

LENT

What is it?

Opportunity/Obligation?

Challenge/Non-Starter?

A Catholic "New Year's Resolution?"

The actual meaning of the word is "the lengthening of light". This might remind us, in the northern hemisphere of "Spring" or springtime.

There is something different about the air, the light, the earth and ourselves in "springtime". It is like something burdensome or bothersome has been lifted. It isn't that we have made this difference happen. The difference has embraced us, and everyone else, at the same time. We "feel" different within ourselves and we "interact" with others differently.

As the multitude of things goes in our life and around our life and between us and others this "difference" energizes us.

This is precisely what LENT is supposed to be within us, for us and through us for and with others. The difference with LENT is that we are not the ones who make it happen (just as Spring is not our doing). Lent is how and why we let the Lord Jesus work in our lives and through our lives for others (just as we let the difference of Spring into attitudes and interactions).

So, what about "giving up something", and then struggling to remember carrying through with it, for 40 days?

What about "doing something extra or special", and then finding the time to actually do it, for 40 days?

What about the idea that "it hasn't made much difference in past Lents", so why should I think something is really going to be different this year? Have you ever had a Spring when you just decided you were going to keep doing the "winter thing" and not take on the difference of Spring?

Lent is not a "spiritual getting into shape" experience. It has a better purpose than that.

All the things we choose to “give up” or to “do extra or special” is the external change of attitude or disposition we pledge in order to make “better” room in our lives for the Lord. It is preparation, it is “attitude adjustment”, it is anticipation for realizing what the Lord wants us to be for Easter and then for the rest of the year.

As you know, Easter is the first Sunday following the first full moon after the first day of Spring. This was determined by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD.

The immediate three days prior to Easter is called Triduum. These days are the bridge between Lent and the 50 days of Easter. They are Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

Lent delivers us to the Triduum and the Triduum opens to us Easter, in all of its days. Easter is so important that every week of the year contains a “little” Easter. We call it SUNDAY. It is the primary holy day of the Catholic liturgical and personal prayer life.

From Easter we count backwards 40 days, not counting Sundays (remember, even in Lent, Sundays are “little Easters”. This brings us to the first day of Lent: Ash Wednesday.

ASH WEDNESDAY and GOOD FRIDAY and all the other Fridays are days of united, shared abstinence (no meat for those 14 and above (there is no upper age exemption, only health).

And, they are days of united, shared fasting (one meal of usual proportions and only lesser food at any other times to sustain the demands of the day) for those 19 to 59 years.

The words “shared, united” are important because Lent is not a private practice or experience. It is shared and a united experience for all Catholics across the world. There are many personal options which will be used for individual “keeping Lent”. These options are important because each of us has a different challenge, a different need, a different opportunity and a different realization (depending on our age, our physical health, our life circumstances) for letting Jesus have a better place in our lives, for our own sake and for the sake of all those whom we influence and for whom we are responsible.

So, whatever you may decide to “do” for Lent, that is your personal engagement with Jesus. Why not choose something which you won’t “GIVE UP” at the end of Lent. Or, simply put: if it is suppose to make you closer to Jesus, why would you give that up for the rest of the year?

Secondly, do not forget that Lent is a “shared, uniting” experience with all other Christians and Catholics. Your “keeping of Lent” is going to help someone else, and theirs will do the same for you.