

# Obligation to Adoration: Pressing into the season of Lent

The season of Lent offers leaders and people of faith a beautiful opportunity to experience a renewed awe of our Savior through spiritual disciplines. Whether your parishioners have been observing these 40 days of sacrifice for 40 years or this is their first year participating, you have a blessed responsibility to guide them in this practice.



## Press into the Intentionality of the Practice

When Jesus entered the wilderness for His fast it was a time of preparation. He was about to launch into the fullness of His purpose, and he chose to begin with sacrifice and prayer. What a wonderfully consistent picture of the nature of Christ. Before he taught, led, or healed, He prepared with a sacrifice of fasting and prayer. This initial sacrifice paled in comparison to the ultimate sacrifice He purposed to make but sets an example for us.

Don't miss this opportunity to ask your parishioners to consider what season God may be preparing them for during this Lenten observance. Will they be starting a new job, watching children graduate, welcoming a new child, laying loved ones to rest? We can anticipate some seasons; others take us completely by surprise. God knows what each season will bring, though, and can use this time to prepare our hearts, minds and spirits for what is unseen to us.

Since Lent is a corporate practice, not just a personal one, it is a time to ask God to prepare the body as a whole. Are there ministries to start or stop? Are there causes to support more faithfully? Is there a community need your parish is uniquely positioned to meet?

When we push past the "this is what we do" and arrive at "this is why" - to emulate Christ, hear God's voice and allow our hearts to be prepared, what was a practice becomes practical.

Encourage your parishioners to reflect on what God may be preparing them for, where their hearts need work, and where their spirits need growth. Create space for parishioners to share these areas. Whether it is sharing verballing in a small group setting, anonymously writing it on sticky notes to post on a wall of the parish, or submitting it electronically to parish leadership, there is power in writing something down. This will let parish leaders see the themes and seasons of care that parishioners need and will let the parishioners know that they are not alone - this is the power of community to encourage, heal, and restore.



## Press into what we are turning to during Lent

Samuel reminded the children of Israel that God was more pleased with their obedience to His word than with their sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22). It can be easy to choose something to give up during Lent without focusing on what we are turning to in its place. Pushing our plate back, then lashing out because we are hangry or simply replacing one indulgence for another doesn't accomplish the purpose God designed for this practice.

During a recent fast I opened the freezer and it felt like everything I touched was "off limits" – that tub of ice cream, the frozen loaf of homemade bread, the donuts, even the English muffins...it was too much. I closed the freezer and lamented out loud, "I can't eat anything in there!" and the Spirit quickened my heart and said "Can't?" I repented. This was a choice I had made willingly. It was a reminder that when we choose to follow Christ, there are things around us every day that we choose not to participate or partake in any longer. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10 that there are many things that are permissible, but they are not beneficial. When our perspective shifts from restriction to invitation, we can see God's outstretched hand to join Him at His table to feast with Him.

What are we turning to instead? Challenge your parishioners in this season to choose with intentionality what discipline they are choosing in place of what they are fasting. Will they press into prayer more specifically each day (set a time and place)?

Will they replace time on electronic devices with time in scripture or reading? Will they let the pangs of hunger remind them to pray for a country wrecked by famine? Will they take the hour of TV time to serve the outcasts of society? Will they use the money from frou-frou coffees to support a local mission?

As a leader in your body of faith you can resource your parish with ways to turn with intentionality. Send daily prayers and scripture readings via email or text. Host specific volunteer activities at the parish. Provide time and space for parishioners to come and reflect, meditate and pray. Facilitate a volunteer buddy program – connecting parishioners who already actively volunteer in the community with those seeking to get involved. In Chapter 58 of Isaiah the prophet rebukes and instructs the nation of Israel about how they have approached fasting. He desires fast that frees, the wronged, the burdened, and the oppressed. He directs us to share our food, give shelter, and provide clothes to those in need.



## Press into time for reflection

The celebration of a Risen Christ can easily overtake space to reflect on what our hearts have learned during Lent. As Christ ended His time of fasting, He was met with temptation. He faced Satan and his offers of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We won't have to wait until the end of Lent to be faced with those same temptations and revelations of our weaknesses. Creating space for parishioners to share their experiences is vital for those lessons to imprint on hearts and minds. Maybe your parish is small enough that these experiences can be shared over a meal. Maybe you can highlight these as short videos or written vignettes. Whatever way you choose to engage, be sure to ask your parishioners to

intentionally reflect on what they have learned, how they have grown, and what practices they will continue.

The three common tenets of Lent can barely be separated from each other: Prayer, Fasting, Generosity (Almsgiving). As we choose a personal sacrifice of food, entertainment, or time, it is in order to turn our eyes outward. We turn to Christ in prayer, and to our neighbor with open hands. When we do this, we will encounter our Savior, and it will move our hearts from obligation to adoration.



## Ideas to Implement in Your Parish

### 1. Encourage parishioners to share what season of preparation they are entering

- a. Create a Spring-themed Seasons Wall or board where parishioners can add their season
- b. Provide a box where parishioners can drop their season in discretely for parish leadership
- c. Create an electronic form where parishioners can easily submit their season from a phone or computer

### 2. Make resources easily accessible

- a. Send a weekly email encouragement from the local priest
- b. Send daily text messages with Lenten Prayers
- c. Add a Lenten Resource page to your parish website
- d. Post daily scripture on your parish social media pages

### 3. Design volunteer opportunities

- a. Host one-time parish focused volunteer activities
- b. Provide details about on-going volunteer options in the parish and community (allow ministry leaders to share, highlight on your website, and create interest forms)
- c. Kickoff a volunteer buddy program to connect parishioners who actively volunteer with those seeking new volunteer options

### 4. Challenge parishioners to join in generosity

- a. Highlight current and future appeals
- b. Make options available for digital giving
- c. Encourage committing to an automatically scheduled gift to a cause

### 5. Create space to share reflections and growth at the end of Lent

- a. Plan a shared meal where parishioners can share their Lenten experience reflections
- b. Collect stories from parishioners to print in bulletins, on the web, or on a wall in the parish
- c. Record short videos to share in services, via email or on social

