

101 Practical Fasting Ideas for Lent Redux

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[Note: This is an update of an article I wrote last year for Catholic School Chronicle]

Fasting, praying and almsgiving are the three penitential practices that we are asked to engage in during Lent. In addition to fasting and abstaining with the rest of the Church on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent, we are also challenged to make individual sacrifices appropriate to our own spiritual condition. However, before we choose something to give up for Lent, it's important to assess our current spiritual state:

- What habits do I engage in that are destructive to my spiritual health?
- To what material things am I too attached?
- What areas in my life are unbalanced?
- To what do I devote too much or not enough time?

Only after asking questions like these are we ready to decide what to give up or what to add to our lives during Lent. The following list is meant to be an aid in this process. Use it as you need based on your current circumstances.

"Through fasting and praying, we allow Him to come and satisfy the deepest hunger that we experience in the depths of our being: the hunger and thirst for God."

—Pope Benedict, *Lenten message, 2009*

1-10: The Usuals:

1. Give up candy/sweets.
2. Give up television time.
3. Give up eating snacks between meals.
4. Give up or limit soda or coffee.
5. Give up or limit video games.
6. Spend more time with family.
7. Give to the poor.
8. Do an extra chore each day.
9. Perform a random act of kindness.
10. Spend more time in prayer.

11-20: Prayer

1. Pray a book of scripture using *lectio divina*.
2. Attend Mass on a weekday (every day if possible).
3. Pray the rosary each day, alone or with your family.
4. Prayerfully read *Abandonment to Divine Providence*.
5. Make a special prayer notebook and list all the people in your life who need prayers; pray for them each day. Add someone new every day.
6. Learn to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.
7. Make a commitment to attend Eucharistic Adoration regularly.
8. Commit to examining your conscience each evening.
9. Pray the Jesus Prayer throughout the day.
10. Pray the Angelus each day at noon.

21-30: For Those Addicted to Popular Culture

1. Switch from regular radio to Christian music radio or Catholic talk radio.
2. Avoid shows with gratuitous sex or violence.
3. Give up or limit watching sports on television.
4. Listen to only classical music for the next 40 days.
5. Drive to work in silence each day.
6. Read a work of classic literature.
7. Read a Catholic classic.
8. Read a story to a child.
9. Sit in fifteen minutes of silence each day.

10. Write a letter to God each day.

31-40: For Internet Users/Bloggers

1. Set time limits on overall online time.
2. Limit Facebook time.
3. Limit Myspace time [*and other social media.*]
4. Resist making or adding to lists that rank people.
5. Share one spiritual video with your online network once a week.
6. Blog about the poor once a week.
7. Add a spiritual blog to your blog reader.
8. Subscribe to a prayer podcast like Pray As You Go or Pray Station Portable.
9. Leave an encouraging or positive comment on a different blog each day.
10. Help a new blogger by sending traffic their way.

41-50: For Those Who Need to Be More Grateful

1. Each week, write a letter of thanks to a different member of the clergy, beginning with your bishop and parish priest.
2. Each week write a thank-you note to your parents.
3. Write a poem of praise for each person in your family.
4. Get a stack of sticky-notes and write one sentence of thanks each day and stick it to the bedroom door of each person in your family so that by Easter they each have 40 sticky-notes.
5. Find the psalms of thanksgiving or praise in the Bible and pray them.
6. Write a list of the ways God has blessed you and add to it each day. This could be done in a notebook or on a big poster hanging on your wall.
7. At dinner each evening ask your family to share one thing for which they are grateful.
8. Make a CD or iPod playlist of praise and worship music and listen to it each day.
9. Make a point of saying "Thank You" a certain number of times per day.
10. Help your children write thank you letters to their teachers.

51-60: For Those With Lives Out of Balance

1. Go for a walk each day with a loved one and talk about life and faith.
2. Take the kids to the park each week for some carefree time.
3. Give up fast food and give the money to charity.
4. Exercise each day.
5. Spend at least half an hour each day in meaningful conversation with your spouse.
6. Go on a Lenten retreat.
7. Pray with Sacred Space each day.
8. Commit to a daily 3 Minute Retreat.
9. Begin the online 34-week Retreat for Everyday Life.
10. Give up your most unhealthy habit.

61-70: For Those Who Need Spiritual Nourishment

1. Read the documents of Vatican II, especially *Gaudium et Spes*.
2. Read *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* or *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*.
3. Sign up for adult formation classes at a local parish.
4. Join a Bible study.
5. Attend Stations of the Cross at a local parish.
6. Find a spiritual director.
7. Read *The Imitation of Christ*.
8. Listen to a free Catholic audio book from Maria Lectrix.
9. Read *Introduction to the Devout Life*.
10. Read a spiritual autobiography (i.e., Augustine's *Confessions*, *Story of a Soul*, *Journal of a Soul*, *Witness to Hope*)

71-80: For Those Who Need to Increase Their Service to the Needy

1. Volunteer at soup kitchen or other food program.
2. Coordinate a food drive at your parish, school or place of employment.
3. Find out who in your parish is sick and offer to visit them or bring them food.
4. Call your local Catholic Charities office and volunteer.
5. Begin making visits to a nursing home.
6. Help an elderly or disabled person in your neighborhood with yard work or other difficult chores.
7. Become a hospital volunteer.
8. Become part of a prison ministry team.
9. Coordinate a clothing drive.
10. Make rosaries and give them away.

81-90: For Those Who Need to Be More Active in Their Parish

1. Become a lector.
2. Volunteer to become an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist
3. Volunteer to help with the parish youth group.
4. After each Mass stay awhile and introduce yourself to someone you don't know.
5. Join the Knights of Columbus.
6. Offer to be a Confirmation sponsor.
7. Volunteer to be an usher.
8. Offer to help with funeral dinners.
9. Help with the RCIA program.
10. Volunteer to do lawn work, cleaning or other needed maintenance for the parish.

90-101: Potpourri

1. Begin to receive the Sacrament of Penance weekly.
2. Give up foul language.
3. Give up gossiping.
4. Read and study *Healing the Culture*.
5. Study the life of a different saint each day.
6. Cook dinner each night for your family if someone else normally does.
7. Pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.
8. Carry extra food in your car, purse or backpack to give to street corner beggars.
9. Begin practicing socially conscious investing.
10. Spend a week meditating on each of the seven principles of Catholic social teaching.
11. Make breakfast each morning for your family.

Bonus! 10 More Fasting Ideas

1. Pray with the daily Mass readings each morning.
2. Give up or limit text messaging.
3. Give up swearing, cursing and foul language.
4. Give up buying/downloading new music and donate some of your iTunes balance to Haiti.
5. Watch a spiritual film each week of Lent. (**Update 2/18/2010:** See this great article on films for Lent by my favorite film critic Steven Greydanus)
6. Read *Deep Conversion/Deep Prayer* by Fr. Thomas Dubay.
7. Gain a greater appreciation of the Mass through Tom Curran's free pdf book *The Mass: Four Encounters with Jesus*.
8. Strengthen your faith by listening to free audio lectures by Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft.
9. Begin the habit of receiving the Sacrament of Penance on a weekly basis.
10. Create an inspirational YouTube video.

Conclusion

Lent is a tremendous opportunity for spiritual growth. I hope these suggestions re-energize you on your spiritual journey. If you try one or more of these ideas, or if you'd like to share your own Lenten practices, please leave a comment.