



LENT

RENEWED

Prayer, Fasting & Almsgiving



National Office
for Vocation
Helping people hear God's call



WELCOME

Welcome to your Lenten Catechesis, it only seems like a short time ago that we were celebrating Christmas, and now our focus turns to Lent, traditionally 40 days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, as we begin to look at our lives and preparing ourselves for Christ's Paschal Mystery in the Easter Triduum.

Lent is a beautiful time of year, which can also challenge us and plunge us deeper into our faith. Bishop Philip Egan tells us that *"Lent is a spiritual springtime. It's a joyful season, as the Roman Liturgy puts it, a time when God wants to give us new grace and new life."* (Bishop Philip Egan, Bishop of Portsmouth).

During Lent we will focus on the theme of renewal, unpacking how we can observe the three Lenten observances of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Pope Francis talks of these three acts in his 2024 Lenten message stating that *'... prayer, almsgiving and fasting are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying, in which we cast out the idols that weigh us down, the attachments that imprison us'*. This is a very sobering message, in which we should take into our prayer over the coming weeks as we enter into Lent. We ourselves have the opportunity to renew all aspects of our lives through the three acts and to take them forward throughout Lent to the cross, lay them there and enter into the joy of His Resurrection at Easter.

The National Office for Vocation have a 40-day self-guided course known as GodCalls Adventure. This course has a wide range of prayers, reflections and daily actions that can be undertaken during Lent. Themes of this Catechesis will touch on some of the information already in the GodCalls Adventure resource. If you would like to go deeper in prayer and reflection and challenge yourself then you can download this free of charge to follow it throughout Lent on our website: <https://www.ukvocation.org/adventure-40-days>

We are currently in the Year of Prayer, a preparatory year for the Jubilee in 2025, therefore prayer has been a big focus in the Church and is a good place for us to start.



PRAYER

“But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you”. (Matthew 6:6)

If we were to ask every single saint in Heaven “What is Prayer?” each would probably give a different answer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), section four on Christian Prayer gives us many definitions to ponder, including:-

“...a surge of the heart...” (St Therese of Lisieux quoted in CCC 2558),
“...the raising of one’s mind to God...” (St John Damascene quoted in CCC 2559),
“...a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ...” (CCC 2564) and
“...a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God...” (CCC 2561).

This variety of responses to a seemingly simple question does not mean that prayer is ambiguous or that we cannot agree on what it is, or that it can be quickly explained by a simple definition but rather that it is a wonderful, profound mystery of God and how we might respond to Him.





In Acts of the Apostles, we see that prayer is one of the four pillars of how the apostles and early Church members lived their real and tangible relationship with Jesus Christ *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”* (Acts 2:42). Prayer therefore is one of the vital aspects of entering into and living an ever-deepening relationship with God.

When the Year of Prayer was announced Archbishop Rino Fisichella who is the Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, stated that *“...there is such a vast range of ways of praying that no one can fully describe them all”*. This opens us up to a rich and broad way of praying, each person can find their own different way in which they can communicate with God. Some different ways to pray include:

- Pray of the Church: The Divine Office, a set of daily prayers usually prayer by priests, religious and lay people all over the world.
- Lectio Divina: (Divine Reading), contemplation over a piece of Scripture.
- Eucharistic Adoration: prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament.
- Novena: 9 days of prayer for a particular intercession.
- The Rosary: entering into the mysteries of Jesus’ life.
- Intercessory: prayers for specific people or causes, for example, vocation.
- Traditional prayers: Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be.
- Silence: opportunity to find silence and hear God’s speaking to you.



These are only some suggestions that you may want to consider as you spend your time focusing on developing your prayer life during Lent. Spending time in prayer is a vital part of our discernment, it is where we can enter into conversation directly with God the Father, with the Holy Spirit working in us and with the influence of Jesus always in our sights. It can be through prayer that we develop our understanding of where God is calling us to. Use these types and try each one and see which suits you best.

Let us now contemplate on how we can renew and be renewed by our own prayer life this Lent.

- What is your favourite way to pray?
- How long do you pray for? Can this be developed?
- What are your struggles in prayer?
- Write down the things you want to bring to prayer on a daily basis this will help you focus.
- Is there something you particularly have on your mind to pray for this Lent?



FASTING

“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.”
(Matthew 6:17-18)

Fasting is a beautiful observance that we carry out during Lent, especially on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, where we are asked to fast and abstain. Fasting teaches us how to unite our own sufferings with His sufferings, to go without treats and luxuries for a period of time can allow us to grow in perseverance, a virtue which can be mastered during Lent.

