

February 25th this year, Ash Wednesday, marks the beginning of Lent. **But what is Lent and what exactly are we supposed to do as Catholics during this time?** Lent is a penitential season of approximately 40 days established by the Church in order for us to prepare for the commemoration of Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection during Holy Week. During Lent we remember how Jesus took 40 days in the desert to prepare for His public ministry. We also remember how, even when He was "very busy", He always took time aside for prayer, contemplation and communication with the Father.

Traditionally, Lent is a period of time for penitence, fasting, almsgiving, prayer and reflection; a time to perform acts of penance and self-denial to repair for our sins. The official requirements of the Church call for fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and it applies to adults between the ages of 18 and 59. Fasting refers to eating only one main meal with no snacks between meals. Two smaller meals can be eaten in addition to the one main meal, provided that the two meals combined are not as large as the main meal. In addition, all Catholics 14 years old and older must abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent.

Why do this? Fasting is a sacrifice that reminds us of Jesus' sufferings and we do it out of respect for His offering His very own flesh for the forgiveness of our sins. But Lent is not only about giving-up food. It's about sacrifice and self-denial. Denial of things that perhaps without realizing it, we have become "addicted" to like TV, internet usage, video games, cell phone usage, unhealthy food, alcohol, drugs, or whatever any other addiction might be distracting us from focusing on what is important.

On the other hand, in addition to giving-up something, we can also "do" more. Like dedicate more time to prayer, attend Mass daily or several times a week, pray the rosary, or make the way of the cross. Or perhaps it is time to be more patient, less judgmental, more accepting or maybe it is time to forgive someone who offended us and finally find peace with that person. And if it was us who offended and hurt someone, we need to be humble and ask for that person's forgiveness. We are called to love as God loves us, we must show love for one another in very concrete ways. Just as we ask for God's love and forgiveness, so we must be willing to do for one another.

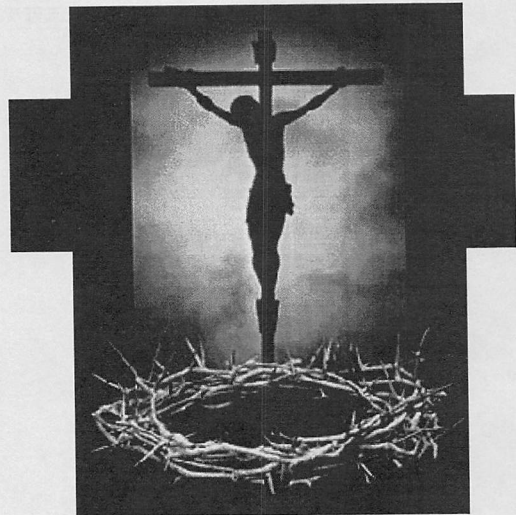
We are called to look for opportunities to perform Corporal and Spiritual Acts of Mercy during Lent.

The Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy are:

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit the imprisoned
7. Bury the dead

The Seven Spiritual Acts of Mercy are:

1. Admonish the sinner
2. Instruct the ignorant
3. Counsel the doubtful
4. Comfort the sorrowful
5. Bear wrongs patiently
6. Forgive injuries
7. Pray for the living and the dead



Lent is an ideal time for us to meet our annual requirement of confession, since it is a time of penance and reflection. The opportunities to really live this Lent as true followers of Jesus are endless if we are open to them and allow the Spirit to guide us. Let us renounce something that really will be difficult to give-up this Lent and perform acts of generosity in His name, **for it is in the way we treat each other that people will be able to recognize us as Catholics.**

May you and your loved ones have a Blessed Lenten Season!

Office of Faith Formation, Diocese of Brooklyn