

“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). As we journey through Lent, Jesus invites us to walk with him on his journey to Jerusalem where he will pick up his cross and carry it to Calvary.

Throughout Lent we are called to the time-tested traditions of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These practices help us to focus less on our selves and more on the heart and mind of Christ. At the beginning of Lent, many churches pass out Rice Bowls. We are called to think of the less fortunate and to pray for them. In fasting, we give up a favorite meal or food and set aside the money we save to help feed the hungry. The money collected in many Rice Bowls throughout the diocese provides a substantial offering to help feed the hungry in less fortunate countries overseas. If we learn to sacrifice and share with others at a young age, we will benefit from a lifetime of thinking of others first.

Before beginning his ministry, Jesus fasted and prayed in the desert for 40 days. As he was led by the Spirit, he contemplated the mission the Father had for him of calling people to “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15). When the devil thought Jesus was at a weak point, he tempted the Son of God to abandon his mission. We should not be surprised that as we focus on drawing closer to Christ, the devil will redouble his efforts to tempt us. When we are tempted, we might recall the words of Jesus to stand fast: “Get away, Satan! It is written: ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve’” (Mt 4:10).

“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). When we think of Jesus carrying his cross, we think of Good Friday along with his passion and death. During the Fridays of Lent we abstain from meat. We recognize the blood of Christ was shed on the cross and out of deep reverence for this loving sacrifice of our Lord, we do not eat beef, pork, poultry, or the meat of any animal which has blood. “Christ is the Paschal Lamb without blemish, whose blood saved the new Israel from sin and death. The Lamb is the main title for Christ in Revelation, used twenty-eight times” (Note Rev 5:6). Or as John tells us at the beginning of his gospel, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29).

In the Fridays of Lent, we often pray the Stations of the Cross. Jesus was condemned unjustly. We too may bear a cross if others lie about us or wish us harm. Jesus fell three times. We too may falter in our Lenten journey. It is important to get up and try again. Jesus had the help of Simon of Cyrene. We too may need to reach out to others as we carry a heavy burden in life. As we reflect on the Way of the Cross of the Son of God, we are invited to experience the “the love hidden within the Cross of Christ.”¹ Jesus endured excruciating pain and suffering to set all of humanity free from sin. Let us honor his sacrifice in our own daily commitment to pick up our cross and follow him with love and respect.

¹ vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/apr-jun/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000421_via-crucis.html