

Adult Education – St. Luke’s Church – Sedona, AZ – Class 25
Suggestions for Keeping a Holy Lent
February 23, 2020

Note: for ease of accessing the web sites referenced in this handout, download your own PDF copy here: <http://www.episcopalnet.org/DBS/Sedona/AdultEducation2019.html> and click on the live links in that copy. Questions or comments? Email me at dmc89az@gmail.com. Follow St. Luke’s on Facebook: “St. Luke’s Church Sedona AZ”.

I. Opening Prayer

O GOD, who desireth not the death of a sinner; mercifully look on the weakness of our mortal nature and of thy great mercy accept our repentance, that through thy pity we may obtain remission of our sins, steadfastness in thy service, and finally the reward which thou has promised to those who persevere. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (*St. Augustine’s Prayer Book* (1967), p. 127.)

II. What is Lent?

- “The word Lent itself is derived from the Anglo-Saxon words *lencten*, meaning *Spring*, and *lenctentid*, which literally means not only *Springtide* but also was the word for *March*, the month in which the majority of Lent falls.”
<https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/history-of-lent.html>
- Beginning with Ash Wednesday, it lasts 40 days not including Sundays, which are always Feast Days. It is a time particularly devoted to prayer, fasting, abstinence and almsgiving.
- The Fast during Holy Week is typically more intense than during the rest of Lent.

III. The Scriptural Basis for Fasting and Abstinence

A. Old Testament

- God’s words to Adam and Eve after the Fall remind us of our mortality: “For *dust* thou art, and unto *dust* shalt thou return.” Genesis 3:19.
- Job, recognizing both his sinfulness and his mortality, declares to God: “Wherefore I repent in *dust and ashes*.” Job 42:6.
- Daniel, confessing his sin and praying for the restoration of Jerusalem, writes: “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with *fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes*: And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession.” Daniel 9:3-4a. Here, you see the fundamental elements of today’s Lenten practices.

- The Israelites, before going into battle under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, engaged in *public* prayer and fasting: “Then they fasted that day, and *put on sackcloth*, and cast *ashes* on their heads, and *rent their clothes*.” I Maccabees 3:47.
- The example of Esther: “Queen Esther also, being in fear of death, resorted unto the Lord: And laid away her glorious apparel, and put on the garments of anguish and mourning: and instead of precious ointments, she covered her head with *ashes and dung*, and she *humbled her body greatly*, and all the places of her joy she filled with her torn hair. And she prayed unto the Lord God of Israel.” *The Rest of Esther* 14:1-3.
- *God calls* the Israelites to public prayer and fasting, and Joel offers words of hope:

“Therefore also now,” saith the LORD, “turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with *fasting*, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments,” and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion, *sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly*: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people.

- Jonah warns the city of Nineveh of its impending doom in forty days. The people and the King respond with extended prayer, fasting and self-mortification, and God relents. Jonah 3:1-10.

B. New Testament

- Of course, we have Jesus’ own example: “Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.” St. Matthew 4:1-2.
- Jesus recognizes the continuing need for prayer and fasting, not just for Himself, but for others: “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” St. Matthew 11:20-21.
- Not **if** you fast but **when**: “Moreover, *when* ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and

wash thy face: That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. St. Matthew 6:16-18.

- Sometimes, fasting is a necessary component of spiritual warfare: “Howbeit this kind [of demon] goeth not out but by *prayer and fasting*.” St. Matthew 17:21.
- St. Paul endorses fasting: “Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.” I Corinthians 7:5.
- He further exhorts the Corinthians: “Give no offense in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings...” II Corinthians 5:3-5.
- The bottom line: regular “prayer and fasting” are **essential and expected** elements of the Christian life.

IV. The History of Lent

A. Early Church

- The Didache (first century A.D.) mentions fasting several times in the context of: fasting for one’s enemies; fasting before Baptism; and fasting on Wednesday and Friday throughout the year. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>
- St. Irenaeus (d. 203) wrote to Pope St. Victor I, commenting on the celebration of Easter and the differences between practices in the East and the West: “The dispute is not only about the day, but also about the actual character of the fast. Some think that they ought to fast for one day, some for two, others for still more; some make their ‘day’ last 40 hours on end. Such variation in the observance did not originate in our own day, but very much earlier, in the time of our forefathers” (Eusebius, History of the Church, V, 24). <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/history-of-lent.html>
- “The Council of Nicaea adopted a canon specifically mandating a 40-day fast, and this is reflected in one of St. Athanasius’ *Festal Letters* in which he implored his congregation to make a 40-day fast prior to the more intense fasting of Holy Week.” *Id.*

B. Later Developments

- Xerophagy was practiced predominantly in the Eastern Church, particularly by the Desert Fathers: “the practice of eating dry food...especially food cooked without oil. In Eastern Christianity, xerophagy is the form of fasting observed during Great Lent and certain other fasts, in which vegetables cooked with water and salt are eaten, together with such things as fruit, nuts, bread and sometimes honey. Think extreme veganism. In some instances, it

was imposed as a form of punishment, particularly for sexual sins.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xerophagy>

- “Pope St. Leo (d. 604), writing to St. Augustine of Canterbury, issued the following rule: ‘We abstain from flesh, meat, and from all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese and eggs.’” <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/history-of-lent.html>.

