



Pastor's Pen

February 24, 2019

- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

## PREPARING FOR LENT

I like Lent starting late. We have that this year. With a March 6 Ash Wednesday, we are close to the latest possible start on March 10. The biggest reason for liking the later start is because it gives us a bit more time to really prepare for the season and get more out of it. When it starts earlier, it can easily catch us by surprise, and functionally we really aren't beginning Lent until a week after it starts. With a March beginning, we should be ready.

Lent is still the season that hasn't been coopted and this gives us a chance to probe more deeply into our hearts to know God and ourselves better. It is a season of growth and sacrifice. One of joy in discovery, and humility in seeing how it really is within ourselves. We are weak sinners in need of God's mercy, and the penitential season makes our need for God even more clear. Done well, it clarifies our focus. It is not a time of spiritual games or a spiritual arm-wrestling match, in which we demonstrate the depth of our discipline and the strength of our will.

The invitation to prayer, sacrifice, and almsgiving is at the heart of our practice in the Church. Walking with Jesus in the desert is the cornerstone of our experience and being prepared for the joy of the resurrection is our goal. To that end, everyone, regardless of age, should be prepared to engage all three of the practices. Age and physical limitations may provide direction and obstacles to them, based on what we can and cannot do, but no one is exempt from them. I also encourage and hope that families will do something together and each as individuals.

Our staff has prepared a simple trifold of suggestions for Lent for individuals, married couples, and families that are simple to do, in-depth, and get at the heart of our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. Some of them are things to do specifically for Lent, while others are intended to develop ongoing habits. Things like making it a practice to ask forgiveness each day, reserving complaining, making sure to get to confession, and praying each day are just a few. If you are not in a small group yet, consider joining one. Pick up the trifold in the Gathering Space for many more solid suggestions.

As we enter Lent, it is a good idea to humbly acknowledge our own weaknesses and not ignore them. Do I spend too much time online? Make a conscious decision to limit it. Do I engage in entertainment that isn't edifying? Instead of taking the celebrity gossip click bait, find an app or website with spiritually nourishing material like [Dynamic Catholic](#) or [Word on Fire](#). Do I have a propensity to get distracted at Mass while attending to children or having my mind drift? Review the readings and listen to the homily online later in the week. Do I have poor nutritional habits? Take something out of the diet that is bad and add something that is good. Do I take too much comfort in something that is otherwise good? Sacrifice it for six weeks and realize you really can live without it. Have I allowed my prayer life to become an afterthought? Commit to focused prayer each day in Lent.

Beyond the sacrificing and growing in virtue elements in Lent, we can also grow in our faith. We are barraged by a culture that doesn't understand many of our moral teachings, especially in marriage and human sexuality. Lent is a great time to take one of those hard teachings and discover what Jesus and His Body really teach about it, rather than letting the culture define the terms and dictate our thinking. Learning the foundations and principles of those teachings grounds us in their truth and prepares us more fully for the inevitable difficult conversations. An excellent place to begin that search is looking up the YouTube lessons by Fr. Mike Schmitz from Duluth and videos from Bishop Barron.

Starting Lent late gives us the opportunity to be really ready for Lent and make it the time of growth in the Lord, and preparation for Easter that God desires for us. Used well, Lent will help us to know God and ourselves much better.