

LENTEN PRACTICES

Every Lent, our Holy Mother the Church advocates certain pious practices that her children should perform to satisfy their requirements to do penance, to pray, to perform good works, to make reparation for their sins, and to further the apostolic life of the Church.

The primary purpose of Lent, of course, is to help us become truly holy - and we should work toward this goal during Lent by *extra* prayer, penance, good works, almsgiving, attendance at Mass and reception of the Sacraments (the chief sources of grace). Below are some specific practices we can choose from:

Abstinence - This is the giving up of something we like to eat, drink, smoke, use, etc. We can abstain from (give up) meat on days other than just those required (Ash Wednesday & all Fridays of Lent), give up sweets, soda pop, gum, coffee, tea, smoking, liquor, snacks, having simpler meals, etc. Use the money saved for charity.

Fasting - While only *required* on Ash Wednesday & Good Friday, it is also something we can do more often during Lent (perhaps *every* Friday). Fasting requires that we have only one meal per day with two lesser meals that, if added together, do not add up to a second meal. However, this is rather minimal. You may wish to do more such as having only one major meal that day or perhaps having only bread and water, etc.

Entertainment - We can drastically limit our T.V. viewing, give up favorite programs or give up television altogether. Perhaps instead we can watch a good program as a family or a religious video. Rather than going to secular movies, rent a religious film to watch as a family instead.

Prayer - * Daily Mass (at St. John Chrysostom's: 6:30 and 8:00 a.m. daily) * Daily Rosary (at our parish it is recited daily after the 8:00 a.m. Mass) * Holy Hour Weekly (here Tuesdays @ 7:00 p.m.) * Family Prayer each night * Friday Stations of the Cross (every Friday at 7:30 p.m.)

Confession - Frequent Confession is generally said to be once a month and this would be a good practice to have all year long but several of the saints including St. Francis de Sales and St. Alphonsus Liguori recommend weekly Confession. Resolve to make a good Examination of Conscience. (There are good "Confession guide" leaflets provided in the vestibules of the church. At St. John Chrysostom's: Saturday's at 4:00 and 7:00 p.m.)

Penance - Our Lord told us that penance is necessary for salvation. Works of penance are a way of mortifying ourselves and growing in sanctity

Good Works - * Visit the sick * Visit people in nursing homes * Support pro-life efforts * Take someone to Mass with you on Sundays * Get involved in social justice programs

Almsgiving - * Increase your donations to the Church * Give to cloistered monasteries or convents * Support the missions * Support crisis pregnancy centers * Support Christian Service programs * Help the poor

Apostolic Works - * Take someone to Mass * Take someone to Confession * Assist in Religious Education

Spiritual Reading - * Read at least 15 minutes per day from a good Catholic book * Read the Bible at least 15 minutes daily * Read from the lives of the Saints at least 15 minutes daily

See the movie The Passion of the Christ - This movie is highly recommended as a prayerful way to mediate upon the Passion of Our Lord. It is *not* "entertainment." It is a highly religious experience. Praying the Stations of the Cross would be a good practice after seeing it. You can rent it at any movie rental store.

The suggestions above are certainly not an exhaustive list and much more could be added. However, you may decide to choose a few of these and do them well in order to use this penitential season for a true renewal of your prayer life that you may grow ever closer to our Divine Lord.