

SAMs Lenten Resources Part 4 - Practices and Activities

The practices of Lent are often broken down into three key parts: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. While entire books have been written on each of these topics, I wanted to give some jumping off points and ideas for you to flesh out the activities of your Lent within those topic areas. Hopefully at this point you have prayerfully discerned a theme or core area of focus for your Lenten journey, these activities and practices should be in tune with or support those areas. It is tempting to take on great gobs of activities or practices, but starting with just one from each category I think is an excellent goal, especially if you are trying to encourage or organize the other Lenten activities of your family. If you are particularly weak in one of the areas but another is already common and easy to you, maybe take up two or three in that weaker area and only one in another, etc. What ever you choose to do or give up though, the most important part is that you have prayerfully discerned this with God; if you follow His lead, you will have a fruitful Lent. Don't get discouraged or afraid to pick something hard. To be sure, the devil is going to try to dissuade you, distract you, make you want to quit when you don't do it "perfectly" or when you get behind. If it's too easy, you probably aren't digging deep enough. If it's very hard, seemingly too hard, discern if it is you having picked too much, or if you are being supernaturally attacked and then ask for help. Remember that God does not ask us to succeed all the time, but he always asks us to TRY. Be gentle but clear with yourself, maybe even write a promise note to God telling him what you intend to do and why, then sign and date it. Putting pen to paper and putting your name on something can really help motivate you, it's also handy to be able to come back to if you get discouraged.

First, I thought this was a great resource for some "out of the box" activities for Lent:

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/2020/02/14/20-out-of-the-box-things-to-do-for-lent-%ef%bb%bf2020/>

Prayer

I am not going to do a lot in this section just because I covered several resources and ideas in the first Resource page. But, here are a few prayer activities that would be great to take up in addition to your time spent in personal mental prayer.

1. Daily Rosary and/or Divine Mercy Chaplet
2. Reconciliation - While the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not a prayer per se, it requires prayerful reflection before and penitential acts and prayer afterwards. A good confession also obtains the graces necessary to help avoid future sin and to have a clear heart and soul for persevering in this penitential season. At least one visit to Confession during Lent and/or Easter should be on everyone's list.
3. Adoration time either live with the Blessed Sacrament or making a home Holy Hour
4. Spiritually Adopt a young family in the parish with our SAMs
5. Make a prayer journal and commit to a writing time every day. (This can be a useful tool in staying focused with mental prayer time too.)
6. Group prayer; invite via virtual or in person a group into a time you commit to together. Maybe as Mothers we could bring our children and family intentions into special focus.
7. Make a personal list of Intentions for each day of Lent and dedicate your actions/sacrifices for that intention each day.
8. Make amends through Novenas or Rosary Weeks where you commit to praying for someone who you struggle with, or who has hurt you, or who you have hurt. For example, pray a Rosary a day for someone you gave repeatedly had trouble with for 7 days, bring this too confession too if you realize that you have someone that you have not forgiven.
9. Go out and pray as a peaceful witness to life in front of Planned Parenthood for 40 Days for Life
10. Stations of the Cross. This is prayed every Friday at St Andrews and at various parishes during the week in our area. You can also pray the outside Stations of the Cross at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Salem if you are still avoiding indoor spaces with folks or just enjoy communing with God in nature while you pray.

11. "No Bible no breakfast, no Bible no bed." - Make the Lord's Word your first and last thing you read and pray with every day.

Fasting

Just a brief note on what fasting is and is not. Fasting is **not** giving up something that is a sin or bad for you anyway. Obviously, we should be giving up sinful behavior and bad habits that are harmful for us, but those are things we do not intend (hopefully) to pick back up again at Easter. Rather, we fast out of love from things that are good as a mortification, penance and sacrifice. Lenten fasting should not be for a weight loss goal. Of course it is ok to eat healthier for Lent, but your intention needs to be to separate yourself from a good out of Love of God, not just to lose weight. The outcome may be the same, but the intention is key. The disciplines we take on should not be merely self-help activities. It has become very popular to fast from things that aren't food, such as social media, news, buying things, etc. These are great ideas, but unless you have a medical reason not to fast from food, at the very least on the days prescribed by the church, it's really something we all should be doing. Fasting is mentioned countless times by the Saints and by Christ himself as an integral part of a strong prayer life and as a powerful act of mortification for atonement of sin. I will freely admit that I struggle with this one, but that's probably a good indicator that I need to meet it head on. If you are reading this, it's probably safe to say you are not going to starve to death this Lent, so give it a try. Find a fast that is right for you and your life style, and make sure that it doesn't cause you to be nasty to others either that's also not the point haha. Abstinence, as pertains to Fridays and Ash Wednesday, is different from fasting, where in you eat, but you abstain from eating meat. This is often in combination with fasting, but abstinence is different.

