

MAKING LENT SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY



*Ideas for Practicing Prayer,
Fasting, and Almsgiving*

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Spring training

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Every year, at this time, baseball players report to spring training: a time of preparation for the long baseball season that is coming up. At spring training, they practice the fundamentals: hitting, fielding, base running, pitching, and so on. Even players who have been around for a long time need to go through spring training to sharpen their skills. Each spring, hope springs eternal as teams get excited about their chance to win a championship.



Spring training usually lasts about 6 weeks and involves a lot of hard work that is not very glamorous. And yet, the players are filled with excitement because they know they are preparing for something they love: the chance to play baseball and to do their best to win a championship.



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Their goal, of course, is victory. With the right preparation and hard work, they know that they will be ready to celebrate when the trophy is awarded.



As followers of Jesus, we also spend about 6 weeks every year – 40 days to be exact – during which we participate in “training” so that we can sharpen our skills for discipleship. Does anyone know what these 40 days are called?

(click) LENT

Just as baseball players work hard at the fundamentals, we also work hard during Lent to practice the fundamentals of our faith: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We’ll talk more about these in a few minutes.

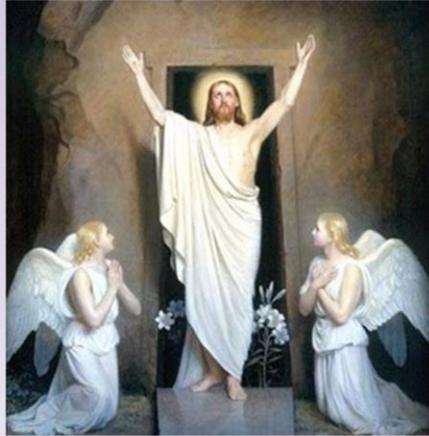


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During Lent, we do some hard work and it is not always very glamorous and yet, we are excited because we know that we are preparing to do something we love: follow Jesus more closely.

Our goal, too, is victory! Does anybody know what victory we are preparing to celebrate?

(advance slide)



Easter: Jesus' Victory Over Sin and Death

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The victory we celebrate is a victory that was won for us! Jesus defeated sin and death by rising from the dead after his crucifixion. On Easter, we celebrate this victory.

In baseball, spring training prepares players to play a long hard season, battling team after team, and even then, only one team will win in the end.

For us, Lent prepares us to celebrate a victory FIRST and then to go forth each day after Easter to live our lives knowing that sin and death have been defeated



Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday
after the first full moon of spring.

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So, in order to find out when Lent begins, we have to find out what date Easter falls on each year. Easter is a moveable feast and it's date is determined by finding out when the first full moon of spring takes place.



This is how the Jewish Feast of Passover is determined. The Jewish people celebrate Passover each Spring as the event through which God led them from slavery to freedom through the waters of the Red Sea.

For us, Easter is our Passover feast, when Jesus led us from the slavery of sin to freedom in his Resurrection through the waters of baptism.



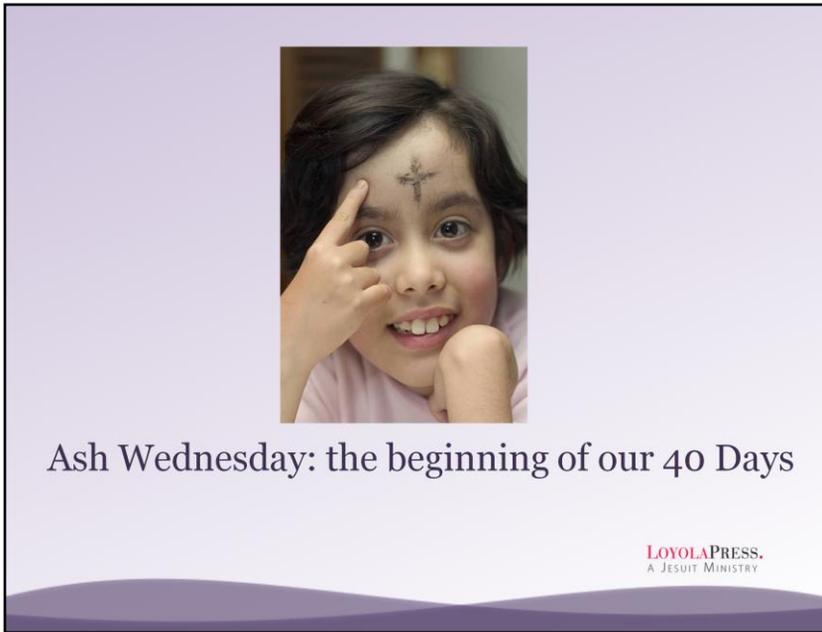
Catechumens – those preparing for baptism on Holy Saturday

