

# GIVING UP SOMETHING FOR LENT!

For centuries, Christians have **observed the season of Lent by fasting** from food and/or observing other self-denying acts – giving something up.

These acts serve as an effective tool to help us focus during Lent. If we don't interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves, as Eugene Peterson reminds us, how will we remember that it is God who is at the center of this great story, and not ourselves? When we deny ourselves the comforts we are used to—whether a full plate of food, or some other part of our daily routine (TV, coffee, alcohol, Internet, etc.)— each time we do it, we **are again reminded of all God gave up for us on our behalf and of our great need for Him. It brings God into focus, not just on Sundays, but many times, everyday, for all of Lent!** Every time we say “no” to ourselves – it stops us up short, serves as an on-going reminder of God's sacrifice, and provides continuing impetus throughout Lent NOT TO FORGET!

## What could I give up for Lent?

What follows are some suggestions for things you might give up or “fast” from. None of these are compulsory. Remember that the important thing is that this practice is to help you focus and remember. Another side benefit is that it might give you some extra time, take away some distractions, allow you to focus instead on the mercy, salvation, and comforting provision of God. Make time and space for God, and God will meet you.

**Food:** Meats, poultry (eggs too), fats and oils, soft drinks, *2nd helpings*, Alcohol, Coffee (try tea or some other low-caffeine drink if you get headaches), dairy (milk and cheese), *solid* foods (only drink water or juices), Junk foods (chips, snacks, excessively salty food), candy (plus refined sugar in general), and dessert (*great* for kids—very meaningful!). (see below for fasting guidelines).

**Media:** TV, movies, computer, email (set an auto-responder), Internet, magazines, radio, the phone (leave your cell phone off when appropriate), handheld computers, video games, and other technology ....

**Other Things:** You may want to fast from certain relationships, or people in general, choosing instead to walk alone with God for a period. You may also fast from social events, parties, or clubs, if you regularly go out of your way for that kind of gathering.

**Days:** Leave it all behind: leave junk food, TV, cars, noise, and all the media and messages of the culture. Pack the very minimum (water, warm clothes, etc.) and find a trail, or a beach, and feast on God.

**Imitate Jesus**, who took whole days to walk alone in the wilderness fasting and praying .... Give God the time and the room that he wants. God wants to fill you up, wants to bless you. If we are constantly pouring other stuff into our heads or stomachs, there will be little room for God.

## **Guidelines for fasting:**

[**First, some important considerations: if you have any concerns about whether dietary fasting (fasting from food) is safe for you, ask your physician**, especially if you have a health concern (heart, diabetes). ... Don't fast from food if you are pregnant or nursing; make sure you always get plenty of fluids; and finally, don't make decisions for others (for example, **don't modify a child's diet** except to help them decide to cut nonessentials like sodas or desserts, etc.).]

You know yourself best: which of the following might you do without? Try adding to your list each week (see the individual pages of the [Calendar](#) to read more specific suggestions). If you fast from all the food items listed in the Calendar pages, you may find that at the end of several weeks, you are eating very simply: vegetables, beans, rice, fruit, grains, etc. Take the suggestions one step at a time and make sure you do what is necessary to have energy for your work and family.

### **On what days should I fast?**

Fast on any day but Sunday, which is a feast day even in Lent. On Friday (the day of the crucifixion), many world Christians will fast from meat, and it can be meaningful to join them. Try fasting from something on each day, Monday-Saturday. You may choose one day to fast from all foods or other comforts for as much of the day that you can (remembering to drink plenty of fluids). End your weekly fast on Sunday: on this day, enjoy your food and your freedom!

### **Fasting Etiquette**

When you fast, you will occasionally be faced with a dilemma: someone offers you food that you have eliminated from your diet. Not everyone knows that you are fasting (nor should they--see below). You have probably just begun to feel good about going without your daily dose of chocolate—or whatever—when there is a friend offering it to you with all good intentions. What is the proper response?

Let humility be your guide. Resist the temptation to explain that you are fasting and so refuse. If you can politely refuse without hurting the person's feelings, then do so. But if someone has prepared something for

you to bless you (a special desert at the end of a meal, cookies for a visit, or a big steak dinner right after you gave up meat), then perhaps the more humble response is to accept gratefully. After all, the point of Lent is not the elimination of a specific food, it is *sacrifice*. Sometimes the greater sacrifice is to give up the idea of a perfect day of fasting for the sake of another.

### **Matthew 6.16-18**

16 ... When you fast, do not put on a sad face as the hypocrites do. They neglect their appearance so that everyone will see that they are fasting. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. 17 When you go without food, wash your face and comb your hair, 18 so that others cannot know that you are fasting—only your Father, who is unseen, will know. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you. ([TEV](#))

© 2001-2002 D. Maddalena

### **Lent**

It is customary, Lord  
to give something up  
during the season of Lent  
What would you have me do without?  
I who have so much  
Chocolate?  
Cream cakes?  
Cigarettes?  
Sweets?  
Swearing?  
The list is endless  
and I could give up all those things  
for the span of 40 days  
quite easily and almost painlessly  
But what difference would it make  
other than making me feel 'holier'  
that my friend who makes no such  
sacrifice

What would you have me do without?  
I who have so much  
Selfishness?  
Conceit?  
Envy?  
Pride?  
I fear before I ask  
that the answer might be 'yes'  
and the giving up  
would be all too real, Lord  
it would be difficult  
painful  
sacrificial  
a real cross to carry for 40 days  
and more?