

# Fact of FAITH

## An Introduction to Lent

by Larry Rice

The days between Ash Wednesday and Easter are conventionally referred to as the season of Lent. For us Catholics, this is a very important time of year. These 40 days invite us to seek conversion—a change of heart—and repentance—a turning away from sin and seeking a closer relationship with God.

For many people, Lent is a time to give up some pleasure or do some extra act of charity or personal discipline. This reminds us not to be ruled by the desires of our physical senses, living according to the flesh, but to master our fleshly desires and live according to the Spirit (see Rom 8:5 and Gal 5:13, 16-17). This sacrifice allows Christ to live more fully in and through us. The

**“For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. . . . I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh.”**

—Gal 5:13, 16

austerity of disciplining our flesh is reflected in our liturgical celebrations by somber purple vestments and decorations and by not proclaiming the Alleluia before the Gospel. This solemn tone heightens our anticipation as we look forward to the bright, joyous celebration of Easter.

The traditional disciplines of Lent are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Increased attention to prayer draws us closer to God. Fasting is a reminder that our physical satisfaction isn't our highest value, and almsgiving is the act of sacrificing something of ourselves for the good of others.

Ask yourself if you could give something up for Lent that would serve to remind you of the disciplines of this season. As I often do, I'm giving up elevators this Lent. It's a reminder to myself that left to my own devices, I can become lazy and complacent. My soul knows I'd be better off taking the stairs.

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