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It is for this reason that the Church celebrates baptisms at the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil, to celebrate how these people have died to sin and have been born again to new life in the Risen Christ.

The people preparing to be baptized at Easter are referred to as catechumens and they use the last 40 days before Easter to make their last, intense preparations for baptism.

The rest of the Church, then, prepares along with them, as we recall our baptism and prepare to renew our baptismal promises at Easter. These forty days of preparation have come to be known as Lent – a word which means “lengthening”, referring to the lengthening of daylight during spring time.

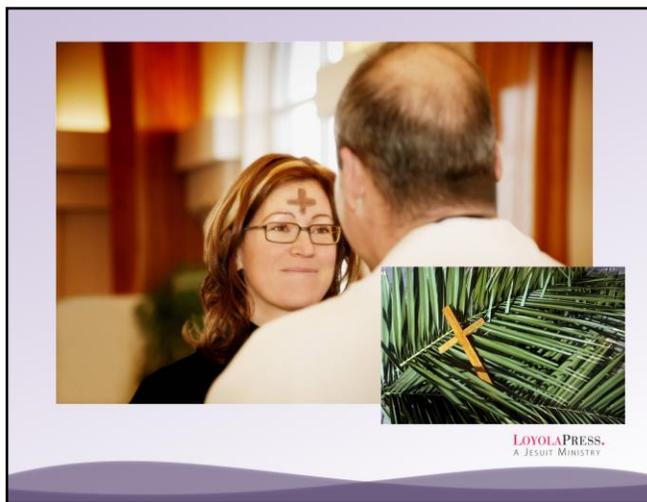


Once you know the date of Easter, you can determine when Lent begins by counting backwards 40 days beginning with Holy Saturday (and skipping the Sundays of Lent since Sundays are not days of penance). You will land on a Wednesday. Who knows what we call this Wednesday on which Lent begins?

(click) ASH WEDNESDAY

(Show a calendar of the current year and determine/indicate when Easter falls and then, when Ash Wednesday falls.)

**Note: another way of counting the 40 days of Lent is to count backwards from Holy Thursday (since Lent technically ends on the evening of Holy Thursday). You will land on a Sunday, the First Sunday of Lent. The days preceding that the First Sunday of Lent – beginning with Ash Wednesday – are like a prelude to the 40 days. Either way of counting “works” since 40 is a biblically symbolic number and not to be approached literally.*



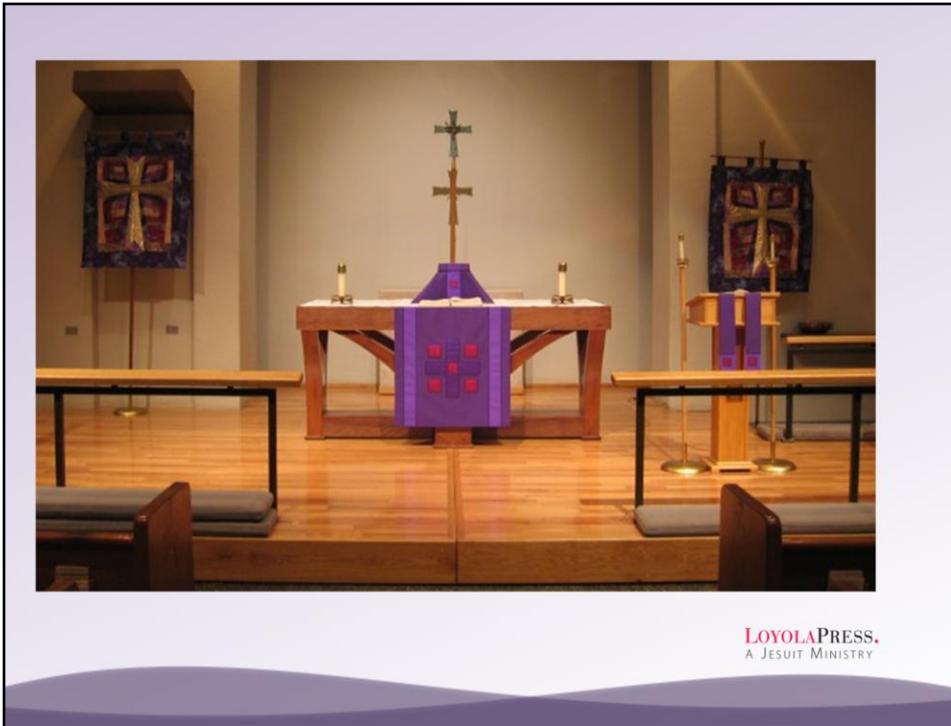
Ashes remind us that, without Jesus' victory over death, this is all that we would have to look forward to. Death would be the end. Instead, because of his Resurrection, we now share in his eternal life.

