



40 Ideas for 40 Days

from Joe Paprocki

Overcoming Impulses

Sin is often the result of acting on an impulse – like a reflex action that we do without thinking. During Lent, we strive to pay closer attention to how we act so that we can learn to discipline our impulses and not act reflexively.



Materials needed: several cotton balls or rolled up paper towels, a transparent barrier (a wire screen, a piece of clear plastic, etc.), a heavy book and a table top.

- Say, *“I’d like to do a simple demonstration to show you what a REFLEX is. I need a volunteer.”* Have the volunteer stand facing the group and hand him/her the transparent barrier. Say, *“I want you to hold this barrier in front of your face and keep your eyes wide open.”*
- Pause for a few seconds and then quickly throw a cotton ball (or rolled up paper towel) directly at the volunteer’s face, hitting the barrier.
- Say, *“You blinked! That’s an example of a reflex. Let’s try with another volunteer.”*
- Get ready to repeat the process, but this time, just before you are about to throw the cotton ball, signal a volunteer to slam a heavy book on a table top, making everyone jump.
- Say, *“That was another example of a reflex. Everyone either jumped, turned their heads, blinked their eyes, put their hands up, or even let out a sound. Reflexes are physical reactions that happen involuntarily as a response to a stimulus. When you go for a physical exam, the doctor will test your reflexes by tapping you with a little rubber hammer just under the kneecap, making your leg kick out. Reflexes happen without us even thinking about them. During Lent, we practice giving things up as a way of overcoming impulses or reflexive actions. Instead, we strive to practice virtues – good habits that require us to think before acting!”*
- Continue with a discussion of things that participants can give up for Lent – things they do impulsively (without thinking).