

Back to the Basics - Our Guide for Lent

Gospel of Luke: 6:39-45

I recently found myself on a plane headed back to Milwaukee. As we waited for our turn to take-off - I thought about all the good times Rhonda and I had while visiting our children and grandchildren. Lots of laughter, way too much food, some great memories and enough love to carry me until I can see them again. Then the plane's engines began to roar and the plane was starting to race down the runway. That was when I noticed that I was praying. I was not afraid and I know that statistically, you are much safer flying in an airplane than driving a car. In fact, if I were not a hypocrite I'd pray whenever I got in a car and I would sit back and relax on a plane. But here I was, quietly praying as the plane launched itself into the skies.

Once the plane was in the air, I thought to myself - how cool is that. With all the noise on the plane, the exhaustion of a family vacation, the lines, the luggage, the discombobulating and the recombobulating, the hustle and the bustle - to suddenly turn it all off and turn to God - naturally and without thinking - to get back to the basics - to just pray! To cut through the clutter and the noise and to find God waiting for me - to be there when I turned to Him.

I think it's safe to say that we all have a lot of noise and clutter in our life. Things that distract us from what is good, basic, and pure - in our hunt for the bigger and the better. We live in a secular world and there are many people telling us how we should act and whom we should be. This group tells us this and that group tells us that. We end up criticizing those that are not like us - sometimes for the very same things we do ourselves. When we allow others lead us instead of Jesus Christ - it might as well be the blind leading the blind.

We turn a blind eye to the things that keep us from Christ and fall prey to the seduction and madness of the temptations that lead us astray. The noise and the clutter that just gets louder and louder.

Can we just take a timeout already!
We can - it's called Lent

We are only a few days away. A season of somber humility. Where Advent is a time of anticipation - Lent is a time of preparation. Together we prepare for the great Easter mysteries by committing ourselves to fulfill our baptismal call to maturity, holiness, service, and community. Our response to each call will demand sacrifice, and denial of our own self-will. We CAN turn away from evil, resolve not to sin, and trust in God's amazing grace.

We can imagine Jesus standing on the edge of the desert just before he set forth for 40 days of inner reflection and prayer, and here we are, on the edge of our most important Lent ever. Lent is also about conversion - the radical reorientation of our whole lives toward God's kingdom. A chance to get back to the basics - where Jesus is our guide and our teacher

When we walk out the other side of that desert 40 days from now - are we willing to be different - will we be different. Can we reflect and find those things that need to change - the things that are keeping us from a better relationship with Jesus? How can we become the tree that bears good fruit?

We are given the recipe for cultivating our trees. We can apply a mixture of the three pillars of Lenten service - prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The three go hand in hand and should be a REGULAR part of your Catholic life and not just a once-a-year Lenten sacrifice. It's not just about removing things that distract us from Him but also finding ways to draw closer to the Lord. Lent teaches us how to cut through the clutter and the noise to return to that which is most important - our relationship with Jesus!

Almsgiving means donating money or goods to the poor or performing other acts of charity. One family told me that they place a jar on the kitchen table - then money that they save through their fasting practices (like giving up coffee or soda) gets put in the jar. It will help to show them that Lent is grounded in sacrifice and service. It is also considered "almsgiving" to give one's time and goods to those who are in need. Our Lenten outreach asks for donations to St Michael and St Rose parishes but also offers opportunities to give your valuable time and service to cleaning and repairing or simply providing lunch for the volunteers.

Fasting and Abstinence and Penitential Practices

Fasting refers to the amount of food consumed (Like Ash Weds & Good Friday), while abstinence describes the type of food denied such as meat on Fridays. Fasting is not just food and people can get really creative here. You might give up chocolate or TV or eating out. It doesn't really count if you give up something like broccoli or snow-shoveling. We want to offer to God something beautiful. Remember that Christ fasted completely from food for forty days. No matter what we choose, it will help us to imitate Christ and to be united with the one who gave His life for our salvation.

Penitential practices take many forms: apologizing to an injured party, healing divisions within our families, or graciously accepting the menial tasks of life.

In case you haven't gone in a while, the faithful are obliged to confess their sins once a year

- The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered every Saturday from 3:00 until 4:00 PM and even longer after March 9.
- Lent is the perfect time to visit the confessional and get a fresh start

Look to add things too instead of just giving things up.

- Consider giving blood at the St Dominic blood drive on April 6
- Perhaps a no electronics night each week - no TV, no checking emails, no surfing the web - just good old conversation and a board game or two - without noise and clutter.
- Or go to work on your faith by some spiritual reading - And did you know that St Dominic even has a mini-library in the Marcy Center. Perhaps you might want to venture down there and pick out something to read over the next 40 days.
- Turn your car into a monastery - books on tape, CDs from lighthouse media, Relevant radio or for music listeners K-Love
- Teenagers could sign up for the WI Catholic Youth Rally on March 16 and 17. Our own Father Aaron will be part of this prayerful worship.
- Men might want to think about going to the Men of Christ conference on March 30. It has always been a powerful day of faith and inspiration and there are dozens of priests available for reconciliation too.

- Consider attending our Parish mission nights - Wednesday March 20, 27 and April 3. The speakers will share their life changing stories and love for our Lord. Those evenings will begin with Evening Prayer.

Last but never least - Prayer.

It should be the easiest but it is also the most neglected. If you want a better relationship with Jesus - you have to talk to Him. And like any conversation between friends, you have to give Him a chance to talk too - be quiet and listen. Commit to praying each day during Lent - pick a time to do it, find a quiet place and stick to it.

It will be the most important thing you can do this Lent.

Find new ways to pray and renew old ways

- Did you know that our church offers Adoration on Tuesdays from 1:30 to 7 in the Chapel?
- Attend Mass outside of Sunday. There are weekday Masses here or find an evening Mass at another Church - use it as a family adventure in faith.
- Relive the Stations of the Cross - it's almost every Friday and one Thursday during Lent
- You might want to grab your rosary and join others in praying peacefully on the sidewalk of Affiliated Medical Services during the 40 Days for Life. Let me know if and when you decide to go and I just may join you.

These are just some of the things being offered in our own parish. Other parishes are also offering opportunities for change, for spiritual growth, and for bringing you closer to Jesus. The details for these and other opportunities are spelled out in the bulletin - a must read this week!

St. Teresa of Avila said that we find God in ourselves, and we find ourselves in God. As members of St. Dominic Catholic Parish, we commit ourselves to seek Christ, know Christ, and become Christ, each one for the sake of all. Tis the season - are you willing - are you fed up with the noise and clutter so much that you go back to the basics and seek Christ?

Can you help your tree produce better fruit?

Our goal this Lent should be to become like our teacher.

When we walk out of the desert of Lent and into the joy and splendor of Easter how much of that walk will have been with Jesus?

May this be your best Lent ever!