



Spirituality Report

Although Lent is almost a month away, before you know it, Ash Wednesday will be here and we'll be wondering what am I going to do for Lent?

Why does the Church set aside this time for us to look inwardly at our relationship with God? Probably because we wouldn't do it if the church didn't help us. Taking a long hard look at how you live your life is not an easy or fun process. It can be a learning experience, and a freeing experience if you go about it right. There is a Greek word that is a perfect definition of the Lenten journey, that word is *Metanoia*. It means turning back. In Lent we turn away from our worldly life, and back toward God.

Lent is a season of being invited by God in a deeply personal way. From the first day of Lent, the Ash Wednesday readings make God's call to us clear: "Return to me with your whole heart." "A clean heart create in me, O God," Psalm 51 offers. That is exactly what our loving God wants to give us, the joy of salvation.

It is an extraordinary invitation to me in a personal, individual way. God invites me to drop the defenses that I hold up between myself and God. All God wants is for me to realize that *my* standards, my way of judging and loving are so very different from God's way, and so much smaller. God offers an entire Lent season, an entire lifetime, of loving me unconditionally, no matter what I have done or how much I think I have hidden from God.

Our acceptance of this call, this appeal to our hearts is simple. All we have to do is say to our Lord, "I'm here. Where do I start? Yes, I want to be with you." No explanations are necessary, only to pause and picture in our hearts the joyfully loving gaze of God that falls on us.

Lent will be this wonderful season of grace for us if we give ourselves to it. And we will give ourselves to it to the degree we really want it badly enough. So, in these days before Lent, we need to prepare our hearts. We need to prepare by realizing how much we want to grow in freedom, how much we need to lighten our spirits and experience some real joy, and how much some parts of our lives really need changing.

Our sense of excitement and anticipation will grow more easily if we begin to imagine what God wants to give us. There is really something coming that we can truly look forward to. If we get too focused on ourselves, and what we are going to do or not do, we could risk missing the gift God wants to give us. We have to be aware of the fact that grace comes from God. This is about God's great desire to bless us. Then, we can imagine that what we really *want* to do is place ourselves in a space to *receive* what God wants to give us.

Before we get to Ash Wednesday, we should start asking ourselves some questions and we should start with some preparations. "What does God want to give me this year?" This question may require that I slow down a bit and *listen* to my inner spirit.

It doesn't take a lot of time to prepare for the beginning of Lent. It just takes desire and focus. God can do so much with that. We can give God more of a space to touch our hearts if we begin to establish some simple patterns.

All of us have, at one time or another, named certain things as our "priorities." From time to time, when we become aware of our not doing something that is really important, we say, "I have to make that a priority." Lent is an important time to do a top-to-bottom review of what we value and what we actually do, in our everyday lives. Whenever we do this, we always discover that something needs realigning. We discover that there are values we hold, commitments we've made, growth we desire, that simply don't make it on the list of our "actual priorities".

Fasting, almsgiving and prayer are the three traditional Lenten practices that strengthen us for our journey. They open us up to God's wisdom and pave the way for the breakthroughs that Jesus longs to give us.

Let's all commit ourselves to these three spiritual practices this Lent. Remember, it matters less how we pray or what we give up or what we give away. It matters more that we take up these practices in a way that will help us become closer to the Lord.

Taking some time to get ready for Lent will ensure that you aren't going to miss the first week or two of Lent, because you are just getting started. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, but you want to be ready, rather than just beginning to think about Lent on that day.

Read Matthew 6:1-18. Jesus didn't say, "if you fast" or "if you give alms", or "if you pray". He said WHEN you do these things. These aren't optional add-ons to our spiritual lives. They are commands from the Son of God. Jesus told us to fast, to give alms, and to pray because he knows that they help us place our possessions, our comforts, and our worth in the right perspective. He knows that self-denial multiplied by prayer and generous giving opens our eyes to God's love. He knows how these practices help us to love and care for other people.

A word of caution: it's not all about what we do – Lent can sound like a completely human-driven time. What we do counts - but what God does in us is even more important.

Lent can be a powerful time of renewal. If we adopt the right approach to fasting, prayer and repentance, we'll find God inspiring us and empowering us to make real changes in our lives. Try to live more simply over the next 40 days. Deny yourself so that you can focus on the Lord. Go ahead and join Jesus in the desert.

Spend these forty days turning back toward God. Open new ways of communicating with Him, and strip away all of those bad habits that keep you from fully experiencing God's love. How do you spend these 40 days which begin on Ash Wednesday and end on Holy Thursday?

That is for you to decide!

Whatever you choose to do, let it help you draw closer to the Lord. May God bless all of us with His grace this Lent!

SOME ONLINE RETREAT OPTIONS

[Lent video series: Live the Lenten Journey - Catholic Extension](#)

During the Lenten season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, all are invited to join our Lenten video series. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and continuing each Friday of Lent, this series will offer a Gospel reading proclaimed by a priest from the diverse communities supported by our donors, including Alaska, Appalachia, Puerto Rico and more.

Additionally, each video will include a homily from our president, Father Jack Wall.

Finally, you can sign up to receive a meatless dish recipe that comes from the region of each week's reading. This recipe will be sent a few days ahead of each video. Jump to each week's Gospel readings and recipes! Sign up to receive this series in your inbox!

[Online Lenten Retreat | Loyola Press](#)

The retreat begins the week of Ash Wednesday and continues through Holy Week and the first week of Easter. We hope that this retreat will provide you with an opportunity for spiritual renewal as you participate in the reflections and exercises.

[Lenten Retreat 2023 \(franciscansisterstor.org\)](#)

Lenten Retreat 2023 - At the Cross

Please join us for our Lenten Retreat on Saturday, March 11, 2023! We would love to see you at our upcoming Lenten Retreat! At this retreat, held at our Motherhouse, we will offer talks and testimonies, Adoration, Mass, refreshments, and an opportunity for prayer ministry and small groups. Fr. Matthew Gossett of the Diocese of Steubenville will be our celebrant for Mass. **This event will also be livestreamed.**

Registration at the door will begin at 8:00 am EST, the program will begin at 8:30 am EST and conclude at 12:30 pm EST. A more detailed schedule and speaker info. will be coming soon!

[Lenten Online Retreat \(creighton.edu\)](#)

Eight Weeks of Retreat - From Ash Wednesday Week, when Lent begins, through the Second Week of Easter

Each week contains a GUIDE which should be read careful early in the week - hopefully on Sunday. Each Guide is meant to make a home in the background of our consciousness all week long. Read it on Sunday and we might want to read it once or twice more during the week to remember well its theme and the grace to be prayed for each week. Most importantly, this retreat is meant for busy people. It is very important to carry on a brief conversation with the Lord, each day, about the graces asked for each week. That brief friend-to-friend conversation can happen any time throughout the day. Its purpose is to bring these reflections into the day and to let them interact with the real things of our day - and most of all, to let them become a growing part of our relationship with the Lord.