Lent Gives Us a Chance to Become the Person We Want to Become

This Wednesday, we begin our journey through the season of Lent with the imposition of ashes. As they are placed on our foreheads, we are invited to repent and believe in the Gospel, and are also reminded that from dust we came, and to dust we shall return.

The joy though for the Christian is that is not the end of the story. The ashes symbolize something that once was; we thought always will be. But while our earthly bodies turn to dust, our bodies are also glorified through the resurrection. However, the invitation to follow Jesus does require a response too.

This wonderful season of Lent gives us the time to take some of those steps as we grow closer to Him. Traditionally there are the practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer.

With respect to fasting, don't focus so much on food. You need food to have energy and think clearly and to relate to others. Rather, consider fasting from things that can take up our time and distract us from God and one another. Sometimes there are things we enjoy that maybe aren't out of control, but we recognize perhaps we spend too much time on. For instance, maybe the phone takes up too much of your life and fasting from it you can rediscover better time spent with family or get some more sleep; or maybe it's TV or video games or other things that inhibit deeper relationships with God and others.

Other times there are "spiritual fats" that we consume that would be best removed entirely, such as sins we have fallen into or bad habits we justify. Again, we want to emerge from Lent a better person - not to fall into the bad habits again.

Another spiritual practice during Lent is almsgiving. Lent gives us a chance to look at how we use our resources but again think outside the box here. It's important to be generous and to help others, but time is perhaps an even more valuable commodity. Lent is a great time to try to become more generous and spend more time helping those in need, or even with family if we have become too busy or are out and about all the time rather than spending time at home with loved ones.

Lent is a great time for prayer. But remember, we have to be Saint Mary and Saint Martha. We have to work and be active, but we also need time to listen to Jesus. So, use Lent as a time to find time for spiritual growth and prayer, using what works best for you personally. There's the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, reading Scripture or other good spiritual books, or even silence. And then there are Stations of the Cross every Friday too. Mix it up and use what works!

Lastly, maybe you can look at your life and ask what are some things you'd like to work on as a person and use Lent to make progress. Maybe anxiety has taken over your life. Maybe in your examination of conscience you feel you've become a little too controlling of others in your families. Perhaps you are too over-extended with your own or your families/kids schedules and need more quiet time or time as a family. Maybe you could work on your diet and exercise and take better care of your body. Maybe your relationship with your family members could use some fine-tuning, or you are putting off

having challenging conversations. Maybe you've become a bit embittered. Or you've become angry at someone or a group of people. Lent is a great time to look at ourselves in the mirror, and to use the season to make the adjustments so that come Easter, we are truly more spiritually happy and at a greater spot of peace with God, ourselves and one another.

Lent is sometimes called a "joyful" season in the sense that it really helps us emerge to become the people we know we can be when we respond to God's grace. May we use it to do just that!

Have a very blessed Lent!

Fr. Paul