This was a common standard for many centuries, giving rise to the tradition of Shrovetide and Shrove Tuesday, in which households used up all meat, eggs, and dairy products.

- Later, the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas reflect approval of eating fish (because of the different nature of its “flesh” and its less “pleasurable” qualities compared, say, to red meat.) For practical reasons, during the Crusades the Popes issued dispensation allowing soldiers to eat eggs and dairy and eggs.
- Modern day practices vary widely and tend to be relatively lax by historical standards.

C. Book of Common Prayer

(BCP, page li)

A TABLE OF FASTS.

Ash Wednesday

Good Friday

OTHER DAYS OF FASTING, ON WHICH THE CHURCH REQUIRES SUCH A MEASURE OF ABSTINENCE AS IS MORE ESPECIALLY SUITED TO EXTRAORDINARY ACTS AND EXERCISES OF DEVOTION.

- I. The Forty Days of Lent.
- II. The Ember Days at the Four Seasons, being the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday after the First Sunday in Lent, the Feast of Pentecost, September 14, and December 13.
- III. All the Fridays in the Year, except Christmas Day, and The Epiphany, or any Friday which may intervene between these Feasts.

DAYS OF SOLEMN SUPPLICATION

The three Rogation Days, being the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Holy Thursday, or the Ascension of our Lord.

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In a typical year, this comprises about **95** Fasts!

A Pre-Lent Meditation



“...some fell on good ground...”

The days of Pre-Lent, from Septuagesima Sunday till Shrove Tuesday, were anciently intended to be days of preparation for the coming Great Fast. In days when people took Lent more seriously than we do, they prepared for it body and soul. Weeks before the Fast began, they began a gradual abstinence from the foods customarily forbidden during the Fast. Since the custom was to avoid all “animal products,” meat, milk, cheese, butter and all such were laid aside. Our Sexagesima Sunday was commonly called “Carnival Sunday,” not because of a big party (which remains in things like *Mardi Gras*, “Fat Tuesday”); *carne vale* in Latin means “farewell to meat.” Quinquagesima, the days immediately before Ash Wednesday, were, as *Fat Tuesday* says, the days to bid farewell to the fats in our food: milk, butter and cheese. In the Orthodox Churches these terms remain till today: “Meatfare” and “Cheesefare” Sundays lead them into the

Lenten Fast.

We may not follow the old Fast so stringently, but even with our lackadaisical keeping of Lent most people have the idea that it’s a time to “give something up.” It may be chocolate or your favorite television program – or today I guess, computer game – but most who practice *some* form of Lent at least begin the season with some form of self-discipline in mind. The “giving up” of something is meant to be sacramental, an outward sign of something inward.

Leaving aside for now the existential cultural crisis the eating of meat or ingesting of animal fats may provoke, the “giving up” of things for the duration of the Fast is intended to be the giving up of *good* things. Giving up stealing or gossiping for Lent misses the point. We give up something good for something better. For an ol’ Texas boy, giving up steak or even chicken till Easter means I’m wantin’ something *seriously* better.

What is it? What’s the “something inward” for which we undertake forty days and forty nights of fasting and abstinence?

We discipline our bodies to discipline our souls. Any other reason for observing Lent may be personally satisfying but is spiritually hollow.

If the Church in the past set aside the three weeks of Pre-Lent to prepare our bodies for the Fast, it was with the obvious intent that we prepare our souls, too. The medieval name for Pre-Lent was “Shrovetide,” from the old English word *shrive*, to forgive. Pre-Lent was a time for each Christian to prepare and make a confession of their sins and receive forgiveness for them.

The Gospel we read at Mass this Sunday (which has been read every Sexagesima Sunday for 1500 years or more) is the Lord's Parable of the Sower. You remember how it goes: the Sower goes into His field to sow seeds. Some of the seed falls on the roadside and birds gobble it down. Some falls on rocks and dies in the sun. Some of the seed *does* sprout but is choked by thorns. Other seed "fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold." The point of the parable isn't the seed, but the soil, and the Lord Christ looked back to opening chapters of the Bible – and some of its earliest teaching – for the words and meaning of His parable.