Fasting is a good way to begin our renewal throughout this season, Pope Francis in his Ash Wednesday Homily in 2023 stated that *“fasting is not a quaint devotion, but a powerful gesture to remind ourselves what truly matters and what is merely ephemeral”*. Therefore, our focus can really switch during Lent to Jesus and what really is important and will have lasting goodness. Fasting *‘ensures the times of asceticism and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart’* (CCC 2042), this linking back to our own perseverance where we can acquire self-discipline and mastery to keep us going.

There are a number of different ways we can fast for example, by giving something up that we enjoy week to week, such as; sugar, cakes, alcohol and red meat, or are we perhaps looking to fast from watching TV and could we perhaps switch off from social media. Fasting can take many forms but direct us right towards deepening our relationship with Jesus.

We can also attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation, an easy way to renew our inner self and empty ourselves in front of God, cleansing us from sin and allowing us to walk free from what is dragging us down.

Let us now contemplate on fasting:

- What do we have too much of in our lives that we need to cut back on or perhaps give up for good?
- What bad habits do we want to surrender and start a fresh?
- How can we switch entertainment such as TV or video games for prayer or spiritual reading?
- When do you plan to go to Reconciliation? How do you feel about this?
- Can we challenge ourselves to give up something that doesn't give us life, but take up something that is good for our communities?



ALMSGIVING

“But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”. (Matthew 6:3-4)

Pope Francis tells us that *“almsgiving is not a hasty gesture performed to ease our conscience, to compensate for our interior imbalance; rather, it is a way of touching the sufferings of the poor with our own hands and heart”*². Almsgiving is simply the act of giving, this can be financially, time, cooking a meal for someone or perhaps donating to a foodbank. Almsgiving simply strengthens our love for others, it is *“a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God”* (CCC 2452). Almsgiving can be closely linked with fasting, if we have too much of something in particular, by fasting from this, we could give the money to a worthy cause.

Lent is a good place to begin when thinking of regularly giving, but it is not just about the six weeks, it should be something that we do all year round. We are called to give generously at all times and Tobit reflects beautifully on this:

“Do deeds of mercy from your possessions to all who practice righteousness and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it. Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. For practicing mercy delivers from death and keeps you from entering the darkness; for practicing mercy is an excellent offering in the sight of the Most High for all who do it”. (Tobit 4:7-11).

Tobit tells us is that we should be giving in proportion to our income, and therefore, we are not asked to put ourselves into financial difficulty, however, we should give accordingly. Tobit also explains that we should always reach out to the person in need, this is also highlighted at all points within Jesus’ ministry, *“give, and it will be given to you”* (Luke 6:38).



As explained earlier, there are a number of ways we are able to give and one of these ways is through our time. Have we perhaps thought about spending some time with a lonely relative who rarely has anyone visit, or perhaps visit a nursing home with a friend and even helping out at a foodbank or homeless shelter. These are ways which can help us see the strength of a community when working together, helping the vulnerable in our society is a great way to commit our time throughout the Lenten season, where is it that you feel called to give your time this Lent?

Let us now contemplate on almsgiving:

- Where are we called to give our time this Lent?
- If we do not already give financially, are we able to? And if we do, can we give a little more?
- What do we want to see changed in our world? What are we a passionate about? And how can we dedicate sometime to this worthy cause this Lent?

GOD WANTS EVERYTHING

At every point of everyday God wants us to give everything to him, he wants our joys and our struggles. Through the acts of prayer, fasting and almsgiving we can begin to really give our all to God. This is how we can start to feel renewed during this season. At every point we should try and keep on track this Lent, let us stay looking ahead and focusing on Jesus, journeying with him at every point. If we struggle, offer this in prayer, if we fall go back to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but persevere in all that you do.

Use the three acts as a part of your discernment, begin with prayer offering God the desire on your heart and then move through the other acts to see where God might be calling you to.

Make this this a Lent where you fall deeper in love with God, explore more of your faith, do something that challenges you and finally once the day of the Resurrection is here, you can be renewed.

Sources: Select Photos: © Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

Pope Francis, Ash Wednesday Homily, 2023:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2023/documents/20230222-omelia-ceneri.html>

Pope Francis, 2024 Lenten Message:

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/02/01/240201c.html>

Bible Translation: English Standard Version Catholic Edition (ESV-CE)