

Ask Fr. James

What Lenten Observances are we called to undertake at the season?

Every year when Lent comes around at this time, we find ourselves wondering what to do for Lent. What should I give up? Or what should I take up? St. Augustine explains that Lent is a time of chastising the body, a time to embrace hardship so that the soul could be purified and could contemplate more devoutly Christ's sacrifice. In other words, we are to engage in more spiritual practices and hopefully cultivate those habits for the rest of our lives. Though these practices may seem like more suffering and sorrow but therein lies the way through which God will bless us.

Liturgically and scripturally the theme of the Israelites Exodus journey to the Promised Land is central to explaining Lent. The Israelites spent 40 years on a journey that should have taken them 40 days. The journey of the Jewish people through the wilderness from slavery to freedom was undoubtedly filled with trials and tribulations, but ultimately, through circuitous route they were able to leave the painful experiences of Egypt, the struggling time in the desert and finally arrived at the Promised Land. They were blessed at the end of the journey.

The goal of the Lenten journey is Easter. Good Friday pains leads us to the joys of the resurrection. During the season of Lent, we engage in some spiritual devotion like Stations of Cross, fasting, giving to Development and Peace and some local charities and indigent people in our neighbourhood. The least we are called to do is to sacrifice a little to help the less privileged.

Traditionally prayer, fasting, and almsgiving have been thought of as the three chief practical aspects of our Lenten conversion. We are also called to fast. Our focus should not just be on fasting from food. Is there something else that has a hold on us. Fasting brings us closer to God by enhancing self-control, purging bad habits and improving health. The Christian fast is a discipline akin to Jesus' fasting in the desert for 40 days.

Lent is also a time of reconciliation as part of an interior conversion, particularly the failure of humanity to meet God's standards. We should plan to attend the parish's reconciliation service. It is an opportunity to reform ourselves individually, as a community and as a Church. During this time we attentively listen to the Word of God and take stock of the failure of humanity, particularly the body, to meet God's standards and we seek forgiveness from God.

We engage in all these Lenten observances while awaiting Holy Easter with all the joy of spiritual desire. The desire meant here is a reaching out for what is to come. The goal of our Lenten journey is Easter. Of course, Easter is more than the annual celebration at the end of the Lenten journey. We await it and celebrate it at every moment. This central mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection is fundamental to the whole of our lives.

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.