In Genesis, when God made man, He formed us from the soil, the dust of the earth. In Christ's parable that soil, the dust of the earth on which the seed is cast, is us. When the Lord's disciples ask Him to explain the meaning of the parable, He tells them they are the soil in His story and the parable hinges on what sort of soil they are. But His parable reaches across time and is directed at every one of us who are – even nominally – His disciples. What sort of soil, He still asks, are you? His parable is a call – dare I say demand? – for each of us look inside and see who we are.

As we move through Shrovetide towards Lent, the Church's Liturgy points us to these days to prepare for Lent. Each of the Pre-Lenten readings and prayers call us to prepare. The Sexagesima Gospel invites us to introspection or, to use the customary words, "self-examination." Over the centuries countless books have been written for the purpose, from St John Cassian's *Conferences of the Desert Fathers* and St John Climacus' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* in the early centuries through *The Imitation of Christ* (our parish Lent Book this year). Whatever we use as a guide to self-examination, the call is the same. Stop. Be quiet for a bit. Take a look inside yourself to see what you've done that you ought not to have done, and what you haven't done that you ought to have. Don't compare yourself to anybody else, good or bad. Compared to the Lord Jesus only, how do you measure up? What sort of soil are you? Does Christ's Gospel spring up in you and bear fruit? Are you worth the plucking? When you're asking yourself those questions, you're getting ready for Lent.

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<https://stjosephsanglican.com/weekly-scribblings/f/some-fell-on-good-ground>

Five Things to Do During Lent

by
[+ David McMannes](#)

Do you love Lent? I do, but a lot of folk don't have all that much affection for the season. Many Christians have come to think of it in negative terms; however, Lent is not about hair shirts, solemn countenances and the like. Rather, it is a positive, strengthening, lovely spiritual experience, and if you want to grow in your love of God and your neighbor, then Lent is for you! Here are five things to do with single-mindedness this Lent which, if you do them, will give you a clearer vision of the Risen Christ, come Easter.

I. FASTING & ABSTINENCE

The biggest problem we moderns have with fasting and abstinence is one of confusion; that is, we don't really understand them. The priest gets up and talks about what they mean, and when he's done, people are more confused than they were when he started. So, here's a simplified elucidation of fasting and abstinence: Abstinence lowers the quality of food (usually by not eating meat) and fasting lowers the quantity, and usually means not more than a light breakfast, one full meal, and one half meal daily each fast day.

Therefore, the rule is “keep it smaller and keep it simpler.” Smaller portions of food, and simpler menus. Don't eat so much during Lent. Not because you necessarily have to lose weight, but because the practice will give you strength in your spiritual life by weakening the attractions of the sensate pleasures. Fasting makes the waistline shrink and the heart get larger, and abstinence makes the heart grow fonder.

Indulge in both fasting and abstinence during Lent, and you will have a clearer vision of the Risen Christ, come Easter.

II. PRAYING

For the forty days of Lent, start and end each day with prayer. Read [Morning](#) and [Evening](#) Prayer and/or [Family Prayer](#). Dust off that old grace you used to say before eating – spend some table time in quiet reflection and prayer instead of chattering and chomping. Pray daily, making sure you indulge in all the qualities of Christian prayer – adoration, thanksgiving, petition, penitence, and invocation.

Pray daily, and you will have a clearer vision of the Risen Christ, come Easter.

III. BIBLE READING

Do this daily, also, and if you haven't availed yourself of reading the Daily Office of Morning and Evening prayer, you are missing out on the opportunity the Church has given you for daily study and reading of Holy Writ. There's solace, insight, encouragement, grace and a whole lot more in scripture, and that can't be said about any other book in your library. The Good Book is precisely that, and those who read it daily learn how to be good – godly – themselves.

You can read the Bible daily via the Ordo Kalendar's links, or you can avail yourself of the [innumerable publications available on episcopalnet.org](#) via paper and electronic books on the Daily Office regimen.

Read Holy Writ daily, and you will have a clearer vision of the Risen Christ, come Easter.

IV. CORPORATE WORSHIP

Corporate worship is a basic Christian duty. Our Prayer Book puts it succinctly, telling us that part of our bounden duty is to [worship God every Sunday in his Church](#). Doing so brings us understanding, strengthens our faith, gives us hope, fills us with encouragement, and gives us the first-hand experience of being loved by God – and that gives us the ability to love others more fully. There is nothing we can do on Sunday morning that is more important than being in God's House and being fed by His grace-filled presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

Make a commitment not to miss one single Sunday in God's House this Lenten season. Jesus told us to *this do* (Luke 22:19; 1Cor 11:24-25), so let's do it together, every single Sunday, and you will have a clearer vision of the Risen Christ, come Easter.