Does anyone know where we get the ashes that are used on Ash Wednesday?

(click) They come to us from burning the palms used on Palm Sunday last year.

When the ashes are placed on your forehead in the Sign of a Cross, the minister will say the words:

“Repent, and believe in the Gospel” Or
“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”. You do not have to respond but just receive the ashes silently.



Beginning with Mass on Ash Wednesday, you'll notice the color purple being used in the décor as well as the priest's vestments. Purple is a color that symbolizes repentance and Lent is a time for us to repent from our sins.

Also, during Lent, we do not sing the Gloria or the Alleluia. By going without these 2 joyous parts of the Mass throughout Lent, we will appreciate them all the more when they return come Easter!



Joel 2:12-18 “Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting...”

2Cor 5:20-6:2 “Be reconciled to God! Now is the acceptable time!”

Mt 6:1-6, 16-18 “When you give alms...
When you are praying...
When you fast...”

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The Scripture readings for Ash Wednesday, announce the plan, so to speak, for Lent. The readings emphasize three things that we are to focus on during Lent. Can anyone guess what those 3 things are by looking at this slide?

(accept answers and then advance slide)



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2Cor 5:20-6:2 “Be reconciled to God! Now is the acceptable time!”

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When you are **praying...**

When you **fast...**”

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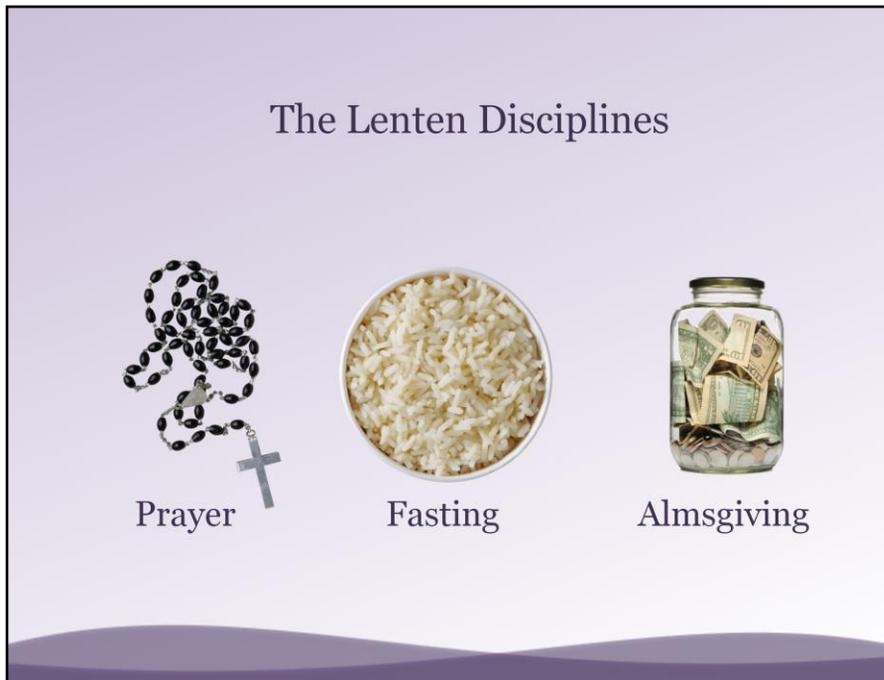
During Lent, the 3 things we are called to focus on are:

- Prayer
- Fasting
- Almsgiving (sharing with the poor)

Let’s take a closer look at these 3.



