

Seven Ways to Make a Better Lent

1. Pray privately. Start with five minutes a day, in a private space and moment, to center yourself in Christ and find what his will is for you. Ask him to set your mind ablaze with his light, so that you see what you must do and have the strength to do it. Take enough time to charge your battery. Encourage other family members to do the same, and then let them alone to do it. Keep your thoughts as private as a conversation with God should be.

2. Pray publicly. Seek out and participate in parish and school liturgies or special Lenten services, from the old-fashioned Stations of the Cross to the currently popular Ashes-to-Easter five week program. Share your overflow of grace from private prayer with your second family, the community.

3. Make your sacrifices a positive affirmation. Less a doing *without* than a doing *for*. Don't stop at material denials. Offering up a favorite TV show or Sunday morning coffeecake is nothing compared to giving up the pleasure of having the last word or being infallible. At least once a day, refrain from saying "I told you so," "I knew I was right" and "It wasn't my fault." For 40 days, try to keep your mouth shut and your heart open.

4. Give—your time, energy, privacy, effort, ear and light heart—unsparingly. Give without reckoning cost or reward. Work in whatever capacity you are needed (and ask God's guidance to lead you there), at hospitals, hospices, nursing homes, prisons, soup kitchens, Meals-on-Wheels. If you are paid, fine. But don't expect it.

5. Give—of all your material blessings. If you give money, don't call it tithing and expect something back. Just give it as you think Christ would, out of love.

6. Be actively concerned about the entire world, not only your small, specific one. Read, listen, learn, become involved in making a more Christ-like life by working for good in politics, environment, world hunger, peace and nuclear power, armaments dispersal—all topics we have heard about over and over until they have little meaning. Make them real. Remember we are all one family trying to make a just and loving home out of this world.

7. Keep a joyful sense of humor about your imperfections and lapses. If we were perfect, we wouldn't be here. Wear a face that says, "Be of good cheer!" Secret, silent martyrs only make real martyrs of those who have to live with them. "A cheerful countenance bespeaks a serene heart," and a serene heart says that all is well, all is very well, Lent and all.