

Guided Reflection on Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving (by Joe Paprocki, DMin)

Today, we're learning about Lent, and how we are called to pray, fast and give alms to the poor. During the next few minutes, we're going to reflect on how you can make Lent more meaningful in your own life through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Let's take a moment to get comfortable now.

Make sure you're in a position where you can be comfortable and still for the next 10 minutes.

Let's quiet ourselves. Close your eyes. Slowly and quietly breathe in to the count of 5. (1,2,3,4,5)

Hold your breath for 1 second.

Now slowly and quietly breathe out to the count of 5 (1,2,3,4,5)

Let's do that again. (repeat)

Now, imagine that everyone else in this room just vanished and that you are all alone, enjoying the quiet.

Before long, Jesus walks in and sits next to you.

He asks how you have been. Talk to him. Tell him what you've been doing recently. Tell him what has made you happy recently. Tell him about anything that has made you sad or worried recently. Listen to him as he talks to you.

Jesus explains that he is here today to talk to you about Lent and how he's inviting you to pray, fast, and give alms to the poor.

You ask him, "Jesus, how can I pray during Lent?"

Jesus says, "You're praying right now. You can pray this way anytime you want. Just take about 10 minutes every day and find a quiet place. Maybe your room at home, or a quiet place outdoors, or even a quiet corner in the library. Just quiet yourself down and I'll come join you like I did right now, and we'll just talk. You can tell me about what you're happy about and what might be upsetting you. You can tell me about people you are concerned about...people who are sick or going through a tough time. I'll be there to listen to you and to talk to you. So think right now about where we'll meet every day for a few minutes to spend some special time together."

You ask Jesus, "So, what's all this about fasting?"

Jesus replies, “Fasting is a way of making space in your life. You know how when the snow melts away in spring, we find lots of piles of dirt and stones and twigs and garbage left behind? We didn’t notice all of that clutter gathering but now we go out and do spring cleaning. We need to do the same with our lives. When we’re not paying attention, our lives can get too cluttered and we need to make space so that you and I can connect better. Fasting is how we do that. Fasting from foods and meals is a reminder to make space in your life. You can also fast from watching TV or playing video games or surfing the Internet or listening to music. It’s also good to fast from bad behaviors like gossiping or bullying with the idea that these are habits you’re NOT going to go back to after Lent. So think about how you might fast during Lent. (pause)

You ask Jesus, “What does almsgiving mean?”

Jesus says, “To give alms means to give money or material goods to the poor. So many of my children in this world are hungry, homeless, without proper clothing or healthcare, and in need of help. I know that you’re not rich, but there’s so much that you can do to help others. Lent is a good time to remember how lucky you are to have what you have and to share some of that with others. Think about how you can share with others this Lent. Maybe you can give a little bit of your allowance to help feed the poor. Or maybe you can go through your drawers and closets and find some clothes that you can donate to a clothing drive. Or maybe you and your parents can gather up some food to donate to a food drive. Think about how you can give to others in need this Lent. (pause)

Jesus says, “I’m not asking you to do these things to impress me or to earn my love. You already have my love. I’m asking you to do these things so that we can remain close together and so that you can grow in love, because wherever there is love, you’ll find me there.”

Talk to Jesus now in your own words about these Lenten practices that he is asking you to make a part of your life. (pause)

Tell Jesus that you want to have a good Lent but that you need help. Talk to Jesus about anything that might be keeping you from praying, fasting, and giving alms this Lent and ask him for his help. (pause)

Jesus knows that it’s time for you to move on now. He asks if there’s anything else you want to say to him or ask him. Take time to do that now.

Thank Jesus for this time together.

Watch as he walks out of the room.

Spend a quiet moment now with the Holy Spirit.

(pause)

Invite the young people to slowly return to the room, to open their eyes, and then to return to their places.