



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend is the last weekend in Ordinary Time before Lent. Are you ready? When we think about Mardi Gras – Fat Tuesday – it is kind of ... how do I say this ... well, it misses out on the purpose of Lent. I get that in the olden days, when you couldn't eat meat at all during Lent, they needed to get it out of the house, and so would feast on the last of the meat (and not be wasteful of perfectly good bacon). It has become, however, an opportunity more for gluttony and licentiousness than for preparing for Lent.

Lent, after all, is not supposed to be a dismal time, but, rather, one when we focus a bit more on getting closer to our Lord. I'm thinking about the many couples I have walked with as they prepare for marriage.

They spend much of the time leading up to their wedding day by focusing on the many details – wedding dress, colors, shoes, who sits where, flowers, cake, etc.. As I work with the couples, I encourage them to make sure to spend time working on their relationship, not just the wedding details. Imagine, if the couple, after they get engaged, looked at the months before as dreary and awful – “Oh, that I didn't have to get to know you better!” I think that's the attitude we take toward Lent. “Fat Tuesday” then becomes almost “one last fling” before I propose to my girlfriend (much the way bachelor parties are portrayed in pop-culture).

A better title for the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday is “Shrove Tuesday”. To “shrive” means to be cleansed of sin – aka Confession. It looks at Lent, not as a dreary drag, but as that time when we do all we can to *get closer* to our loving Father in Heaven, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Comforter the Holy Spirit.

So, what will you do for Lent?

Of course, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, all Catholics from 18-59 are required to abstain from meat and fast, and on all Fridays during Lent all Catholics 14 and up are required to abstain from meat. But will this on its own get us closer to the Lord? Probably not. It does open an opportunity though. Opportunities to:

- think beyond ourselves helping others
- give up some of our superabundance to realign our priorities
- spend more time with the God who loves us so much

As Matthew Kelly says, “Don't give up chocolate for Lent. Do something that is really life-changing.” If the Christmas book we gave out (*Holy Moments*) has been gathering dust on your shelf, maybe it's the time to dust it off and read it. If there are broken relationships between you and family or neighbors, maybe it's time to offer an olive branch (after all, today's Gospel speaks about turning the other cheek, loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us). We also have our Lenten Challenges coming back (Rosary, Fasting and Almsgiving Challenges – see page 3 for more information).

May this Lent truly be a time of “engagement” as we prepare for the great “wedding feast” of Easter, using the many opportunities of Lent to draw us closer to the Lord.