

## WHAT DO WE GIVE UP FOR LENT?

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“The devil took him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil left him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

I bring you greetings this day from a loving God who in this time of Lent asks us if we are committed to the forty days before us and wonders what we have decided to give up. Amen.

Lent has started and like most of you I find myself focusing on new devotions, a true desire to know my Lord better and to eliminate everything that might separate me from His love and understanding and living His word. The popular question each year for us is what are you giving up for Lent and over the years I have tried and failed to offer some token as a sacrifice during this season. I gave up sweets one year, which lasted a few days. I gave up Scotch which lasted an entire day. My wife, who truly inspires me in her devotion, gave up chocolate one year and it almost ended our marriage.

But this year is different for me as it is my first year in serving His church as an ordained deacon. I looked forward to the season with a great deal of enthusiasm and wondered about what devotions might be appropriate and how I would make the time to follow through with my commitment. I remember one year hearing a priest tell his congregation that it's not always about giving something up it can also be about doing something new. He outlined daily prayer, or daily Bible verses. I thought this was a great idea actually and it was during Lent several years ago I began reading the devotional “Our Daily Bread” which is a wonder source of reflection every morning. That devotional encouraged daily prayer and scripture reading which is a wonderful way to begin the day.

Yet, it seemed that my daily prayer life, my morning devotions, even regular Bible study, while helping me to grow in my faith, wasn't getting me to where I wanted to be. There was something nagging me in the back of my mind that was concerning me. How was it that I still found myself so often slipping in my desire to glorify God in everything that I do?

Just before Lent began this year, my Bible study class was wrapping up the Gospel of St. John. We had spent a great deal of time on the Divinity of Christ and now were talking about the Passion at the end of the Gospel. It was a good place to be just before Lent and the discussion focused on the love Christ showed for us by taking on the sins of the world on the cross. We talked about showing our love for Christ though rededicating ourselves to Him in the Lenten season through penitence and prayer. One of our members was curious about the practice of giving something up for Lent and as we discussed self sacrifice another member of the group, no doubt inspired by the Holy Spirit, made a remarkable statement. She said “It's not about giving up something for Lent; it's about giving up ourselves.”

Her profession of faith astounded me and I began to reflect on why it is we so often have wonderful intentions during Lent to be a better Christian but too often fail. Look at our Lord in today's Gospel. Forty days fasting in the desert and there He is confronted by Satan, offering Him comfort and even all the kingdoms of the world. He confronts His tempter and tells him "Thou shall worship the Lord thy God and only Him shall thou serve."

If we truly are worshipping our God in the spirit and truth He asks of us and we are putting Him first in our lives, then we must first stop worshipping ourselves and give up ourselves to Him. The true connection to the love of God begins with our complete and total surrender to His will. To set aside our own satisfaction and to try to please Him as best we can. It is truly surrendering ourselves and allowing God to enter our hearts and our lives with His grace.

St. Paul warns us that we should not receive the grace of God in vain. "behold", he says "now is the day of salvation. Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God." If each of us are His ministers, how are we to properly share God's love in the world?

By the power of God! Through Him we can be strong in our desire to do His work and to show His love to all. We need to let that love in and that means we need to surrender our human will to Him. The trueness of His love is seen when His will and our will become one. It effects a change in us; it opens us to the joy and comfort of Him in our lives.

Life will beat us down. Our secular world diverts us from our true Christian values. It tears at us, confuses us and leads us astray. We become weak in our devotion to God as we get caught up in all the world puts before us. Look what we have done to Christmas. When did the Easter bunny become the most significant symbol of Easter? How is it that God is being erased from every facet of our society? It is because Satan, being unsuccessful with our Lord, now lays before each of us "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" and offers them to us if we "will fall down and worship" him.

Like the painting on the great ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, God is reaching out to us. He has extended His hand to us and we need only reach out and place ours in His. The cost of that is giving up ourselves, trusting in Him completely, showing His love to others, becoming renewed.

If we are to make it through Lent, indeed through all of our lives, God must be the center of everything for us. In our coming out and in our going in, in our waking and lying down, in our living and in our dying, our eyes and our hearts should always be focused on Him. Our worship should not be vain, our charity for glory, our righteousness false. Our lives should be living testaments to His love for us, as shown on the cross.

So what shall we give up for Lent? Let us place ourselves before His throne as we set aside all that separates us from Him, and recommit ourselves with His help, to Him in all who we are and all that we do.

We pray: “Heavenly Father, may we this Lenten season draw closer to you by giving up some of ourselves every day, every moment, every instant so that all who we are will be yours. We thank you for your patience with us, and ask for your strength and that our renewal this Holy Lenten Season may carry us through everyday of our lives, beyond Easter, until we come before your Heavenly throne. We dedicate ourselves to you and pray that what little we have to offer may be acceptable in your sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” AMEN

*The Epistle. 2 Cor. vi. 1.*

WE then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard three in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

*The Gospel. St. Matt. iv. 1.*

THEN was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.