

If the ashes are where the journey begins, the journey can be said to have ended at the Easter vigil, where Christians renew their baptismal promises. With this renewal, we affirm the royal dignity of our baptism. When we are baptized, we are no longer meant to be lowly creatures, but subjects of Christ's kingdom. As we journey through Lent, we will learn about this exalted nature, and how God's grace can help us live it. When looked at through this prism, the season of Lent becomes far more than just a penitential season, but a season that chronicles our existence here on earth.

Another popular misconception of Lent is people treat it as a time to "start anew" their failures from before. If we aren't good at Lent this year, don't worry, there's always next Lent! There's a real temptation to treat Lent as a crash diet, where we go to great extremes in the pursuit of holiness, and once we think we obtain it, we more or less go back to our old ways, and eventually we repeat the cycle. The prayers of the Mass are meant to jar us out of this mentality. In a prayer chanted while ashes are distributed, we hear:

Let us amend for the better in those things in which we have sinned through ignorance: lest suddenly overtaken by the day of death, we seek space for penance, and are not able to find it.

Christianity is not a routine we fall into, it is an experience meant to transform every aspect of our life, and that transformation is continual. The Apostle Paul tells us "now is the day of salvation", and this prayer helps to reinforce that. We aren't guaranteed another Lent. The spiritual life isn't a five year plan with benchmarks and milestones. The spiritual life is all about giving ourselves over to Christ permanently, and allowing Him to direct us in our steps for as long as we are on this earth, no matter the results. For some this involves a few small changes, and for others, something far more extensive. Whether large or small, we are all called to a radical and permanent change of heart this Lent.

If there is one message in the prayers of Ash Wednesday, it is the message of a radical and permanent renewal of the heart being the point of Lent. In the epistle the Prophet Joel condemns false fasting by exhorting the people to rend their hearts, not their garments. Don't make your Lent all about the external things you give up. As St. John Chrysostom reminds us:

Are you fasting? Show me your fast with your works. Which works? If you see someone who is poor, show him mercy. If you see an enemy, reconcile with him. If you see a friend who is becoming successful, do not be jealous of him! If you see a beautiful woman on the street, pass her by.

In other words, not only should the mouth fast, but the eyes and the legs and the arms and all the other parts of the body should fast as well. Let the hands fast, remaining clean from stealing and greediness. Let the legs fast, avoiding roads which lead to sinful sights. Let the eyes fast by not fixing themselves on beautiful faces and by not observing the beauty of others. You are not eating meat, are you? You should not eat debauchery with your eyes as well. Let your hearing also fast. The fast of hearing is not to accept bad talk against others and sly defamations.

While external things should never define our fast, we also cannot overlook the role they play in helping our fast. If the true fast is that of renewing our souls, that renewal happens through the things we do. This point is driven home during the Preface of Lent:

It is truly meet and just, right and for our salvation, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto Thee, O holy Lord, Father almighty, everlasting God; Who by this bodily fast, dost curb our vices, dost lift up our minds and bestow on us strength and rewards; through Christ our Lord.

I think in the end, this is why Christ exhorts us to be joyful with our fasting in the Gospel. He's not telling us to anoint our heads with oil and appear glad so as to fool the world. He wants us to be joyful because even if fasting is at times uncomfortable, the benefits it produces are something to be glad about. Who wouldn't want vices curbed, minds enlightened and our entire being strengthened? Far too often we approach Lent with that negative sense. This Lent, how about we approach it with the joy that comes as a result of fasting?



Have a Happy Lent

By: Sean Fitzpatrick (Article found at <https://catholicexchange.com/happy-lent-2>)



Memento homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris. Remember man, thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return. Cheerful. Every Catholic just *loves* Ash Wednesday—just as every Catholic just *loves* Lent. Forty days is a long time. These were my thoughts as I stalked out of church with my brows smeared with that singular, stark Catholic insignia, passing the young priest in the vestibule where he stood greeting his parishioners. “Happy Lent, Father,” I said wryly; but he arrested me—and my sarcasm—by his response. “I know! Happy Lent to you! Lent is my favorite time of year, too. It *is* happy.”

Memento homo... Lent is nothing to be depressed about, despite the seeming negativity of the famous Ash Wednesday pronouncement. These words are, on the contrary, something to exult in because they point to the hereafter. The dust is not the end. That would certainly be defeating. The point of Lent is not defeat, but victory—joyful victory. Lent is a season of austerity, but not morbidity. Lent is a sober time, but not a somber time. Nothing about divine friendship is somber. Lent is for sacrifice, but not for sadness. In fact, one of the best things to give up for Lent is melancholy.

The sixth chapter of St. Matthew captures the spirit of a happy Lent memorably and magnificently. The principle Lenten works are almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; and the principle

Lenten attitude is one of private communion with God with outward cheer. But that cheer is not just a hypocritical show. The delight of doing good for its own sake is the most rewarding and uplifting of practices. It bestows joy because it is the basis of sanctity: a foretaste of heaven on earth, and heaven—as everyone knows from their Penny Catechism—is the place where God wants us *to be happy* with Him forever. The hypocritical show is usually characterized by emotions other than happiness.

