

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering **hope** and **joy** in the Catholic faith.

Lent Special Edition 2016

20 Ways To Navigate A Holier Lent

Throughout the year, we can get off track from what is most important in our journey to Heaven. Lent is a time during which we can realign our priorities and get back on track. We take steps to put God—who alone can make us truly happy—in his rightful place in our lives. Try these suggestions to help you make the most of Lent.

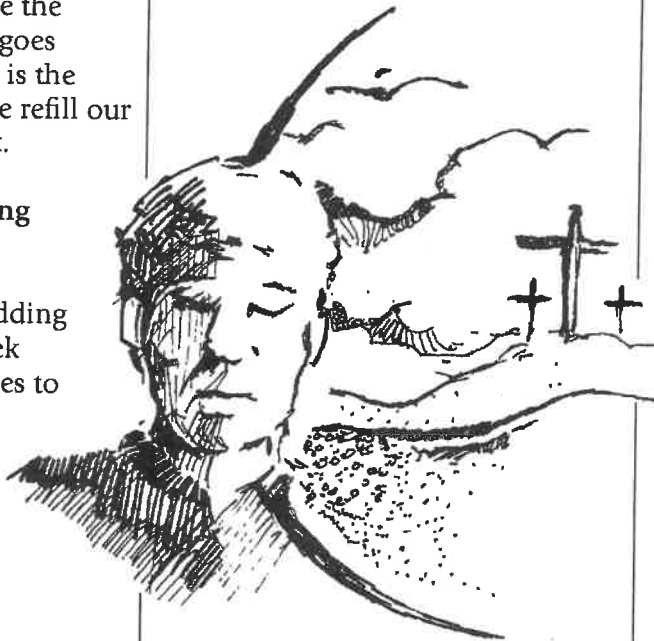
1 Refill at Mass weekly. Any driver knows that driving long distances with a low tank of fuel is a bad idea. Fuel may run out at the bleakest part of the journey or just before the home stretch. The same goes for living the faith. Mass is the “filling station” where we refill our spiritual tank every week.

2 Add daily Mass during Lent. Already making regular Sunday Mass “refills?” Adding in Masses during the week gives you additional graces to get through a strenuous Lenten journey. Pick weekdays that work for you, mark them on your calendar, and go.

3 Make a nightly examination of conscience to ensure you stay on track. Reviewing the choices we made that day will alert us to where our weaknesses (and strengths) are and catch sinful habits before they start.

4 Go to Confession. Even the most seasoned traveler can take wrong turns.

When we get lost on the journey to Easter (sin), the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is there to help us get back on track.



A good rule of thumb is to confess your sins to a priest once a month to keep the clutter of sin from getting out of hand. Of course, if you are conscious of serious or mortal sin, go immediately.

5 Buddy up. Find a good friend with whom to share your Lent journey. The

right travel companion can make a huge difference. He or she can help us maintain perspective when the going gets tough, can challenge us to grow, and make the whole trip more enjoyable.

6 Read good books. A good way to challenge yourself to grow spiritually is to read something you haven't read before. Pick a saint you've never heard of and read his or her biography or something he or she wrote. Select a book of daily meditations. You may feel as if you are viewing the world through a different window.

7 Read *The Good Book*. Far from being a dry narrative, the Bible is the longest love-letter ever written, the longest epic ever told. It's filled with colorful characters and unexpected turns and twist-endings. Pick a book and read a chapter every day.

8 Pray the Official Prayer of the Church. The Liturgy of the Hours is prayed by the Church several times throughout the day. Priests and religious are required to pray at least some of the hours each day.

Laiety are encouraged to pray along. You can buy the hours in book-form, or download it as an app for a smart phone or mobile device.

9 Spend time in spontaneous prayer.

What better way to find the way to our final destination than to consult the one who is calling us? God doesn't necessarily speak in an audible voice, but during prayer time, you might experience feelings of joy, peace, and love. God also works through other people and situations, so keep your eyes and ears open, especially during this holy season and spiritual journey.

10 Make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

If your parish doesn't have an Adoration Chapel, spend time in front of the tabernacle where the Eucharist is kept. Jesus will give you strength for the journey. You can usually find the tabernacle by looking for the red (or white) candle. It's always lit, signaling that the tabernacle is occupied and Jesus is waiting for you.

11 Travel light.

Give something up to which you are attached, and offer the resulting discomfort as penance.



Common examples are dessert or alcohol, but other ideas can be snacking, hitting the snooze button, watching your favorite TV show, or using social media. The idea is not to reject all that is pleasant and enjoyable, but to occasionally free ourselves from attachments to them. Then we can love God more completely.



12 Fast.

From age 18 and onward, Catholics are obligated to fast on Ash Wednesday (February 10th, this year) and Good Friday (March 25th). When fasting, a person is allowed to eat one full meal and two smaller meals that together do not equal a full meal. Catholics are also obligated to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all other Fridays during Lent.

13 Make the fast count.

Take up something in place of the thing you gave up. If, for example, you give up using your phone in the evening, you can spend that time doing a chore, or reaching out to someone who needs attention. If you gave up watching television, you can spend that time in prayer.

14 Donate clothes to charity.

Go through clothes that you no longer wear or have outgrown. Place the gently used clothes – even some you may still like - in a box and take them to a shelter. You can even make up a box of food, clothes, toys, and toiletries and take it to a shelter for a family.

15 Help.

Does your parish have homeless or hunger ministries for which you can volunteer? Or contact the Catholic Relief Services

(877-HELP-CRS, catholicrelief.org) and see if you can help with their projects.

16 Pray the news.

Pray for the people you read about in the newspaper or online in the news. Pick one celebrity, politician, criminal, or victim of natural disaster and pray for him or her for the rest of the week.

17 Visit with the homebound

and sick, especially the elderly in nursing homes who are often forgotten. Be prepared to sit and listen for an hour or so. While it may feel like a sidetrip in your journey, sharing love and attention is very much a stop on the way.

18 Spread hope, combat gossip.

As an alternative to giving up social media for Lent, use it to encourage your fellow Lenten travelers. Post uplifting quotes, thoughts, reflections, even a little Christian-related humor. Whatever you post, use it to encourage others and brighten their days.

19 Perform a Corporal Work Of Mercy.

Spread mercy to your fellow travelers at least once a week. The Corporal Works of Mercy are: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.



20 Perform a Spiritual Work Of Mercy.

These are: instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, admonish the sinner, comfort the sorrowful, forgive injuries, bear wrongs patiently, and pray for the living and the dead. Try to do one of these every day.