



www.usccb.org

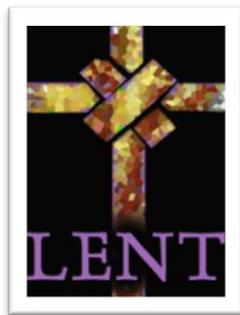
JOURNEY TO THE FOOT OF THE CROSS - 10 THINGS TO REMEMBER FOR LENT

Journey to the Foot of the Cross: Bishop Ricken Offers 10 Things to Remember For Lent

Bishop David L. Ricken of Green Bay, Wisconsin, former chairman of the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), offers “10 Things to Remember for Lent”:

1. **Remember the formula.** The Church does a good job capturing certain truths with easy-to-remember lists and formulas: 10 Commandments, 7 sacraments, 3 persons in the Trinity. For Lent, the Church gives us almost a slogan—Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving—as the three things we need to work on during the season.
2. **It’s a time of prayer.** Lent is essentially an act of prayer spread out over 40 days. As we pray, we go on a journey, one that hopefully brings us closer to Christ and leaves us changed by the encounter with him.
3. **It’s a time to fast.** With the fasts of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, meatless Fridays, and our personal disciplines interspersed, Lent is the only time many Catholics these days actually fast. And maybe that’s why it gets all the attention. “What are you giving up for Lent? Hotdogs? Beer? Jelly beans?” It’s almost a game for some of us, but fasting is actually a form of penance, which helps us turn away from sin and toward Christ.
4. **It’s a time to work on discipline.** The 40 days of Lent are also a good, set time to work on personal discipline in general. Instead of giving something up, it can be doing something positive. “I’m going to exercise more. I’m going to pray more. I’m going to be nicer to my family, friends and coworkers.”
5. **It’s about dying to yourself.** The more serious side of Lenten discipline is that it’s about more than self-control – it’s about finding aspects of yourself that are less than Christ-like and letting them die. The suffering and death of Christ are foremost on our minds during Lent, and we join in these mysteries by suffering, dying with Christ and being resurrected in a purified form.

6. **Don't do too much.** It's tempting to make Lent some ambitious period of personal reinvention, but it's best to keep it simple and focused. There's a reason the Church works on these mysteries year after year. We spend our entire lives growing closer to God. Don't try to cram it all in one Lent. That's a recipe for failure.
7. **Lent reminds us of our weakness.** Of course, even when we set simple goals for ourselves during Lent, we still have trouble keeping them. When we fast, we realize we're all just one meal away from hunger. In both cases, Lent shows us our weakness. This can be painful, but recognizing how helpless we are makes us seek God's help with renewed urgency and sincerity.
8. **Be patient with yourself.** When we're confronted with our own weakness during Lent, the temptation is to get angry and frustrated. "What a bad person I am!" But that's the wrong lesson. God is calling us to be patient and to see ourselves as he does, with unconditional love.
9. **Reach out in charity.** As we experience weakness and suffering during Lent, we should be renewed in our compassion for those who are hungry, suffering or otherwise in need. The third part of the Lenten formula is almsgiving. It's about more than throwing a few extra dollars in the collection plate; it's about reaching out to others and helping them without question as a way of sharing the experience of God's unconditional love.
10. **Learn to love like Christ.** Giving of ourselves in the midst of our suffering and self-denial brings us closer to loving like Christ, who suffered and poured himself out unconditionally on cross for all of us. Lent is a journey through the desert to the foot of the cross on Good Friday, as we seek him out, ask his help, join in his suffering, and learn to love like him.
www.usccb.org



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT LENT AND LENTEN PRACTICES

Q. Why do we say that there are forty days of Lent? When you count all the days from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday, there are 46.

A. It might be more accurate to say that there is the "forty day fast within Lent." Historically, Lent has varied from a week to three weeks to the present configuration of 46 days. The forty day fast, however, has been more stable. The Sundays of Lent are certainly part of the Time of Lent, but they are not prescribed days of fast and abstinence.



Q. So does that mean that when we give something up for Lent, such as candy, we can have it on Sundays?

A. Apart from the prescribed days of fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and the days of abstinence every Friday of Lent, Catholics have traditionally chosen additional penitential practices for the whole Time of Lent. These practices are disciplinary in nature and often more effective if they are continuous, i.e., kept on Sundays as well. That being said, such practices are not regulated by the Church, but by individual conscience.

Q. I understand that all the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence from meat, but I'm not sure what is classified as meat. Does meat include chicken and dairy products?

A. Abstinence laws consider that meat comes only from animals such as chickens, cows, sheep or pigs --- all of which live on land. Birds are also considered meat. Abstinence does not include meat juices and liquid foods made from meat. Thus, such foods as chicken broth, consomme, soups cooked or flavored with meat, meat gravies or sauces, as well as seasonings or condiments made from animal fat are technically not forbidden. However, moral theologians have traditionally taught that we should abstain from all animal-derived products (except foods such as gelatin, butter, cheese and eggs, which do not have any meat taste). Fish are a different category of animal. Salt and freshwater species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, (cold-blooded animals) and shellfish are permitted.

Q. I've noticed that restaurants and grocery stores advertise specials on expensive types of fish and seafood on Fridays during Lent. Some of my Catholic friends take advantage of these deals, but somehow I don't feel right treating myself to the lobster special on Fridays during Lent.

A. While fish, lobster and other shellfish are not considered meat and can be consumed on days of abstinence, indulging in the lavish buffet at your favorite seafood place sort of misses the point. Abstaining from meat and other indulgences during Lent is a penitential practice. On the Fridays of Lent, we remember the sacrifice of Christ on Good Friday and unite ourselves with that sacrifice through abstinence and prayer.

Q. I understand that Catholics ages 18 to 59 should fast on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday, but what exactly are the rules for these fasts?

A. Fasting on these days means we can have only one full, meatless meal. Some food can be taken at the other regular meal times if necessary, *but combined they should be less than a full meal*. Liquids are allowed at any time, but no solid food should be consumed between meals.

Q. Are there exemptions other than for age from the requirement to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?

A. Those that are excused from fast and abstinence outside the age limits include the physically or mentally ill including individuals suffering from chronic illnesses such as diabetes. Also excluded are pregnant or nursing women. In all cases, common sense should prevail, and ill persons should not further jeopardize their health by fasting.

God Bless

Deacon Joseph Rafferty