

20 Ideas for Lent

God cannot be outdone in generosity.

By Patti Armstrong – adapted from <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/armstrong/20-holy-hacks-for-lent>

The time of suffering is upon us -Lent! It is the season of choosing sacrifice and following Jesus who chose to suffer and die for us. If we suffer with Christ, we will also rise and be renewed in our faith on Easter as a prelude to life everlasting.

Such a joyous description of Lent makes giving up chocolate seem positively mundane. But it's not really. Sacrifices, big or small, just need the right attitude and a moment of reflection in which we engage our hearts and minds to connect our action to our love of Jesus Christ. Feelings come and go, but the *decision* to love regardless of how we *feel* at any given moment, is our gift to God.

Lent is a focused time of participation in prayer, fasting and almsgiving, to transform ourselves to destroy death, and to live a new life in Christ. "Give alms... Pray to your Father... Fast without a gloomy face..." (Matthew 6:1-18)

We can integrate Lenten sacrifices into our lives in simple, doable measures. These ideas are about integrating our faith into the rest of what we do.

Prayer

1. Thank God for every inconvenience during Lent. We can also choose to accept whatever suffering God has already chosen for us. "You must accept your cross," said St. John Vianney, "If you bear it courageously it will carry you to heaven."
2. Now take that suffering and unite it with that of Jesus Christ during his passion and crucifixion. We can align ourselves with God's mission when we unite our suffering and sacrifices with the power of Christ. St. Paul tells us: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body, which is the Church."
3. Set your alarm for 3 p.m. to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy all during Lent. We repeat on the rosary beads: For the sake of his powerful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world!"
4. Pray consecutive novenas. Since Lent is 40 days, you can pick 5 different novenas and you will go a few days extra. The extra benefit will be all yours.
5. Pray the Stations of the Cross. Find a church that does them on Fridays during Lent. You can pray them daily at church or at home. According to Brother Estanislao (1903-1927) Jesus made promises to those with a devotion to The Way of the Cross. There is also a plenary indulgence attached for praying the stations at church or at a site where you move from station to station.
6. Make a Lenten commitment to pray for anyone who irritates or troubles you as you go through your day. Do it on the spot so that you will not lose your peace.

Fasting

It is mandatory during Lent that every person 14 years of age or older abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent. Everyone between the age of 18 and 59 must fast (one big meal and 2 small ones) on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Keep in mind that giving up meals or favorite foods are always a type of fast. In the Bible, whenever fasting was mentioned, it always referred to going without food. For those who want to integrate fasting itself into a daily Lenten sacrifice, here are some ideas.

7. Skip a meal.
8. Have only one meal a day. Father Larry Richards has recommended fasting to listeners who are praying for conversions but not seeing results. He fasts by eating only one meal a day and says he has seen powerful effects and has the added benefit of feeling healthier.
9. Abstain from something at each meal. It could be mustard on your sandwich, the main course, salad dressing... just something that is a sacrifice. St. Francis de Sales advised people never to leave the table without having refused themselves something.
10. Pick a day or a meal where you just fast on bread and water.
11. Eat only for health so that meals are plain such as a hard-boiled egg, dry toast and a banana. That used to be St. Teresa of Calcutta's daily breakfast.
12. Fast from some activity such as TV, social media, etc. Use that time instead for prayer or good works.
13. Do not eat between meals during Lent.
14. Whatever the fasting sacrifice, when a feeling of deprivation hits, offer it up for a particular intention or person.
15. Fast from vanity. Don't wear makeup or go without one item. Don't wear jewelry during Lent. Wear clothing items you don't particularly like to reduce vanity. Then get on about your day and think of yourself less as you focus on others to reflect your real beauty.

Alms Giving

16. Put all the change from all purchases you make during Lent in a jar designated for charity.
17. If you are abstaining from something that costs money such as coffee or cigarettes, give that money to the poor.
18. Find a charity for the poor, making a difference for the poor and forgotten.
19. Make your giving hurt. Donate money that will require you not to have something you wanted. Otherwise, it's giving from your excess. Jesus gave his entire self for us.
20. Go through your closets and house and pick out something you love and give it away to a charity such as a thrift store that supports the needy or to organizations such as St. Vincent DePaul. Find an item a day or an item a week. The greater it's value the greater your gift to God.

Through prayers, fasting and almsgiving, we help ourselves to grow in love and charity. If we feel deprived from time to time, let that feeling make you happy because it confirms you are doing something very real and will be blessed by that because God cannot be outdone in generosity.