



DON'T WASTE YOUR LENT !

7 Ways to Have a Good Lent

By Sam Guzman

Lent is a season of penance and ascetical warfare. The enemy is concupiscence, the world, and the devil. The goal is pure hearts so that we can joyfully celebrate the resurrection of our Lord at Easter, the greatest feast of the liturgical year. In a way, Lent should be a microcosm of our entire struggle on earth, just as the Paschal feast of Easter is a microcosm of our heavenly triumph in Christ. Yet, a good Lent takes focus and discipline, and it can easily be wasted.

In my own experience, I often begin the Lenten season with the best of intentions. I imagine myself going into full ascetic mode, fasting and praying as ardently as one of the monastic fathers in the desert. And *maybe* for the first week I succeed through sheer strength of will. Then, just when I am feeling good about myself, everything falls apart and I come face to face with my own weakness.

We've all been there at some point, and so today I'd like to share 7 practical ways to have a good Lent.

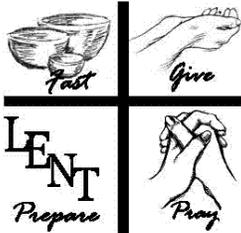
1. Have a plan – The fastest way to ruin Lent is to have good intentions but no plan. Be specific. "I'm going to pray more," isn't good enough. Download this helpful worksheet. Once you've determined what you are going to do, stick to it every single day. One word of advice: Make it doable. Often, we are overly ambitious and commit to way too much. When we fail in our Lenten goals, we grow discouraged and give up completely. This is a victory for the devil. Make your commitments modest and practical, and your Lent will be the better for it.

2. Read a good book – The saints are constantly exhorting us to read good spiritual books, and there is no better time to begin this practice than during Lent. Reading Scripture or the writings of the saints is a great place to start. Here are some suggestions for Lenten reading:

- Meditations for Lent* by Jacques-Benigne Bossuet
- The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis
- Divine Intimacy* by Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene
- Humility of Heart* by Fr. Cajetan Mary da Bergamo
- True Devotion to Mary* by St. Louis de Montfort
- The Spiritual Combat* by Dom Lorenzo Scupoli
- A Lenten Journey with Jesus and St. Paul of the Cross* by Fr. Victor Hoaglund
- Happy Are You Poor* by Fr. Thomas Dubay
- Letter to Friends of the Cross* by St. Louis de Montfort
- Love of Eternal Wisdom* by St. Louis de Montfort

3. Examine yourself - Lent is an excellent time to take an inventory of the state of your soul. What are your predominant faults? Do you have any hidden idols in your life? What is keeping you from following the will of God with all your heart? Use a thorough examination of conscience to help you assess your spiritual health. Remember, Lent is not ultimately about giving up sweets or other things we enjoy, it is first and foremost about repentance, which means giving up sin and returning to God, our loving Father. While taking inventory of your sins may be painful, it is a healthy pain that restores the soul.

4. Confess your sins – After examining your conscience, the logical next step is to go to confession. Normally, it can be hard to find a parish with confession readily available (thirty minutes on a Saturday isn't enough!), but the good news is, many parishes have increased confession times during



Lent, so it's a great time to go. Before receiving the sacrament of penance, though, remember the five requirements for a good confession: 1) Examination of conscience 2) True contrition for having offended God 3) Firm resolution to sin no more 4) Clear confession (don't hold any sins back) 5) Penance for the sins you have committed.

5. Pray - Let's face it, we can all pray more, and Lent is a great time to plan and implement a daily prayer rule that can guide you the rest of the year. During this season, however, we should especially focus our prayers on repentance and contrition for our sins. Here are some suggestions for Lenten prayer.

- The Prayer of Manasseh
- The Seven Penitential Psalms
- The Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary
- The Stations of the Cross
- The Divine Mercy Chaplet
- Prayer before a Crucifix

6. Fast - I've written before about the importance of prayer and fasting, so suffice it to say that it is something we should be doing all year round, not just during Lent. Still, Lent is a very good time to refocus our efforts and renew our commitment. We should especially focus on fasting from things related to our predominant sins. Are you addicted to Instagram or Facebook? Fast from them. Maybe you're binge watching shows on Netflix. Give it up. On the other hand, maybe you're addicted to criticizing others. Make a special effort to fast from negative speech. The point is, while fasting from certain foods is an excellent ascetical practice, we do not have to limit our lenten fasting to things we eat. Remember the words of Jesus: "If your eye offend you, pluck it out." Nothing should stand between us and the heavenly kingdom, and we should be intentional about cutting off those things that are causing us to sin.

