

Living Lent 2023

The season of Lent comes with lots of Hope, Joy and Love, especially for those who look forward to spend more time with God, follow the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and charity, and make a few valuable changes in their lives, which would help them progress spiritually and personally.

During this period, we are called to focus on coming closer to Jesus by praying a little more, doing good deeds for others, going without something we like, and giving generously to others in need. So let's see if there is something that we could do this year to keep that hope, joy and love running in our families and communities too. We are already aware of our Archdiocesan SCC vision of "No one in want" (Acts 4:34). Keeping this vision in mind, let us take some time and ask ourselves:

1. What does it mean to want something?
2. What are we lacking in our present time?
3. How can we help each other in satisfying these wants?

I am sure you will have different answers related to your wants and needs, and similarly, various solutions to satisfy them. But we already have our Heavenly Father, who knows our deepest wants, and is willing to fulfil them according to His will in His time. Let us listen to what He says to us in the Gospel of Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18. This scripture passage brings to light three types of wants that we usually have, and three practices during Lent that would help fulfil them with a right intention.

The wants can be characterised as:

1. Emotional wants that include companionship, fellowship and protection
2. Physical wants like good health, enough food and a decent livelihood
3. Material wants like a job, shelter and clothing
4. Spiritual wants of avoiding vices and growing in virtues.

The spiritual responses to these wants are the Lenten practices of Prayer, Fasting and Charity.

Prayer helps us feel accepted, heard and understood by God who never abandons or judges us by our actions. This acceptance and companionship received in Love from God leads us to seek and help those who are hurt, lost, and in need of healing by offering our prayers and presence to them.

Fasting is a practice where we satisfy our physical wants with spiritual nourishment. This practice helps us gain self-control on a personal level, but also helps us experience desperation, restlessness and discouragement as we sacrifice daily meals, and at times, restrict our time spent on social media. If the focus here is on our own selves, it will always be challenging to carry on, but if the focus is on

understanding the needs of others and offering our meals to someone in need and our time to God who satisfies our hunger, then it becomes inspiring and meaningful.

Finally, **Charity** allows us to share our love, compassion, things, time and presence with someone who desperately needs them. Since we have been in need ourselves and have received from God-sent people who have been there for us, we pay it forward by being God-sent people to those whom we can help in whatever way possible.

Now while we perform these practices, let us be aware of the dangers it may lead to if not done with a right intention, as mentioned in the gospel.

1. “When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites.” Instead, look happy and cheerful.
2. “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them.” Instead, let it be your me-time with God.
3. “Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.” Instead, do it for the Love of God and not for the praises of people.

As we have reflected on these Lenten practices, let us follow them during this month of March to experience and share God’s love, joy and hope through our services to our community and our Church.

Questions for reflection:

- What new insights have you gained from this paper?
- How will you share the benefits of your Lenten practices with others?