

TWO RULES FOR LENTEN SACRIFICES

In planning what we do for Lent to improve our spiritual lives, it's wise to meet two criteria in whatever practices we choose to follow:

- * Will the practice do anything to improve society?
- * Will the practice improve my own interior life as well?

Lenten resolutions might include:

- * refraining from negative comments and complaining
- * going out of one's way to be kind to someone who doesn't naturally attract us
- * writing letters – to politicians, to the editor
- * Visit someone who is lonely, grieving, blind, sick, poor, etc.



GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING LENTEN ACTIVITIES

1- Choose an activity that is readily measurable. A resolve "to be a loving person" or "to be considerate" will probably produce a feeling of failure since attaining such a goal comes only with perfection.

We can resolve, however, "to do one extra act of kindness each day." Such a Lenten observance which can be easily tallied and brings with it a sense of daily fulfillment is more likely to be continued. By our faithfulness to those actions we will eventually undergo the internal changes that will make us more loving and considerate.

2- Aim for persistence. Persistence may take the form of continued efforts toward some major endeavor – developing a dormant talent or assisting in a homeless shelter.

Persistence also happens through repeating a small action often – which is how good habits are acquired and bad ones extinguished. One such activity undertaken wholeheartedly and with an open spirit can produce lasting effects far beyond Easter. Imagine what our attitude toward others would be, if, for each of the 44 days of Lent (that includes Sundays) we greeted each person by saying to ourselves, "I behold Christ within you."

3- Remember that a Lenten project need not be overly religious. God can take the most ordinary aspects of our lives and use them to inspire us; he can touch us through the most commonplace occurrence.

A habitually tardy person, for example, may resolve to be punctual for every job, appointment and meal. God can work through that resolve to sensitize the person to consideration for others to the distinction between false pride and true humility, to insights into Christian charity and the very essence of love.

4- Consider current needs, such as duties of vocation and relationship with God and others. We may want to ask: Has my preoccupation with my job or other interests caused me to neglect my personal relationship with God? or my time with my family? or my efforts at church? or my involvement with my local community? or my responsibilities as a member of the world community? If any answer is yes, then we already have some things to consider seriously.

To read a bedtime story to a child every evening, for instance, is a resolution that may produce memories lasting two lifetimes. That loving time together can bring about a reevaluation of our priorities and strengthen the parent-child relationship. Insights into our own personal relationship with God, our Parent, may emerge.

5- Remember that a Lenten project may be pleasant! Sometimes the “shoulds” that arise from our inner selves or from those around us are enjoyable tasks that we somehow just never fit into our hectic schedules or place high enough on our priority list.

A resolve to say “I love you” daily to one’s spouse can strengthen the sacramental union and increase the happiness of the entire family. Whatever deepens our love relationships with others deepens our relationship with God, who is Love.

6- Remember to pray! The more active and fragmented our lives, the greater our need for a firm foundation of prayer.