



## What are you doing for Lent?

Fasting and abstaining from earthly delights as an offering to God have been part of the human experience since time immemorial. Early Christians received this tradition from our Jewish predecessors and connected such sacrifice with that of Jesus in response to his command to take up our cross and follow after him. Christians regularly fasted twice weekly on Wednesdays and Fridays, adding additional fast days preceding major celebrations, especially that of Easter. In 325 A.D. the Council of Trent promulgated a 40-day Lenten period. Local practices varied considerably in those early centuries, and it would be more than another century before the season as we know it was universally observed.



What are you doing for Lent? While Christians throughout the world share certain basic Lenten practices in common, the specific ways in which they do so varies from one culture or locality to another. A prime example is the Way of the Cross devotion. People here, as is common throughout Latin America, love processions and pageantry. When we pray the Way of the Cross in church on

Friday mornings, no one remains in the pews as is common among Anglos. Everyone moves from station to station with lots of prayers and singing. Still, doing the stations within the church is not the preferred manner. People want to get out on the streets in a more intensive expression of faith and witness for the broader community. Here at our parish, each barrio plans out their own Way of the Cross. The stations are assigned to families along the route who prepare altars in front of their homes with crosses, statues, religious pictures and flowers. After the prayers at each station, a blessing is bestowed upon the family, and the procession continues down the street singing or reciting the rosary until arriving at the next station. Since 1996 folks at our parish have joined in an extensive Way of the Cross every Good Friday, winding through every barrio on an eight-mile route...a four-hour walk under the hot Venezuelan sun. Preceded by a huge cross and banner, more than 200 parishioners participate...or at least so it was in pre-pandemic years.

In addition to such communal expressions, it has been the standard practice for us Catholics to make personal Lenten resolutions, both giving something up as sacrifice and taking on additional commitments of prayer and charity. I asked parishioners to share what they are doing special this Lent. Here are some of their responses:

Pepe: I am reading and reflecting on the letters of St. Paul and, as far as possible, putting them into practice.

Josefina: I don't have a job and am living by the mercy of God, trusting that He can take care of everything. I am fasting and trying to become stronger spiritually and helping my neighbors as much as I am able.

Mary Celis: I am offering sacrifices and fasting to recall what Jesus went through for the forgiveness of my sins and wearing rough sackcloth undergarments as a means of conversion. I want to dedicate myself more to God, taking time for contemplation in God's presence, to praise Almighty God with my mind, heart and soul.

Nidia: I plan to go to the hospital with a group from our barrio to bring arepas and coffee to the patients there.

Nohemi: I am doing some penance and redoing the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. I had begun them some time back but never finished. I felt the need to start over and finish them this time.

Manuel: People, particularly children, come to our house every day in the afternoon and evening asking for food. I don't have much to give them...I would like to have more to be able to give them more.

Raquel: Our family custom is to avoid eating meat on the Fridays, but we don't have meat these days because of the cost. We could eat fish, but we don't have money to buy that either, so we are giving up sweets. We pray the rosary together and share what we have with neighbors, even if it's only time for conversation. I am trying to change my habit of talking critically, to think well before I speak, even if it is the truth, and to speak without hurting someone. I am asking the Holy Spirit to guide me in this. I am making time for whoever needs help at work, praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet at 3pm and 3am, and am trying to go to Mass every day.

### Points to ponder

What are you doing special this Lent as an individual, as a family and together with others in your parish?

*These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at [ddempsey@churchofst dominic.org](mailto:ddempsey@churchofst dominic.org) or 651-368-7324.*