

each of these 3 areas- fasting, almsgiving and prayer. For example, last year during Lent I tried to give up all alcohol as my personal fast. For the almsgiving piece, I packed my wallet full of 10-dollar bills, and tried to give one away every day. As for prayer, I attended Mass every single day. To be sure, I feel strange telling you this, because aren't I kind of breaking Jesus' rule of keeping my spiritual goals to myself, and not "sounding my trumpet?" It really is a good habit to get into — not telling others about your spiritual success. But I do hope that this gives you some idea of the sorts of ways in which you can practice Lent, in a way that makes sense for you.

**W**ith that said, here is a *Personal Commitment to Lent* that I hope you all decide to make, in all 3 areas. You can discuss this as a family, and help keep each other accountable. I'd love to hear what sorts of things you come up with. Finally, know that I, and all the staff at Our Lady of the Lake, will be praying for you!

### PERSONAL COMMITMENT FOR LENT

One thing I will deliberately **fast** from during Lent is \_\_\_\_\_

**IDEAS:** Coffee, alcohol, chocolate, meat, soda, no eating after dinner, throw away 40 things for 40 days, don't buy anything you don't need, no gossiping, stop being critical, TV, social media, music, limited phone time, less sleep, no pillow, no warm/long showers

One way in which I will intentionally **give alms** during Lent is \_\_\_\_\_

**IDEAS:** Giving money to the poor, save the money you would spend on going out and give it away, spend time with a lonely person, send an appreciative text to someone every day, verbally affirm someone every day (perhaps call them), bring positivity to an environment, pray for an enemy every day, do a chore for your family every day

One way I will mindfully draw closer to God (**pray**) during Lent is \_\_\_\_\_

**IDEAS:** Pray the liturgy of the hours (perhaps just morning/evening), read through the lectionary readings each day, pray the rosary, pray the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"), watch a Mass daily, spend time with God every day (talking or in silence), read through a Gospel(s)

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For more youth and family resources, view our monthly Youth Playlist at [www.ollparish.com/youth-playlist](http://www.ollparish.com/youth-playlist).

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