

PRAYING LENT

From the *Online Ministries*, CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY

The Midpoint of Lent

What if I'm at the midpoint of Lent and not much is going on?

I began with the best of intentions, but I am not sure what I'm doing or what I want to be doing. Can my Lent be 'rescued'? Can a six week journey be completed in the remaining next two or three weeks - waiting for my heart to be open? Of course, the answer is "yes." It doesn't take long for God, when we are ready.

How to begin again

The first step to beginning again has already begun, if I have the desire for something real during Lent. A therapist once said that "we get better when we get tired of not being better." This isn't the same as "guilt." Feeling guilty for not doing much about Lent won't get us very far. What we need is a real desire - a real sense of expectation that God has something for me to hear, to learn, to change, and I want to be ready to listen.

A little desire is enough to shape deeper desires.

This desire can co-exist with fear, with resistance, with bad habits that have been obstacles in the past. God doesn't need much of an opening to begin to free us and show us a transforming love.

A little desire is enough to shape deeper desires. Once we can say we want to make something of these precious days remaining in Lent, then we can start naming some more specific desires.

For some of us, it is obvious. There is a big, glaring self-defeating pattern staring us in the

face. Most of the time, however, it takes a little reflection, a bit of honest examination of conscience to really see what is getting in the way of my being a follower of Jesus.



After some reflection, I might admit that there is a streak of stubbornness or impatience or harshness that keeps putting me at odds with people. Perhaps there is an old wound or a fresh experience of hurt or loss that has turned into a festering anger that robs me of simple joys and sorrows or compassion for suffering of others.

Maybe I am obsessed with how I look - how others see me - and my choices each day are guided by what will make other people like me, and my mood each day goes up and down depending upon people's response to me. I might somehow know that I'm compensating for some emptiness or loneliness or sadness or insecurity by trying to fill in what is missing with quite temporary satisfaction - over-eating, drinking too much,

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In addition to this resource for Lent, there are many others to support our journey through Lent. And, there is a **Lenten Daily Prayer** for each day of Lent.

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escaping in sexual fantasy or pornography or masturbation.

Perhaps I know that my conflicts with my spouse are getting to a bad place, but because my spouse won't do what I want him/her to do - won't be self-sacrificing in loving me - so I refuse to die to myself in loving him/her. Or it might have gotten worse – to the point that I'm punishing him/her

Lent begins when I can say “Help me Lord!”

by my silence or withdrawal of attention, affection, time. And, maybe a homily or something I read recently made me realize that I really have not paid attention to the needs of the poor - and perhaps I've even taken stands and voted against issues and candidates who stand on the side of the poor. After some reflection, I may just realize I'm not very grateful for what has been given me, and therefore, I'm just not very happy, generous or free.

Lent begins when I can say "Help me Lord!" Now I can turn to the Lord, with some real, concrete desires. Now I can practice waking up each morning and naming a desire - while I'm putting on my slippers, or taking a shower or getting dressed:
"Lord, it feels so good to be honest with myself before you. Let me know your presence today. Help me face the challenges that will be there today. Give me some more freedom to make different choices, and act on the graces you are giving me, to refrain from escaping, but rather to give myself to loving, as you have loved me."

Imagine all the different prayers like that - one minute long - that would shape our day! With these desires to let God's grace transform me, then I can pause before going to bed each night, and look back through the day to thank God for the places I felt God's presence and help.

Focusing Lent with a Plan

If we have a plan, we are more likely to follow it. That plan can have the following elements, which

will give real purpose in vitality to our Lenten experience.

- **What am I going to give up each day?**
This is something I need to fast from, abstain from every day. For most of us it means that whenever we feel the temptation to do something that is a bad pattern, we will recognize it quickly and refrain from doing it. It is basically training in self-discipline, for the purpose of letting God's grace have a chance to work in us. So, if being crabby or impatient with various people throughout my day is my struggle, then each morning I can ask for the grace to give that up today. And, I can practice some response that will replace it. Perhaps I will try to see the other person the way God sees him/her. Perhaps I will imagine some pain or struggle or insecurity that could be the reason that they are annoying me.

Perhaps I just need to say something affirming or complementary to the person. Or, if I'm tempted to escape in fantasy throughout the day, I can ask for the grace each morning to live with and embrace the real human beings I live with today.

- **How can I be generous today?**
Almsgiving has been such an important part of Lent. For most of us it involves being more generous to the poor. For some of us, it will mean giving money to the poor for the first time. For others, this may be the time for me to prepare food for a meal program in my city. For some of us, it could mean deciding some simplifying of our food patterns or entertainment, and giving that amount of money saved each week to the poor. It is again, all about, de-selfish-ing ourselves, so that God can free us to be more comfortable with the graces of gratitude and generosity.

Let's give Lent a new start in the days ahead. God is offering us more than we can ask or imagine.