I'm sure you're familiar with something called the "domino effect" which means that, all you need to do is knock down one domino and others will fall as a result.

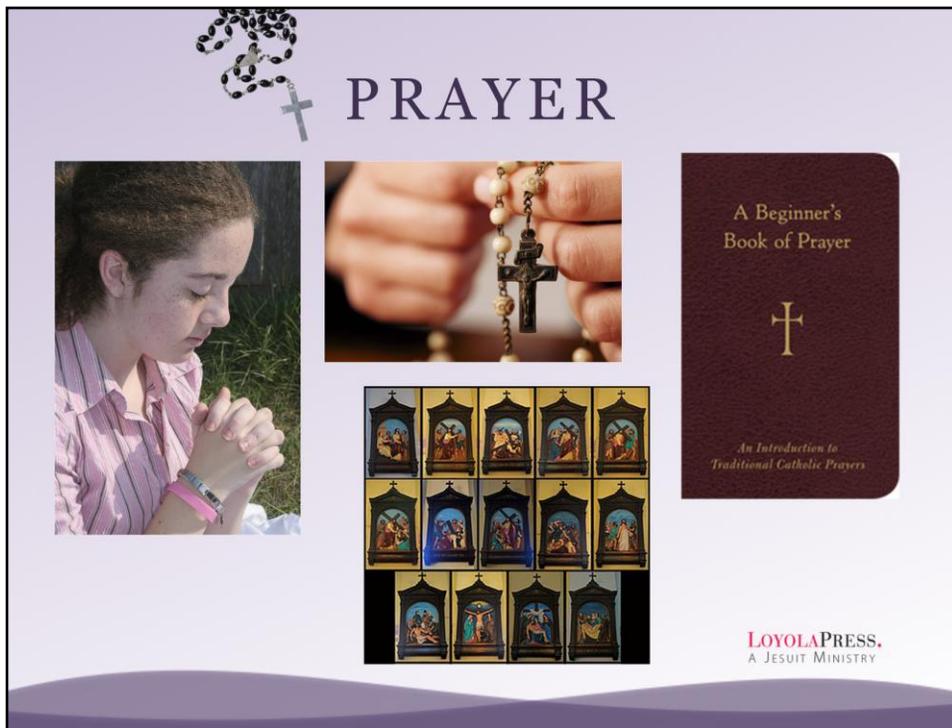


When it comes to changing our lives, Jesus tells us that if we focus on these 3 things – prayer, fasting, and almsgiving – it will have a “domino effect” on our lives. The more we pray, fast, and give alms, the more we will be able to overcome various sinful habits and weaknesses in our lives that are keeping us from living in a healthy, life-giving relationship with God.

We call these 3, The Lenten Disciplines. In spring training, baseball players learn to discipline themselves. As followers of Christ, we too need discipline so that we will be strong enough to overcome temptations.



If a relationship is going to be healthy, there has to be good communication. We need to talk and listen to one another. The same is true of our relationship with God. We need to be in good communication with God, talking to him as well as listening to him.



We can talk to God in many ways:

- We can pray in our own words
- We can use traditional prayers
- We can pray the Rosary
- We can pray the Stations of the Cross

- (Discuss students' experiences with these and offer resources available to assist them)



It's also important that we listen to God. We can do this in many ways:

- By reading the Bible
- Reading the lives of the saints
- Going to Mass more often
- Listening to sacred music
- Experiencing more silence to allow God to speak to us in thoughts, ideas, feelings, memories, etc.)

(Discuss students' experience of these and offer resources and information that can assist them in your parish)



Let's talk now about Fasting.

The truth is, we desire many, many things. And, we live in a culture that offers us many, many things. The problem is, things do not bring us true happiness.

Lent is a time for us to remember that our true desire is for God. It is a time to remind ourselves that our true joy comes from God and not from things. It is a time to face up to our temptations and to practice the discipline we need to overcome them.

This is why Catholics often “give things up” during Lent. We think of things that are pleasing to us but not necessary and perhaps even unhealthy and we promise to go without them during the 40 days of Lent.



