

Being Catholic In Lent

Owen McGarry, Sr in High School

I struggled a lot with what I could share today about my personal experience with lent that would actually be valuable for anyone else. For my whole life I've never taken it all that seriously. In elementary and middle school the big joke was always that we were giving up "homework" or "chores". My parents never exactly went for either of those. And so I would fall back on the classics; the things that everyone says that they are "gonna give up" when someone asks. Things like chocolate, coffee, soda, fast food, or some kind of candy. None of these are bad things to give up for lent, that's not what I'm trying to say, it's just that I didn't put any thought or care into choosing them. So I would pick one of these small pleasures to go without and try to get through as much of the 40 day lenten season as I could manage. As insignificant as these sacrifices were, there have been a number of years where I wouldn't even make it half way. Maybe I forgot or had a really bad craving, like a moment of weakness type situation. Oh and if I slipped up once, all bets were off; I would just indulge myself completely. Taking an honest look back now, I wonder if I failed not in spite of the fact that these sacrifices were pretty easy, but because of the fact that these sacrifices were easy. By choosing to give something up that was more minimal I was preventing myself from fully and actually participating in lent, so I didn't feel all that much pressure to stay true to my sacrifice. Not to mention the fact that I completely missed the point. Lent isn't really about mildly

inconveniencing yourself for a while so you can stuff your face on Easter without having to feel guilty. Honestly my experience with lent so far, has only focused on one aspect of the Catholic observance of the season. By our faith we are compelled to use this time for three things. Fasting (which in this context can often just mean whatever it is we are giving up), prayer, and almsgiving. My point in bringing them up now is that there has always been so much more to lent than I have allowed myself to explore, and I am genuinely excited to do it right this year.

Another one of the reasons I think that Lent has been challenging for me to follow through on is because it's kind long. It drags itself out a little bit. 40 days is a significant number in the Church, as it's the same amount of time Jesus spent in the wilderness before he began his public ministry. But it is not an easy thing to intentionally be deprived over an extended period. It's a long time that we are asked to wait, solemnly, for the joyous occasion that is Easter. I'm reminded of the last year we have all spent waiting for this pandemic to finally end. The coronavirus has confined us all to our homes for the most part, deprived us of our favorite activities and even from seeing our favorite people, and the time seems to just limp along slowly. I'm sure that we are all feeling tired of being told to wait, continue to sacrifice, put the needs of others before ourselves, because we have been doing that all year and it is undeniably exhausting. In the midst of all this, though, people found new and unexpected opportunities. I mean personally I learned how to crochet, I played more board games than I ever had before in my life, and I got a lot closer with my family even though there were times when I was definitely sick of them. Is all of that worth not having a junior or senior prom and rarely ever getting to see my friends? I would say: "Probably Not" to be honest, but the point

still stands that COVID made us all reevaluate how we dedicate our time, think deeply about the things and the people that are most important, and it gave us the opportunity to reflect and improve on ourselves. During lent this year, I want to find ways for my fasting, prayer, and almsgiving to provide similar opportunities, but this time for my spiritual life and relationship with God. So when I think about the things that are important to sacrifice for lent, it needs to be something that would otherwise be getting in my way of taking the time to be present in the moment, to be spiritual. I don't want my sacrifice this year to just be another mild inconvenience like I've made in the past. I want my sacrifice to be challenging so I can be in solidarity with Christ and all those in the world who suffer, absolutely, but I also want to be able to make the opportunity to really reconnect with my faith and with God.

So our sacrifices should not be in vain, is really what I'm getting at, which feels a little obvious. So the question that I ask myself, keeping this in mind, is what opportunities my sacrifice can create for me, for others, and for my faith? One idea is to donate that money we would otherwise spend on chocolate. It's just another level that we should aspire to. This observation also highlights the connection that has always existed between fasting and almsgiving. We deny ourselves personal luxuries so that we have more we are able to give. Donating the money I would otherwise splurge. Helping my Mom with the dishes with the time I would otherwise be using on video games. Saying a quick prayer at night instead of scrolling through social media. This year I want to actively contribute the time and money I would be spending selfishly on being helpful, supportive and prayerful.