7. Give alms – During Lent, we especially remember the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. This is the greatest act of generosity in history, for Jesus died not just for his friends, but for his enemies. "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The generosity of God in Christ should impel us to be generous and merciful to others, especially those poor and in need. This Lent, find a way to give, whether it is supporting a religious order or helping at a homeless shelter. Remember the promise of Jesus, "And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

You Cannot Fail

I began this post by talking about my own failure, and yet, when it comes to Lenten disciplines, true failure is not really possible. I mean that even failing in our commitments can help us grow in humility and knowledge of our own spiritual poverty—and growth in these is always spiritual advancement.

This Lent, do your best. Strive to root out sin and cultivate holiness. But when you fail, realize that even those who can be considered righteous fall seven times daily (Prov. 24:16). Let it be a lesson in humility that drives you back to the grace of God flowing from the pierced heart of Jesus—for that is the true heart of Lent.

Source: <http://catholicexchange.com/dont-waste-lent-7-ways-good-lent>

The post Don't Waste Your Lent: 7 Ways to Have a Good Lent appeared first on The Catholic Gentleman.

THE SEVEN PENITENTIAL PSALMS AND THE SONGS OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT

THE SEVEN PENITENTIAL PASLMS

During times we wish to express repentance and especially during Lent, it is customary to pray the seven penitential psalms. The penitential designation of these psalms dates from the seventh century. Prayerfully reciting these psalms will help us to recognize our sinfulness, express our sorrow and ask for God's forgiveness.

The seven are Psalm 6, 32, 27,38, 51, 102, 130, 143.

THE SONGS OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Within the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we encounter four poetic sections known as Songs of the Suffering Servant. Christian faith sees these prophetic utterance fulfilled in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus the Lord. In brief:

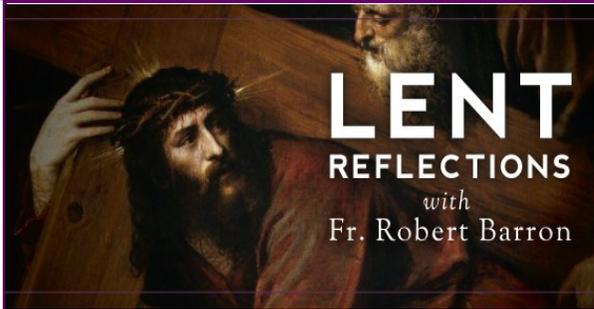
- The first song introduces God's Servant who will establish justice upon the earth.
- The second song, spoken in the Servant's own voice tells of being selected from the womb to become God's mouthpiece and help re-

new the nation.

- In the third song, we learn of the abuse and derision of the Servant endured at the hands of his enemies.
- The fourth song proclaims the salvific value of the Servant's innocent suffering that will justify many and blot out their offenses.

Because of the Christian identification of the Suffering Servant with Jesus, the four Servant Songs become a way of encountering the Lord during the Lenten Season. Not only do they give us a sense of the commitment and endurance that characterized his messianic ministry, but they become a way of touching the bruised face of the Messiah, of hearing the resolute determination that sustained him in the midst of trial, and of rejoicing with him in God's ultimate vindication of his calling and service.

Source: United States Conference of Catholic Bishop's website www.usccb.org under Liturgical Year; Lent. You will find a page with an audio file of each these Psalms and Songs as well as a short reflection. There are also many other Lenten resources on this site.



FREE Daily Reflections Throughout Lent

Peace be with you!

I'm excited to announce that this year, I will again be offering daily Lent reflections through email. Join over 200,000 others by signing up free at LentReflections.com: Sign up -- <http://LentReflections.com>

Each day From Ash Wednesday (February 18) through Easter Sunday (April 5), I will send you a short email with an uplifting spiritual reflection. The reflections will be available in both English and Spanish.