Suggestions for Fasting:

1. Bread and water fasts (or insert your simple protein or carb for "bread") on certain days during Lent.
2. Cut out a meal each day or especially on Fridays
3. Try not eating a whole day, you might be surprised what you can give up for the Lord. (Remember to hydrate though!)
4. Social media or "silly" websites (that are not harmful) but are mostly for self indulgent purposes
5. Coffee, tea or alcohol
6. Desserts or all sweets
7. Salt, pepper, sugar/sweeteners or other seasoning. Let your food be a little bland during Lent, let it leave you wanting a bit, think of the sweetness of the Lord, how WE are called to be Salt and light, etc.
8. Make sure you are really observing the fast before Mass (Did you know we are required to abstain from eating for an hour before receiving Holy Communion? If you didn't, this is the perfect time to start!) If you already do this, maybe extend this time a bit. (Just don't faint in Mass please hahaha.)
9. Warm food. Eat your food cold (within food safety parameters of course) or let it come to room temperature before eating it.
10. Pizza. Burgers. Fried Food. Comfort Food. Pick your favorite, and say goodbye for Lent.
11. Frivolous personal purchases
12. Eating out; only home cooked meals during Lent
13. Dairy, or wheat, or meat - pick a big category of food to give up for Lent, something you love and something that will be a challenge.
14. Your favorite store. If you are a Target junky or an Amazon lover but don't HAVE to go there, give it up!
15. Hot showers (or warm water for face washing) - see how cold you can go during Lent, this is a super challenge and mortification, especially on these cold winter mornings.
16. Music in the car (or where ever you like to jam your tunes), try sitting in silence with God and praying instead, or listen to one of the suggested Podcasts in Resource #5.
17. Decorations. Put away the lights, clean up the house, "undecorate" a bit and put up Lenten reminders like purple ribbon, icons, etc. instead.
18. Your phone. Just. Put. It. Down. Seriously. Limiting the amount of time, setting up reminders, having a place in the house where it lives unless you get a phone call, these are all good. The phone can be

a good, but it is also something that should probably be examined as a place for sinful behavior as well. Either way, we could all probably use some digital fasting.

Almsgiving

1. Take the money you would usually spend on yourself or those “frivolous” purchases mentioned above and donate it. If you like to buy clothes, donate to a homeless shelter. If you love to eat out, donate that money to a soup kitchen, etc.
2. Donate your time. This one is harder right now, just because some places we would maybe usually go to (nursing homes, hospitals, etc.) are not allowing visitors, BUT, there are plenty that still need volunteers such as the Rescue Mission in Roanoke city. Just check current guidelines and see where the help is needed, and it IS needed!
3. Bless My Sole Ministry at the Rescue Mission. We have a group from St Andrew’s that does this ministry regularly, check them out on our website. They literally wash the feet of the poor at the Rescue Mission, talk about acting as the hands of Christ.
4. Write letters to elderly family members, retired priests in the Diocese, folks at a retirement home, etc.
5. Donate your clothes, not just the worn out ones, but those “just in case” clothes you don’t really need, see how little you really need.
6. Put together water bottles, granola bars and a prayer card for folks you see on the street. Ask them their name when you roll down the window, tell them yours and tell them you will be praying for them by name.
7. Donate to a crisis pregnancy center like the **Martinsville Pregnancy Center** or **Blue Ridge Women’s Center**
8. On the weekends, the Justice & Peace committee is collecting food at the exit for **St Francis House**. To see a full list of needs, check out the online bulletin on our website: <https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/20349/bulletins/20210214.pdf>
9. **The Rescue Mission** has specific needed items for the shelter itself, which you can drop off at the main entrance there. This “Immediate Needs” section is updated fairly frequently so check their website before you make a list. It’s so easy just to add to your Kroger Clicklist, Amazon delivery, etc. <https://rescuemission.net/immediate-needs/>
10. Pick a new charity to support or up your monthly giving during Lent. Make a family goal of how much money you would like to raise.
11. There are so many needs out there, but here are a few favorite suggestions:
 1. **Cross Catholic Outreach** - Authentically Catholic, (not just in name only as some have sadly become) almost all of their funds go straight to those in need, this is possible since a large amount of their work is done on a volunteer basis and by Religious.
 2. **Heifer International** - This is a secular group, but also highly rated for the amount of money that actually goes to those in need. It is a “teach a man to fish” organization that sets folks up with live animals so they can raise them for products such as milk, eggs, honey, protein yarns, and breeding to sell, etc. They have kept their noses clean in all the political fray in recent years, which I think says a lot for them.
 3. **Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN)** - While not a charity exactly, this Catholic media network runs on donations and does not take money for advertising etc. This is a great way to support evangelization throughout the world.
 4. Our Diocese is doing it’s **Annual Bishop’s Appeal** right now, you can pick specific places your money goes as well online if there is something, such as seminaries, or feeding the homeless, that you are particular passionate about.
 5. **Our church!** ;) Our Parishes need our support now as ever, consider upping your monthly donation, or make a special Lenten gift.
 6. **Feeding Southwest VA** - This is a local food bank/food assistance program that is always looking for donations and volunteers. <https://www.feedingswva.org/>
 7. **The Marians of the Immaculate Conception** - While you might be most familiar with their Divine Mercy Shrine in Stockbridge, MA, your donation can be directed to support not only this

but their Mercy programs around the world. They have faith initiatives in places like Rwanda and Cameroon, they send emergency medical help around the world, and domestically they maintain the Shrine, a prayer phone line, a Seminary and more. They are near and dear to my heart, but if there is a group that speaks to you similarly, give them a gift this year! <https://www.marian.org/give/>

8. I mentioned some of our local pregnancy centers, but I wanted to highlight the Tepeyac OB/GYN center in Fairfax, VA. They are one of the only Pro-life NFP, NAPRO Technology OBGYNs in Virginia that provides faithful care that is consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church. They do a lot of pro-bono work and are always on call to help with crisis pregnancies, abortion pill reversal, counseling, Perinatal Hospice care and more. Their founder, a former-Abortionist, Dr. John Bruchalski came and talked to us about 5 years ago and his conversion testimony was powerful and inspiring. <https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/DivineMercyCare/givetoTepeyac.html>