

# DURING LENT, LET US FIND CONCRETE WAYS TO DEEPEN OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES



**Ash Wednesday** marks the beginning of Lent, the 40 days of preparation for the Easter Season when we are called to deepen our spiritual lives through the practices of *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*.

The belief is that our consistent participation in these practices—like exercise we do for our physical health—improves our spiritual well-being by stripping away all that is unnecessary and becoming more mindful of how God is working in our lives.

Challenge yourself this year, and go beyond the usual practice of “giving up” something. Now is a great time to take stock of your spiritual life and to grow in it. Not sure where to start?

## Check out these ideas:

- 1 **Make a commitment** to read the Sunday scriptures before you go to Mass. In the same way that reading up on football players, opposing teams, and coaching strategies will help you experience a game more fully, familiarizing yourself with the readings ahead of time will help you experience them in a deeper way on Sunday.
- 2 **Think** about what you spend your money on. Do you buy too many clothes? Spend too much on dinner out? Pick one type of expenditure that you’ll “fast” from during Lent, and then give the money you would usually spend to a local charity.
- 3 **Take something on**—40 days of letter writing, 40 acts of kindness, 40 phone calls to the important people in your life.

- 4 When you first sit down in front of your computer at work, or at the very end of your work day, try a 10-minute guided **prayer** from Sacred Space based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius.
- 5 Go to a **weekday Mass** one day during the week. Star of the Valley offers them at 8:00 a.m., Tuesday through Friday. Daily Masses are often more intimate and shorter than Sunday Mass.
- 6 **Read the entire Gospel of Mark** in one sitting. As the shortest Gospel, it is the most concise story of Jesus’ life, and the cross, a central Lenten symbol, plays an even more prominent role than in the other Gospels.
- 7 **Unplug** from your iPhone or turn off your car radio on your commute. The silence may be jarring at first, but you may find that you are able to concentrate better and will be more observant of your surroundings.
- 8 **Think about a habit** that has kept you from being whom God is calling you to be. Consciously give up that habit for Lent.
- 9 Spend at least one weekend or evening **volunteering** during Lent. Serve a meal at your local soup kitchen. Visit the elderly. Stock shelves at a food pantry.
- 10 Make a commitment to **fast from insensitive comments** about others.
- 11 Participate in a **spiritual book club** or small community of faith. Check out what’s already going on at Star of the Valley. Join our Spiritual Book Club at 10:00 a.m., Tuesday, February 20, in the church Quiet Room. Come to our Lenten Reflections at 3:00 p.m., Thursday, March 7, in the Msgr. Fahey Parish Center.
- 12 As a part of your Lenten almsgiving, make a point to **learn more about a particular social issue** (immigration, human trafficking, racism, the environment, public education, child poverty). Give money to an organization related to your chosen issue that supports the dignity of the human person.
- 13 **Pray for somebody**. As you’re walking the streets, driving the highways, or sitting in your cubicle at work, pick out a person who appears to be in need and pray for that person. Be mindful of the words of philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who said, “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.”
- 14 Celebrate the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**. Can’t remember how? Here’s a simple guide with some tips. Tell the priest it’s been a while, and ask him to guide you through it.
- 15 And finally . . . consider **making a retreat**.

—Adapted from Renée Lareau