When you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Lent—for all its severe associations—is rooted in the brightness of springtime. The word “Lent” is etymologically related to the word “lengthen,” referring to the lengthening of days as the world shakes off wintry darkness and turns to the dawn in the eastern, or Easter, sky. In spring we enjoy a lengthening of days, increasing light, and an unveiling, or even remaking, of the world. Lent, as a time of penance and self-examination, should be viewed as an awakening out of hibernation into the dawn of the world and the Word. Everyone is called to be made anew into the comprehension and participation of the creation and Resurrection—which is something to rejoice and be glad about.

The deprivations and disciplines of Lent should be understood and undertaken as invigorating forces for the sake of health, strength, and happiness. As with anything that gives enjoyment—as opposed to mere pleasure—effort is required: a passage, a pilgrimage. Pilgrimages, though difficult, are merry. One of the reasons for this is the Chaucerian joke that pilgrimages point out the wide spectrum of humanity that makes up the Church: saints, sinners, and middle-roaders, all bumbling and stumbling their way towards the common goal, towards eternity. Like the pilgrims we all are, Lent calls for the asceticism of the Way and bids us, challenges us, to *rejoice* in it—to find happiness in holiness: on earth as it is in heaven.

The teachings of Christ indicate that Lent must not be a time to elicit the reward of men for external mortification. Lent is a time to earn the reward of God for jubilation in spite of hidden

mortification. Though we are required to suffer through Lent, so too should we laugh through Lent. There is no such thing as a sad saint. It is in suffering that the human soul finds the deepest spring of contentment. The paradox of this cheerfulness, this happiness that is holiness, is nothing to hide. God gives the gift of joy to share, and Lent is the time of all times to share, to give, and to make other people happy. Though the Lenten journey is one that should be kept between the penitent and his God, this does not mean that the gladness that flows from reconciliation cannot shake the world like a fanfare. Though you keep your left hand from knowing what your right hand is doing, do let your neighbor know that you are happy. This is the essence of Lent: to happily renew faith and recover newness of life—to lengthen our days with light together with the days of our brothers and sisters as well.

One of Our Lord's epithets is the Man of Sorrows, for so is He painted out in the prophecies of Isaiah. His sorrow was the emotion that the Gospels mention with the most specificity, as He wept over Jerusalem and His departed friend, Lazarus. His Passion was, of course, sorrowful—have mercy on us and on the whole world! Though Christ was, indeed in some intense sense, a sorrowful Man, He was nevertheless an exultant God. There is a wild and wonderful passage from G. K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* that presents the Man of Sorrows from another angle:

He never concealed His tears; He showed them plainly on His open face at any daily sight, such as the far sight of His native city. Yet He concealed something. Solemn supermen and imperial diplomatists are proud of restraining their anger. He never restrained His anger. He flung furniture down the front steps of the Temple, and asked men how they expected to escape the damnation of Hell. Yet He restrained something. I say it with reverence; there was in that shattering personality a thread that must be called shyness. There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. There was something that He covered constantly by abrupt silence or impetuous isolation. There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.

This "tremendous figure which fills the Gospel" may have been a Man of sorrows, but only because He hid His happiness—a heavenly happiness that would have shattered earthly mortals with its humors. Mankind was able to bear God's tears, but he would never have been able to

bear His gaiety. It is for His followers to let that mirth shine through their lives like sunlight through sky—an illumination that is rejoiced in even as it rejoices. Do not be men of sorrow, especially during Lent. On the contrary, show and share the mirth Christ hid. Lent is the time for such exposition: a time of light, of life, of laughter.

*Closing Prayer*¹

Lord, Holy One, have mercy on us. We confess our sins to you. We have fallen short of your glory and without your mercy and grace, we would be dust. We repent now. Lord, as we enter into this Lenten season, be near to us. Help us, by your Holy Spirit, to feel right conviction and repentance for our sin. Help us, by your Spirit, to have the strength to overcome the enemy.

Thank you, Lord, that Easter is coming! Death has no sting, no victory, because of Jesus! Glory and honor and praise to His name! Thank you for rescuing us. Help us keep both the weight and the joy of this season in our hearts and we move through the next several weeks. Help us bear the good fruit of your Spirit.

Thank you that the ashes on our forehead do not symbolize our ultimate reality. From dust we might have been formed, but our bodies, our spirits, ourselves, await beautiful redemption and the restoration of all things. Help us long and look forward to that day, and let it come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.



¹ Prayer found at <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/a-prayer-for-ash-wednesday.html>, Excerpted from

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First in Line



The Blob



The Hasty



Rorschach



Father's Revenge



OCD



The Hipster



The Dripster



Load Toner



The Hindu



The Franciscan



Harry Potter



iPriest



The Jansenist



The Mini



Pirate's Booty



The One Stroke



The Hitchcock