

Beginning New Patterns During Lent.

Something all of us can do is commit ourselves to being more reflective during Lent. It just means that I'm going to make a point of being more observant, more aware of what I'm experiencing - paying more attention to what is "automatic" behavior. And, I then start paying attention to my desires. We have all kinds of desires. During Lent, I can reflect upon the desires I currently have and which of them need to be purified, which may need to be abandoned, and which are wonderful desires that are there, but I haven't acted upon them. Naming our deepest desires will guide the choices we make to establish new patterns for Lent.

Praying How am I talking to God? Listening to God? When am I praying? Where am I praying? Is the way I am praying leading me to a closer relationship with God? With others? Lent is the time to start new patterns of prayer. Choose to change one small pattern like waking up 10 minutes earlier each morning to meditate.

Eating The monks in the desert, centuries ago, discovered that fasting - simply not eating - caused a tremendous boost to their consciousness. Not only did their bodies go on "alert," but their whole person seemed to be in a more heightened state of attention. The whole purpose of fasting was to aid prayer - to make it easier to listen to God more openly, especially in times of need. Choose to change one small eating pattern like fasting one day each week of Lent (simply to eat only one full meal in the day, with the other two meals combined, not equal to the one).

Practicing Generosity Being independent can lead me to assess all of my needs first, and then give away what is left over. Practicing generosity leads to an understanding that sharing with others in need is a priority. A spirit of self-less giving means that one of my needs is to share what I have with others. Choose to practice generosity by recognizing when you are assessing your needs first in a relationship, or in the way you tithe offer your time to someone in need.

Practicing Penance Pope Francis, in the Joy of the Gospel writes, "God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy." Lent is a time to name what sinful, unhealthy, self-centered patterns need changing and to "seek God's mercy" again and again as we work to act against them toward a "change of heart". Receive the Sacrament of Penance during Lent. Forgive someone close to you that has hurt you. Ask forgiveness of someone you have hurt. Lasting healing needs the practice of penance.

In the end, the prayer of St. Augustine places us in the right spirit for Lent:

*O Lord, our Lord, you have created us for yourself
and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*

Let us pray for each other on this journey, especially those who need and desire a change of heart on this pilgrimage to Easter joy.

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<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent/patterns.html>