

## 8 Ways To Pray During Lent

What do we do when we're facing an upcoming big event, celebration, or special occasion in our lives? We prepare for it. Holy Week and Easter are "big events" in the liturgical year of the Church and in the spiritual life of a Christian. So, as Christians, we prepare spiritually for these through the forty days of Lent. This means that, during Lent, we rededicate ourselves to prayer. There are as many ways to pray as there are pray-ers in this world, but a few prayer methods can help us in particular to spiritually prepare ourselves during Lent:

### 1. Make your abstinence a prayer-in-action.

As Catholics we are called to give up something for Lent. Chocolate, coffee, that extra helping of dinner, one less hour of video games or watching DVDs—whatever it is, you can make what you're giving up for Lent a prayer as well: a prayer-in-action. Whenever you encounter the thing you are abstaining from or the time of day that you would normally enjoy it, take a moment to say a prayer in recognition of your wholeness in God even without the thing you have given up. Thank God for the freedom to be wholly yourself without this and, at the same time, acknowledge the gift of its existence in the world.

### 2. Renew yourself through personal reflective prayer.

Lent is a time of spiritual renewal. One easy step you can take is to use the many free online resources to jump-start or reinvigorate your prayer life. A few such resources are Loyola Press's popular 3-Minute Retreats and Seven Last Words of Christ guided meditation, or try the prayer reflections offered by the Irish Jesuit site Sacred Space. If you're seeking more traditional support for your personal reflective prayer, consider a book specially designed to nourish you during Lent, such as *Praying Lent*.

### 3. Pray the Stations of the Cross.

One of the most common traditions of Lent is to pray the Stations of the Cross. This prayer helps us reflect on the passion and death of Christ in preparation for Good Friday observance and the Easter celebration. Check your local parish Web site or bulletin for listings of when a Stations of the Cross prayer service is being offered, or try one of the many online resources available.

### 4. Meditate on Holy Scripture with Lectio Divina.

Perhaps the oldest method of scriptural prayer known to Christians is lectio divina or "holy reading." This method of prayer is characterized by the slow reading and consideration of a text from Scripture, with repetition and meditation on key words or phrases. Lectio divina is rooted in the belief that the scriptural word speaks in the human heart as the word of God and can reveal the thoughts of our hearts in response to God. In this way, lectio divina leads to a deeper communion with the Divine.

### 5. Reflect deeper on your liturgical prayer.

When you attend Mass during Lent, be conscious of and meditate on the words you pray in the liturgy. For example, the Eucharistic Prayer, the highlight of each Mass, has special significance during Lent. After receiving communion, you may want to sit and reflect more deeply on this great prayer of the Church.

6. Join or start a prayer group.

There are many benefits to praying with others. In group prayer you're able to offer and experience a positive example, needed support and encouragement, different perspectives, and the inspiration to grow in the Christian life. A simple way to get started is to invite your spouse, a family member, or close friend to pray with you on a regular basis throughout Lent. You can also contact your local parish and inquire about prayer groups or prayer circles being sponsored.

7. Pray with children or as a family.

Being a parent, guardian, or teacher is a holy ministry and a sacred promise. Share your faith with children by letting them see and hear you pray, and by praying together. *Guided Reflections for Children: Praying My Faith, Praying with Scriptures*, and *52 Simple Ways to Talk with Your Kids about Faith* are all practical, realistic resources to help you make the most of your prayertime with children. And don't forget about family dinners. Dinnertime is a great opportunity to start or enliven a tradition of family prayer during Lent.

8. Start a practice of daily prayer that will last after Lent.

Perhaps the best prayer advice is to use Lent as a time to instill prayer habits that will last long after Lent has concluded. Resources such as yearly prayer guides—for example, *A Prayer Book of Catholic Devotions* can get you started and help you stay consistent.

So enjoy your Lenten prayer. And don't think you have to do all the above. Perhaps choose one or two of these prayer methods to concentrate on—and then you can more fully experience the pilgrim journey toward Easter that is Lent.