In addition, you'll receive exclusive videos found nowhere else, free giveaways of my DVDs and books, and special discounts on new and exciting resources. Thanks

Peace, Fr. Robert Barron

and may God bless you as we move into the Lenten season.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
LENTEN PRACTICES CALENDAR FOR FAMILIES 2015			FEBRUARY 18 Ash Wednesday [P] HOPE	FEBRUARY 19 [F] No TV or screens today (except for homework)	FEBRUARY 20 [S] Make a card for someone who needs extra love	FEBRUARY 21 [P] GIVING
FEBRUARY 22 [F] No snacks between meals today	FEBRUARY 23 [S] Do something kind for a neighbor.	FEBRUARY 24 [P] GRATITUDE	FEBRUARY 25 [F] Only water to drink today	FEBRUARY 26 [S] Buy or find 5+ items for a food bank. (Deliver on March 28)	FEBRUARY 27 [P] JESUS	FEBRUARY 28 [F] Eat very simple meals for breakfast, lunch, & dinner.
MARCH 1 [S] Pick up litter outside your house or at a park.	MARCH 2 [P] SPIRIT	MARCH 3 [F] Do not use toys that require batteries or electricity	MARCH 4 [S] Call someone and tell them you are thinking of them today.	MARCH 5 [P] HOLY	MARCH 6 [F] Do not listen to music in the car.	MARCH 7 [S] Take a treat or meal to someone
MARCH 8 [P] PATIENCE	MARCH 9 [F] No desserts or treats today	MARCH 10 [S] Say something nice about each person in your family.	MARCH 11 [P] DESERT	MARCH 12 [F] No TV or screens today (except for homework)	MARCH 13 [S] Invite someone to your house for dinner.	MARCH 14 [P] JOURNEY
MARCH 15 [F] No snacks between meals today	MARCH 16 [S] Give someone real or paper flowers.	MARCH 17 [P] SERVICE	MARCH 18 [F] Only water to drink today	MARCH 19 [S] Draw a picture for someone and mail it.	MARCH 20 [P] FRIENDSHIP	MARCH 21 [F] Eat very simple meals for breakfast, lunch, & dinner.
MARCH 22 [S] Write someone a thank you note	MARCH 23 [P] GOD	MARCH 24 [F] Do not use toys that require batteries or electricity	MARCH 25 [S] Learn something about another country or culture	MARCH 26 [P] MERCY	MARCH 27 [F] Do not listen to music in the car.	MARCH 28 [S] Deliver your food bank items
MARCH 29 [P] PEACE	MARCH 30 [F] No desserts or treats today	MARCH 31 [S] Buy dog or cat food for an animal shelter (deliver Sat.)	APRIL 1 [P] KINDNESS	APRIL 2 [F] No TV or screens today (except for homework)	APRIL 3 [S] Plant a tree or flowers	APRIL 4 [S] Deliver animal items.
APRIL 5 Easter! [P] RESURRECTION	These activities are based around the traditional "3 Pillars" of Lent. Prayer [P], Fasting [F] and Almsgiving/Service [S]. The pillars are rotated throughout lent with simple activities. On the prayer days, use the word provided to inspire a prayer you write, draw, or sing. All of the activities are suggestions. Modify them for your own family! © Traci Smith 2015 www.traci-smith.com					

Source: <https://tracismith.wordpress.com/>. Calendar from Traci Smith

So excited to share this family Lenten Practices calendar! Each day there is either a prayer [P], service/almsgiving [S] or fasting [F] activity. The activities aren't terribly time consuming and can be adapted for a variety of different ages. On prayer days, a word is given that can be a prompt for a prayer (either written or drawn). On fasting days, simple things are abstained from for a day to give the experience of sacrificing something to focus on God. On service days, a simple service activity is featured.

Looking for a simple daily devotional for adults? I wrote one available for purchase from Chalice Press! Pastors and educators, please feel free to download this calendar and include it in your newsletter or bulletin. Happy Lent! Like this resource? Get more resources like this by [subscribing to my newsletter](#), [liking my author page on Facebook](#) (don't forget to click 'get notifications') or [buying the book!](#)