

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a week and a half away. Have you thought about what your Lent will look like?



Jeff gives it up for Lent.

The comic to the left made me chuckle when I first saw it, “Jeff gives it up for Lent.” How often are we confused by Lent, like Jeff? Lent is about more than giving up chocolate (see <https://dynamiccatholic.com/best-lent-ever>). It’s about becoming a better person; it’s about getting closer to the God of the universe.

That being said, the Church does encourage fasting (hence, the “Giving it up for Lent”) because there is so much that stands in the way of our relationship with God. When we are constantly going after earthly pleasures (even good ones) to fill the God-shaped hole in our hearts, we will not be open to the love God wants to pour into that emptiness. When we are constantly surrounded by noise (whether external or internal), we will never hear the whisper of God. Someone told me the other day that “listen” and “silent” have the same letters; in order to listen to God, we need to find

silence.

In this weekend’s Gospel, Jesus challenges the disciples to be greater than the Pharisees. The Pharisees separated themselves from the rest of the community so that they could follow God’s Law perfectly. The problem was that too many of them (the ones Jesus was constantly challenging) only observed the Law externally, and did not allow the power of God to enter their hearts. Jesus points to this as he talks about the Law of God commanding not just against murder, but against anger; not just against adultery, but against lust. God doesn’t just want obedience, He wants our hearts, our love!

Lent is about denying ourselves (yes, there is a *real* challenge here) so that we can feel our weakness, feel our brokenness, feel our real hunger for God, and allow Him into the emptiness to fill it. Whether that denial takes the form of some form of **fasting** (from food, or other good things that we have or do), **almsgiving** (surrendering part of our hard-earned money or things for love of God and others in need), or **prayer** (giving God the best of our time, forming our day around prayer – God-time – not trying to fit prayer into our day), it is meant to be a way of opening our hearts to God. It takes real self-denial to take *ourselves* out of the center of our lives, and place God into the center (after all, “I may not be much, but I’m all I think about”).

Don’t just let Lent happen – plan for it. I encourage you now, today, to think and pray about how you want to give God your heart this Lent. It would be good to have one thing in each of the three categories: fasting, prayer, almsgiving. Ask God what He wants of you. If you really ask, He will show you!

If we take Lent seriously, asking God to change our hearts, when we get to Easter, we will find that we have new life, that we’ve changed for the better. And like Jeff, we will really want to “Give it up for Lent!”