Lent is a time for us to simplify our meals. Fasting is refraining from eating large portions of food and instead eating very small portions or even skipping meals if we are healthy enough to do so.

During Lent, Catholics fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday Fasting. This means having only one full meal to maintain one's strength. Two smaller meals are permitted according to one's needs, but they should not together equal the one full meal. Eating solid foods between meals is not permitted. Catholics from age 18 through age 59 are required to fast.

Also, on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all the Fridays of Lent, Catholics 14 years and older abstain from eating meat which is a symbol of prosperity. We strive to eat in a more simple fashion.



FASTING



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Our own fasting reminds us that there are many people who are hungry and do not have the food and luxuries that we have. Fasting makes us more sensitive to the needs of others and reminds us to share what we have with others.



ALMSGIVING



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And that brings us to the last of our Lenten disciplines which is almsgiving. To give alms is to share money, clothing, food, and other material possessions with those less fortunate.



ALMSGIVING



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We can give alms by going through our material possessions and choosing to give away some of them. We can go through our closets, we can go through our pantries, and we can go through our piggy banks to gather clothing, food, or money that can be shared with those less fortunate. We can also share our time with those in need if we do not have much of our own to give away.



ALMSGIVING

“A Copernican Revolution”



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By practicing the 3 disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during Lent, we have an opportunity to experience what is known as a “Copernican (Kuh-PURR-nih-kin) Revolution.” you know, Copernicus was the Polish astronomer who first proved that the earth revolves around the sun and not the other way around as many believed. To have a Copernican revolution is to come to the realization that the world doesn’t revolve around you but that our lives revolve around God. All 3 Lenten disciplines, but especially almsgiving, can help to foster this conversion within us.

STRATEGIES

1. Make THREE “resolutions” each week of Lent – one for each of the disciplines (resolutions need not be different each week).
2. In addition, make a commitment to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent and prepare for it by making a good examination of conscience.



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Here are some strategies that can help us to remain faithful to our Lenten practices.

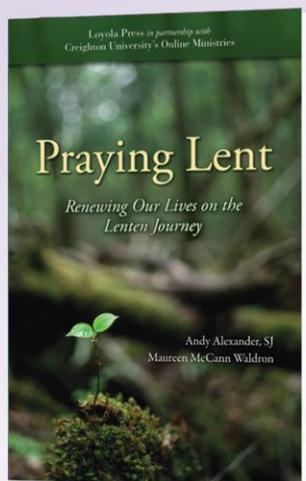
First, strive to make 3 resolutions each week – one for each of the disciplines. Your resolutions need not change much from week to week, but it helps if you think of Lent as organized into 7 weeks as opposed to one long period of 40 days. Each week, then, we have a chance to review our progress or lack thereof and renew our commitment for the following week.

Second, be sure to plan for an opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This Sacrament helps us to overcome the selfishness that is at the root of our sinfulness and to focus on the grace of God that is at the center of our lives.

STRATEGIES

3. Partner with someone

“Lent is not something to do alone. With our spouses, children, close friends, and distant e-mail companions, we can begin to talk about how we will support one another in this Lenten journey.”

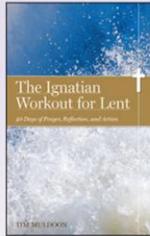
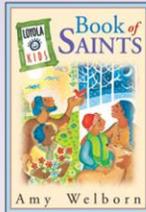
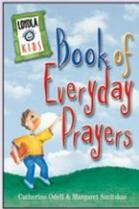
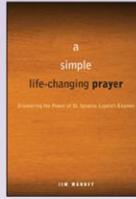
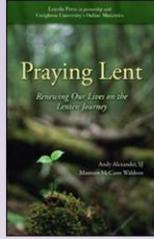
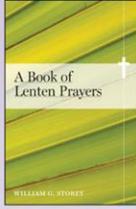


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And finally, partner with someone on this Lenten journey; someone that you can talk to who can affirm you for keeping to your disciplines as well as someone who can gently prod you to try again if you've failed.

Lenten Resources from Loyola Press

www.loyolapress.com - 800-621-1008



<http://www.loyolapress.com/liturgical-year-lent.htm>

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