

Fact of FAITH

Lenten Almsgiving

by Rev. Larry Rice, CSP

During Lent, Catholics prepare for the celebration of Easter by observing a penitential season of repentance, renewal, and on-going conversion. Lent calls us back to the basics of our faith, acknowledging that we are all sinners, all in need of God's grace. Traditionally, Lent has been a time of renewed prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Of these three disciplines, almsgiving is probably the least well understood. After all, works of charity and giving to the poor are supposed to be part of how we live in every season. But, just as Lent asks more of our prayer, it also asks more of our generosity.

For many people, fasting and almsgiving are connected disciplines. The point of fasting, after all, isn't merely that we eat less, it could also mean that others can eat more, specifically those who live in poverty and hunger. One very popular Lenten almsgiving program is provided by Catholic Relief Services. It's called Operation Rice Bowl. The core of the program is a cardboard bowl. During Lent, we're encouraged to put our alms in the Rice Bowl. Seventy-five percent of the funds collected go to hunger relief programs around the world, and the remaining twenty-five percent stay in your local Catholic diocese to aid local hunger programs.

You can find information about Operation Rice Bowl and request materials for it by visiting the Catholic Relief Services website: orb.crs.org. They have resources for individuals, families, teachers and catechists, and for parishes.

However you choose to give to the poor this Lent, whether you're giving of your time, talent, or treasure, this season can be an important time of spiritual renewal. Part of how we're renewed is by acknowledging the many ways that God has blessed us and sharing those blessings with the poor and marginalized.

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