

Extracted from St John Vianney March 05, 2012 Bulletin

Lent by Carl Beyer and Friends

In my informal survey which involved just "asking around," I have found that a number of people have chosen not to do penance or to "give up something" for Lent. For some, it is a conscious decision, and for others....they just have not gotten around to thinking about it. Now, I have only been a Catholic for about twenty years, but did I miss something, either in my RCIA training, reading or paying attention at Mass? Has it become "unfashionable" to do penance during Lent, in sacrifice to our Lord for the suffering He endured for us? Is it our weakness? "Spiritual flabbiness?" Or are we just uninformed?

Let us start with being informed. We are in the Church season of Lent. Lent is the period of fasting, abstinence and, yes, repentance or penance. What follows Lent is Easter. Easter is the celebration, and Lent is the time during which we prepare to celebrate that Our Lord Has Risen From the Dead. Only by fasting, abstinence and doing penance will we be ready to truly appreciate the glorious celebration of Easter. It is that simple.

Anyone who looks at me would not say I am fashionable. But I do try to remain fashionable in following the Church's teachings. Is doing penance unfashionable? Is it more fashionable to follow the modern adage, "If it feels good, do it?" On the surface, doing penance does not feel good, in the short run. But in our desire to serve the Lord, penance DOES feel good. TRUE happiness comes from serving those in need, and when we serve others, how much more do we gain because we are also serving our Lord?

Are we weak when we do not sacrifice? How often does our weakness lead us to "take the easy way out?" It is easy to justify not doing penance, because, after all, it is not mandatory. Why is it not mandatory? Because what we are forced to do seldom has as much meaning as that truly giving of our own free will.

But sacrifice seems such a harsh word! Let us SKIP sacrificing and penance and jump right into Easter! Is not that what Our Lord did? Oh, wait; I seem to remember something about his being brutally scourged and crucified, and put to death, prior to his Rising From The Dead.

"Spiritual flabbiness...." when I read these two words, I think, "Man, that describes most of us!" We take the easy and fun route which forms our flabbiness and pushes aside the hard work that would keep us "Spiritually Lean." We can all start getting lean by doing penance during Lent. Although it is hard work, it is satisfying work and is worth the effort!

What is penance? From Wikipedia: Penance is repentance of sins as well as the proper name of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Anglican Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation/Confession....the word "penance" derives from Old French and Latin poenitentia, both of which derive from the same root meaning, repentance, the desire to be forgiven....

Traditionally during Lent we do penance by giving up something that, through our greed, we generally abuse. Personally, my endeavor is to remain Pepsi-free throughout the season of Lent.

This offering to Our Lord serves two purposes: It serves as a sacrifice to our Lord, and it also serves to cleanse my body, the shell which holds my soul. Any sort of sacrifice or fasting is encouraged, as by our depriving ourselves we are reminded of the abundance with which our Lord daily blesses us.

Another example would be to give up snacking during Lent. Once given up, it is amazing how much something is missed! And it cleanses our souls and bodies and helps make us "spiritually lean." THIS is sacrifice.

Other sacrifices often given up include TV, coffee, radio, chocolate....ideally what is given up is something that causes us discomfort when we do without it. Our discomfort is so minute, no matter what we give up, compared to the suffering our Lord endured for us to redeem us from our sins and give us the gift of everlasting life, in GLORY with Him in Heaven. Our sacrifices cleanse our bodies and souls in preparation for the coming of our Lord at Easter.

An alternative is not to "give something up," but to take on something positive. Some ideas, provided they are done in excess of that we practice in our normal routines, include attending daily Mass, volunteering in a way that serves others (this involves "giving up" or giving OF our precious time and talents), increasing our prayers, faithfully saying grace before meals, reading the Bible, being nicer than we normally are (this can be a hard one) and imitating our Lord in any way we can.

Go forth and endeavor not to treat Lent just as any other several weeks of the year. This is not "Ordinary Time." This is Lent, so go forth and treat it as such. God Bless You All.