

A GOOD LENT

There is an old story told of a priest who worked in the Inner City. The priest was walking down a deserted alley one day when he was accosted by a guy who put a knife to his back and demanded his money. Well, when Father went to get his wallet he opened his jacket and the mugger spied the priest's collar. He said, "Oh Father, I'm sorry-I don't want your money..." Relieved the priest reached into his pocket and offered the man a cigarette. "No thanks," he said, "I just gave them up for Lent!" He should have given up stealing instead! This week, we celebrate Ash Wednesday-the beginning of Lent. The ashes that we receive on that day are not some sort of Catholic "Badge of Honor." Rather, they are a symbol of repentance and of our mortality. We are reminded that we are "Dust And To Dust We Shall Return." There is another life beyond this one and after our bodies die and decay, we know that our soul will live on. Lent can be a time to get our soul into spiritual shape. How can we do that? Well, our Lord recommends three ways in the gospel. The three things are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. So let us look at each of these things for a moment. First prayer. What is prayer? Simply put-it is dialogue with God. The great St. Teresa of Avila once put it this way. She said that really prayer was nothing but just a loving conversation with the Lord who loves us. But we must also listen in prayer and not just do all the talking. Prayer can take many forms; it could be the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, meditation or just simply saying the prayers that we learned as children. Whatever form it takes-it is important that we do it-each and every day. Prayer keeps us in contact with the "Higher Power." And that power keeps us going. Secondly, fasting. That means going without food and drink. Now some people cannot fast for health reasons. But most of us can go without some extra "goodies" that would not harm our health at all. Actually, Americans are some of the most overweight people in the world. A little girl was once asked "What will you do when you get big like your mother?" She replied, "Go on a diet!" While fasting is not dieting, it can help our body and our soul spiritually speaking. And if we really cannot fast from food, there are other things that we can fast from. How about fasting from gossip or rash judgement? Or maybe fasting from aggressive driving? No one ever hurt their health by doing that! Finally, the last thing is giving alms. Sacrificial giving is indeed a good thing to do. When we give money to the poor and are mindful of them, we do a great service. However, sometimes, giving does not always have to be writing out a check. It could be giving time and effort to helping a neighbor in distress. Or it might be visiting a sick relative. The Lord tells us in the gospel, "Give And It Shall Be Given Unto You." Let us be generous not only with our money but also with our time and talents. Lent is an opportunity for us to change and to become better Christians. Let us not waste the time that is before us so that on Easter Sunday 2016 we can truly rejoice in the victory that Christ has won over suffering and death!

Sincerely in Christ,

Father Jerome