



People often don't look forward to **Lent**. Childhood memories of **giving** up candy or sitting through weekly **Stations of the Cross** come immediately to mind. Words like "**sacrifice,**" "**discipline,**" and "**self-denial**" are often used in ways that suggest that **Lent** is something to be **endured** rather than a **time of grace** and **spiritual growth**.

A new approach: Have you ever thought of looking at Lent as a yearly **second chance**? Each year the Church gives us six weeks to take a long, **loving look at our lives** to see if our **values** and **priorities** are in line with **God's desires** for us. Since most of us find that at times we have wandered from God's path, Lent becomes that **second chance**, or do-over time, to "**return to God with our whole heart.**"

Lent offers all of us a very special **opportunity** to grow in our **relationship with God** and to **deepen** our commitment to a way of life, rooted in our baptism. This year, with the pandemic, Lent provides us with an even greater opportunity to **reflect** upon our **patterns**, to **pray more deeply**, experience **sorrow** for what we've done and failed to do, and to be **generous** to those in need.

What if this Lent, we **didn't** approach the practices of **prayer, almsgiving, and fasting** with an eye to what we can do to transform ourselves, but rather with an eye to what **God wants to do** in order to **transform us**. Why not be a **risk-taker** and spend some time in **quiet prayer** and ask God for his **input**?

The 40 days of Lent are to be an **imitation** of Jesus' 40 days in the desert. In fact, we are called not only to "**imitate**" Jesus' time in the desert, but we are also called to live this time **with Him, in Him and through Him**.

Pope Francis wrote in his Lenten letter that:

- ❖ The current Lenten season is **dramatically** different from any other in our lifetimes, no matter how old we are, but it remains what it has always been: "A time to get in **better touch** with **God's love** for us and do our best to '**spring clean**' our souls in preparation for the glory of **Easter.**"
- ❖ The "liturgical season has also become a time to think about how we live as a **community, protect** each other from **illness**, and be part of the **solution** to a **global health crisis.**" He also was hopeful Catholics would "meet these challenges, and maybe even bring about new and better ways of **taking care of each other** in the years to come."

In the Scripture readings for Lent, we hear the words: "**Now is the acceptable time**". What does that mean to you? What is it that Jesus is inviting you to be or to do during the 2021 Lenten season?