

Fact of FAITH

Lenten Prayer

By Rev. Larry Rice, CSP

In Catholic Tradition, the forty days of Lent are observed through three disciplines: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Each of these is intended to strengthen, purify, and reconcile us as we prepare for the celebration of Easter.

The first of these traditions—prayer—is something that is supposed to be part of our lives every day. Communication is essential to any healthy relationship, and one’s relationship with God works the same way. We pray communally whenever we gather for worship, but private, personal prayer is critical for personal spiritual growth. We’re supposed to be praying all the time. So why is prayer emphasized during Lent?

In part, I think, it’s because we don’t always do what we’re supposed to. For many people, praying is like flossing—something you do when an appointment with the dentist is coming up, but easy to neglect otherwise. Lent calls us back to relationship with God and asks us to renew our commitment to communication with God.

Also, praying during Lent reminds us that the purpose of prayer isn’t to change God, it’s to change us. Like fasting and almsgiving, our prayer during Lent is a sign of repentance—of turning away from sin.

If you’re someone who’s already praying daily, and I hope you are, then I have a suggestion for you. Instead of your usual prayer, try something different for the forty days of Lent. Rather than praying for something you need, or to tell God about your day, or to thank God for some favor you’ve received, why not use your prayer time this Lent to simply listen. Rather than reciting prayers, clear your mind, and invite God to speak to your heart. And then wait in silence. Culturally we’re not very comfortable with silence, so this may be difficult at first. But give it time, and let hopeful silence become your prayer this Lent. You may be surprised by what God has to say.

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