

LENT AND THE COVID-19



RAISE UP, SACRIFICE, OFFER

Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before the celebration of Easter. In observing the 40 days of Lent, let us not lose sight of what Lent replicates! That is the sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days by Jesus Christ. We mark this event by fasting both from food and festivities.

Given our present global pandemic occurrence encompassing lent, all Christians should reflect also on the irony and significance of the timing! We start lent on Ash Wednesday, which derives its name from the placing of repentance ashes on the foreheads of participants to the words of “Repent and believe in the Gospel” or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”.

Almsgiving is a foundational call of Christians to charity. During lent we are asked to focus more intently on almsgiving. This means donating more money or goods to the

poor and performing other acts of charity. One way to accomplish this is with the “40 Cans for Lent Campaign”. During Lent we donate one can of food to our local Food Bank for each of the 40 days. This is one of the three pillars of Lenten practice. “A work of justice pleasing to God”. The other two pillars are fasting and reflection!

The fruit of these pillars is baptismal renewal. The calling is not just abstaining from sin, but to true conversion of our hearts and minds as followers of Christ. We recall those waters in which we were baptized into Christ's death, died to sin and evil, and began new life in Christ.

For Christians and our secular brothers and sisters this Lenten season can be one of a new life. One of reducing anxiety and fear, increasing faith and reorienting us from self protection to serving others. This can take many forms while still observing the government response to the crisis. We must realize that governments at all levels can enforce amounts of social change through quarantines as well as financial and medical dictates. The sobering truth is that it is almost impossible for coercive authority to increase our capacity for love and service to others.

Our Love and service to others can include outreach to our elderly relatives and neighbours. A phone call, text or e mail offering reassurance or assistance with needed supplies. The hoarding of hand sanitizer, disinfectant and toilet paper have affected the elderly significantly. So as a rough estimate, if you have 10 rolls of toilet paper and visit the toilet 3 times a day, your 10 rolls will last 53 days. Maybe share a roll or two with a neighbour! Those that are in self quarantine will be well served with a phone call of reassurance of care. An offer of supplies dropped at their door will also keep all of us safe.

During this Lenten season one does not have to be a Christian to recognize Lenten parallels and elements in the current Coronavirus situation! Here is some involuntary fasting that are in our face today.

Fasting from social gatherings

Fasting from watching sports

Fasting from theatre, casino etc.

Fasting from travel, spring break vacation

Fasting from shopping

Fasting from hugs and physical greetings

Fasting from eating out

Spirit and Truth" (John 4:24) that plant you firmly in the breach between the world as it usually is (Power) and the world as it should and could be (Love). Both love and power are the necessary building blocks of God's peaceful kingdom on earth. Love utterly redefines the nature of power. Power without love is mere brutality (even in the church), and love without power is only the sentimentality of private lives disconnected from the Whole. The Gospel in its fullness holds power and love together, creating new hope and healing for the world. Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Near Occasions of Grace* (Orbis Books: 1993), xv-xv