V. WORKS OF MERCY

The final step is to, as the prayer says, [do all such good works as ... \[God\]...has prepared for us to walk in](#). There are fourteen “works” which enable us to put our faith in Christ into action in our life. They are both spiritual and temporal and are as follows:

Spiritual Works of Mercy: (1) Converting the sinner, (2) Instructing the ignorant, (3) Counseling the doubtful, (4) Comforting the sorrowful, (5) Bearing wrongs patiently, (6) Forgiving injuries, (7) Praying for the living and the dead.

Corporal Works of Mercy: (1) Feeding the hungry, (2) Giving drink to the thirsty, (3) Clothing the naked, (4) Harboring the stranger, (5) Visiting the sick, (6) Ministering to prisoners, (7) Burying the dead.

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Finally, and no doubt most importantly, let your Lenten lapses and failures – whatever they may be – serve only to increase your dependence upon God. None of us will do all we want to do during Lent. That's the human condition. The point is not to get a good grade; the point is to increase your capacity to love God and your neighbor.

After all, Lent is a time to learn how to love – God's way – once again. That's the whole point of the season!

<http://www.episcopalnet.org/TRACTS/5ThingsLent.html>

A Checklist of Suggested Activities

- _____ Before Ash Wednesday, read and reflect on Fr. Wilcox's Pre-Lent Meditation and watch Brant Pitre's very good video: The Biblical Roots of Ash Wednesday.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vnGEJHg05E>
- _____ Complete your Lenten Resolve.
- _____ Do the activities outlined in "Stations of the Cross – A Six Week Lenten Exercise," provided with your class materials and also available here:
<http://www.episcopalnet.org/PDF/Stations%20of%20the%20Cross%20Lenten%20Regimen.pages.pdf>
- _____ Pray the Daily Offices, conveniently provided on our website:
Morning Prayer: <http://www.episcopalnet.org/1928bcp/FBSMP.html>
Evening Prayer: <http://www.episcopalnet.org/1928bcp/FBSEP.html>
- _____ Pray the Rosary every day with one or more special intentions.
- _____ Say the Angelus every day at noon. *See*, "Things for Christians to Know and Use"
<http://www.episcopalnet.org/TRACTS/tractsthings.html>
- _____ Read and reflect on the Seven Penitential Psalms (BCP, p. ix) over the course of a week.
- _____ Attend Stations of the Cross every Friday.
- _____ Support all Clergy and Postulants by faithfully observing the Lenten Ember Days on March 4, 6 and 7. (A handout will be provided on Sunday, March 1.)
- _____ Make your Confession during Holy Week. Read "Why Confession?"
(<http://www.episcopalnet.org/TRACTS/WhyConfession.html>) and use "Penance" as a guide for preparation: <http://www.episcopalnet.org/TRACTS/PenanceFormsAndPrayers.html>
- _____ Attend all Holy Week services.
- _____ Read *every* link on "Tracts for our Times" <http://www.episcopalnet.org/TRACTS/index.html>.
If you exclude the links to "Prayers While Vesting," "Preparation for Mass for Celebrant and Servers," and the "Server's Guide," there are 46 links – *exactly* the same number of calendar days in Lent!
- _____ Say the nine-day "Novena for the United States of America."
<http://www.episcopalnet.org/TRACTS/NovenaForUnitedStates.html>
- _____ Refresh your understanding and appreciation of the Anglo-Catholic tradition:
What is Anglo-Catholicism? <http://anglicanhistory.org/alexander/>
Anglo-Catholic Worship. <http://www.episcopalnet.org/PDF/Class%2017%20-%20Anglo-Catholic%20Worship.pdf>
- _____ Use the Ordo Kalendar (<http://www.episcopalnet.org/Kalendars/>) and the Saints Index
(<http://www.episcopalnet.org/Saints/index.html>) to read and reflect on the lives of each Saint commemorated during Lent. Read the Catholic Encyclopedia link for each Saint.
- _____ Select three books to read from the Christian Library:
<http://www.episcopalnet.org/GoodBooks/index.html>.

Lenten Resolve

After prayerful consideration, record specific actions you intend to take in each of the following categories and note your progress as well as any rewards and/or challenges you experienced. **Remember:** “We discipline our bodies to discipline our souls. Any other reason for observing Lent may be personally satisfying but is spiritually hollow.” *Fr. Wilcox*. “The point is not to get a good grade; the point is to increase your capacity to love God and your neighbor.” *Bp. McMannes*.

Fasting & Abstinence: _____

Prayer: _____

Bible Study: _____

Corporate Worship: _____

Works of Mercy: _____
