



25 GREAT THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR LENT ... besides giving up chocolate

Adapted from the original compilation by Renée LaReau



Ash Wednesday marked the beginning of Lent, the 40 days of preparation for the Easter season when Christians are called to renew their commitments to spiritual practices like prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Lent is an annual opportunity to grow in our faith, which means it's about much more than giving up unhealthy foods or treats, as you may have done when you were a kid. It is about abstaining from whatever is unhealthy in our lives – gossip, laziness, lack of social conscience – and, most importantly, taking concrete steps to do something more. Challenge yourself this year, and go beyond the clichés of “giving up” something. Now is a great time to take stock of your spiritual life, and to grow in it. Not sure where to start?

Check out these 25 ideas

1) Make a commitment to reading the Sunday readings before you go to Mass. In the same way that reading up on football players, opposing teams, and coaching strategies will help you experience a game more fully, familiarizing yourself with the readings ahead of time can allow you to experience them in a deeper way on Sunday. (Find the Sunday readings in the Archdiocese of Singapore Official Catholic Directory and Ordo or at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/>.)

2) Don't have time to read all three readings? Then just read the Gospel.



3) Make a commitment to trying something new spiritually. Never tried an hour of Eucharistic adoration? Find a parish where you can try it. Never attended Mass at a parish of an ethnic group that's different than yours? Give it a try.

4) Think about what you usually spend your money on. Do you buy a few too many clothes? Spend a few too many bucks on iTunes? Eating out? Pick one type of expenditure that you'll “fast” from during Lent, and give the money you would usually spend to a great local charity. (Returning the Charities Week envelope with a

donation is a good start.) Challenge yourself this year, and go beyond the clichés of “giving up” something. Now is a great time to take stock of your spiritual life, and to grow in it.

5) When you first sit down in front of your computer at work, or at the very end of your work day, try a great 10-minute prayer, based on the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius, at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/> brought to you by the Irish Province Jesuits.

6) Go to a weekday Mass one day during the week. Many parishes offer them early in the morning, at noon, or after work. Daily Masses are often more intimate and informal than Sunday Mass.

7) If you don't have a cross in your apartment or house, buy a simple one and put it in your bedroom.

8) Read the entire Gospel of Mark in one sitting. As the shortest Gospel, it is the most concise story of Jesus' life, and the cross, a central Lenten symbol, plays an even more prominent role than in the other Gospels.

9) Attend the Stations of the Cross somewhere – lots of parishes offer these during Lent, and often on Fridays.

10) Get some friends together and attend a Friday fish fry at a parish or at your home as a reminder to abstain from meat on Fridays.

11) Turn off your iPod or your car radio on your commute. The silence may be jarring at first, but you may find that you are able to concentrate better and will be more observant of your surroundings.

12) Buy a book of daily reflections and keep it by your bed. Or go online for resources.

13) Think about a habit that has kept you from being whom God

is calling you to be. Consciously give up that habit for Lent.

14) During Lent, we're called to fast not only from food but from other things as well. Read a great reflection on fasting at <http://www.bustedhalo.com/features/fastingtraditions.htm>

15) Make a commitment to “fast” from cruel comments about others.



16) As a part of your Lenten almsgiving, make a point to learn as much about a particular social issue (immigration, human trafficking, racism, AIDS victims, child poverty) as possible. Give money to an organization, related to your chosen issue that supports the dignity of the human person. Donate your time and talent to local charities. Visit the Catholic Social and Community Council website <http://www.cscs-singapore.org/indexflash.html> for information on where you can put your talent and time to good use.

17) Pray for somebody. As you're walking the streets, driving the highways, sitting in your cubicle at work, or going to a movie, pick out a person who appears to be in need, and pray for that person. Be mindful of the words of Philo of Alexandria, who said, “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.”

18) Read the Lent FAQ's from St. Anthony Messenger at <http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/lent/faqs.asp>

19) Lent originated as a time of preparation for people who were preparing for baptism. Those of us who are baptized use Lent as a time of preparation to renew our baptismal promises at Easter. One of the things we promised (or our parents promised for us) at baptism was to renounce sin.



Want to hear more on what Lent's all about? Listen to or read “What is Lent”

by Father Greg Friedman at

<http://www.franciscanradio.org/SundaySoundbites/>

22) While Lent is traditionally 40 days long, there are really 46 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter. Wonder why? Read this explanation from U.S. Catholic magazine at <http://uscatholic.claretians.org/>

23) Read the Works of Mercy as Jesus describes them in Matthew 25. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink... in prison and you visited me.” There are plenty of opportunities available in your own community to put this teaching into practice. Choose an act of service you can perform throughout Lent.

24) Make a list of all the excesses in your life. Think about which ones you could do without.

25) Celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Can't remember how? Simply tell the priest it has been a while, and ask him to guide you through it.



21) As you are waiting to fall asleep at night, pray the Jesus Prayer silently as a mantra:

“Lord Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me.”

