

What am I giving up for Lent?

SIN!

A YOUNGSTER cried out with bitter vehemence, "Oh how I hate Lent!" How many grown-ups feel exactly the same — but do not say so.

What would we find if we had a brain-storming on Lent? Brain-storming? It's a psycho technique for getting a discussion group started. The leader asks each in turn to tell the others "*the first idea that comes into his head*" at the mention of "Lent".

A brainstorming on 'Lent' will show what people think of it. Most will say 'penance'.

Penance (singular) in its fulness is **penitence and repentance, of which 'doing penances'** (plural) is an **essential part**. Not so many think of penance as giving up sin. If they did, the Lenten penances and effort would not be a meaningless burden, but a joyful, purposeful and hardworking effort, to **conquer sin**.

We might reply to the youngster's protest thus: "Would you like Lent if it meant that other people treated you better?" From this we can move on to everyone treating everyone else better in Lent — and therefore **I shall have to start with myself...** Oh! I was afraid it would come to that...

- So **what sins will I stop this Lent?** I must think!
- Mortal? Venial? Imperfections of character?
- I must **make up for my past sins**. Hmmph!
- Therefore **I must do penance**. Ouch!
- Penance for past sins **increases my sorrow**. Really?
- I must strive harder to **avoid my usual sins**. Gulp!
- And I must **resist temptation...** Oh no!
- And I must **avoid the 'occasions of sin'**. Help!
- Therefore I must **practise self-denial**. Arrrh!
- And counter the left-overs of **Original Sin**. Ow!
- I will work on my **Baptismal Promises** for Easter.
- So I can be a **new creature** with the Risen Christ.
- I will **'Spring Clean'** my soul during Lent.
- I will go to **Confession**, 'sacramentalized penance'.
- I will **get up early** to pray.
- I will **go to bed in time to get up early**.
- I will **go to weekday Mass** to do what Jesus does.
- At every Mass and every Holy Communion I will renew my Baptismal Covenant with the Blessed Trinity.
- I want it, wish it, will it, and will work for it, namely **growth in grace and virtues — but which ones?**
- I will strive to **help others grow** in grace and virtues.
- Gladly will **I train like a sportsman** for 'The Big Game', on Good Friday and Easter.
- Gladly will **I train like a soldier** for 'The Big Battle' this coming Good Friday and Easter.
- My training will include **my exercise** of spiritual exercises; **my diet** for body and soul of food & drink, pleasures, reading etc; **my whole Lenten program**.
- My penance and self-denial will be **carefully selected to combat my sins** and to grow in the virtues I lack.
- A youngster's Lent might be **cheerful patience and obedience**, with no whining; i.e. the discipline and courtesy of '**answering properly when spoken to**' and '**obeying straight away**'. N.B. Youngsters need

guidance for fasting penances, carefully chosen to strengthen patience, obedience, answering properly...

- The under eighteen's effort includes all this, plus renewed determination to choose what is right and noble, in spite of **feelings to the contrary**, and backing this with giving up food between meals, etc etc.
- An adult's effort includes all these, plus more. Besides the present minimalistic Church discipline, my **self-imposed penances should improve me**: if they make me crankier I need to stop them and get advice from a doctor of souls and choose something else.

Summary so far

What am **I giving up** for Lent? **SIN!**

What am **I doing** for Lent? **GOOD DEEDS!**

What **good things will I forego this Lent** —

- as penances to make up for my past sins?
- as self-denial to strengthen my will against new sins?

ALESSUSUALLENTENPENANCE

The Lenten **Conquest of Sin** depends on the **Conquest of Self**. Self-conquest is victory over (1) direct temptation to sin, and (2) our whims.

Just think how often we let our emotions, feelings and **mere whims decide our choosing**; so much good left undone and so much evil great or small 'tolerated' **because of our spiritual flabbiness** — which Satan's demons so easily manipulate.

Resolve to rise early in Lent in order to pray and/or to go to weekday Mass. Resolve therefore to go to bed in time the night before, in order to rise in time for the vital Lenten effort.

Basic training for young men both in the army and in the seminary (over seven years!) had you in bed at 10p.m. (no talking, lights out), and rising at 6a.m., with few 'sleep-ins'.

Christian soldiers, who, 'day in, day out', take seriously the Lord Jesus and His Church's Lent, can, **depending on their state in life**, often rise (and 'roost') earlier if they re-arrange their daily regimen to fit special Christian priorities for Lent. This will be both penance and self-denial.

GETTING UP FOR MASS (if early Mass is an option)

The greatest event ever in all the world since creation itself is happening today in my parish church: the continuance of the Incarnation of Christ and His Sacrificial Death and Triumphant Resurrection. If humanly possible, **I will be there!**

GETTING UP TO PRAY

You cannot make a Morning Offering at Night, so offer the 'first fruits' to God and the rest of the day will be blessed. Indeed, extend the Morning Offering into Meditative Prayer: ask your confessor (spiritual adviser) **how to meditate on**:

God to glorify	State of Grace to preserve
Jesus to imitate	Grace of State to practice
Angels & saints to invoke	Humbly obey
A soul to save	Talents to use
A body to mortify	Encouraging others
Sins to expiate	Being good, cheerfully!
Virtues to acquire	Hands for service
Hell to avoid	Neighbour to love
Heaven to gain	Patience to practice
Eternity to prepare for	Temper to control
Time to profit by	Non-Catholics to convert
Neighbours to edify	Non-Christians to convert
The world to despise	Tongue for truthfulness
Devils to combat	Tongue for kindness
Passions to subdue	Find Bible verses to match
Death perhaps to suffer	these topics. Meditate them
Judgement to undergo	All in the Psalms, Hymns &
Christ's Kingdom to build	readings of the Divine Office

LENT — "THIS JOYFUL SEASON"

PENANCE INCLUDES FASTING BUT IS SOMETHING MORE

Father Adolphe Tanquerey, in his classic text book, *The Spiritual Life, A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, pp. 359-361, lists the various works of penance which make up for sin, and in this order:

1. Patience

Patience receives adversity as a God-given penance, "the submissive, willing, and joyful acceptance of all the crosses Providence may see fit to send us." e.g. putting up patiently with people when they are difficult.

2. Duty

The duties of one's state in life are a God-given penance. "The most acceptable sacrifice we can offer to God is obedience: 'Obedience is better than sacrifice,' 1 Samuel 15:22, because the duties of our state are the manifest expression of God's will in our regard." e.g. doing my job (and my jobs).

3. Fasting and Almsgiving

Other works of Penance recommended in Holy Writ are Fasting and Almsgiving. "To be acceptable, fasting must be **accompanied by sentiments of sorrow for sin and mercy towards others.**" There are also personally chosen acts of mortification — mortification means 'making death (to sin)' — to discipline our own particular weaknesses. Thus fasting and mercy build on those above, (1) patience and (2) duty.

Category 3 comes in third place and last, lest we ignore **the penances God selects for us** in (1) & (2), and fall into pride about our own self-impositions.

SELF-DENIAL AND PENANCE

Isn't self-denial the same as penance? Not exactly. They may **involve the same outward effort** but are directed to different purposes: penance is making up for past sins; self-denial is avoiding future sins.

OCCASIONS OF SIN

The old **Act of Contrition** reminds us to 'avoid occasions of sin': the particular persons or circumstances which we foresee will tempt us severely.

PENANCE NOT THE SAME AS SACRIFICE

Penance and sacrifice are not the same, but rather are overlapping realities, and both are essential :-

Sacrifice is a bigger idea than penance: it is the ritual adoration of God. True, in our fallen world, sacrifice always asks for reconciliation with God and makes reparation for sin. The Sacrifice of the Mass — the same Sacrifice as the Cross — 'repairs' the sins of the world, reconciles mankind to God, opens the Gates of Heaven. Most of all, however, it gives perfect homage to God. A 'brainstorm' on sacrifice should put adoration as its supreme purpose.

Penance is a smaller idea than sacrifice: it is my making up for *my* sins, my essential contribution for forgiveness and healing, part of my inner 'sacrifice' as a sinner participating in the great Sacrifice of the Mass, the Cross, my sharing the cross with Our Lord.

Of course, we extend 'sacrifice' to any religious offering to God, and see our penances as *a sort of sacrifice*. Beware, however, of so often calling our acts

of penance 'sacrifices' that we forget the basic meaning of sacrifice as *a gift offered on an altar by a priest on behalf of worshippers for God's adoration and their reconciliation:* *Catholic Family Catechism* 137.

See also the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion..." §2096; **"It is right to offer sacrifice to God as a sign of adoration and gratitude, supplication and communion:** 'Every action done so as to cling to God in communion of holiness, and thus achieve blessedness, is a true sacrifice';" §2099; see also §§2114, 2628.

BAPTISMAL PROMISES

The Baptismal Promises are renewed at Easter. To each question we make our promise, "I DO":

Do you reject Satan?

And all his works?

And all his empty promises?

Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting?

VATICAN II

Vatican II said this about Lent: "The two elements which are especially characteristic of Lent — the recalling of **Baptism** or the preparation for it, and **penance** — should be given greater emphasis in the liturgy and in liturgical catechesis. It is by means of them that the Church prepares the faithful for the celebration of Easter, while they hear God's word more frequently and devote more time to prayer..."

ASH WEDNESDAY and First Sunday in Lent

Ash Wednesday is about life and death. The ashes are a reminder of Adam and Eve and original sin; of 'death as a gateway to life'; of 'dying to ourselves' to prepare for eternal life; of suffering becoming offering.

The Gospel of Ash Wednesday from the Sermon on the Mount is about **sincerity in Almsgiving** (i.e. having mercy on others in practical situations), on **sincerity in Prayer** (the passage omits the details of the Lord's Prayer), and on **sincerity in Fasting**.

Likewise the first reading from Joel, "rend your heart and not your garments," insists that bodily acts of penance are a means to an end, not an end in themselves, and that our hearts must be in it, *repenting*.

The Gospel of the First Sunday in Lent is about our Lord's Forty Days of Fasting *to strengthen* Him for Satan's Temptations: on Ill-gotten Bread and the bodily appetites; on Vulgar Display and vanity; and on Worshipping Creatures and pride. These three temptations match up with 1 John 2:16, on avoiding the concupiscence (lust, desire, covetousness) of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.

FINALLY, do not be surprised that the first Lenten Preface calls Lent "this joyful season"! And likewise the priest invites us — **Lift up your hearts!**