

## Msgr. Bill's Weekly Letter...

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent begins this Wednesday. Our U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops reminds us of the guidelines to help us celebrate this holy season. **Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fast and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence.** These guidelines bind us to obedience and if you knowingly break them, we should confess those in your next confession.

For members of the Latin Catholic Church, the norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59. When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. The norms concerning abstinence from meat are binding upon members of the Latin Catholic Church from age 14 onwards.

If you make a plan to do something during Lent such as — not eat meat on Wednesday, give up chocolate, not have dessert, etc., and you fail to carry this out, — **YOU ARE NOT BOUND UNDER PAIN OF SIN.** Do not confess them when you go to confession, they are not sins. “But I feel bad.” Feeling bad **DOES NOT MAKE AN ACTION A SIN.** These practices are meant to help us attack a sin that may be lingering in our lives, not to prove you have a strong will.

One of Satan's strategies is to equate the two so that we might fall into scrupulosity, doubt, fear, etc. It is also true that a focus on bad feelings can cause us to overlook sins such as gossip — he is very, very smart and manipulative. Rarely does he allow us humans to look at him as he is. I think Dante got close when he described Satan; he is frozen from his feet to the waist chomping on the heads of Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, has six eyes (a number designating incompleteness), and flapping his huge bat wings.

We all solemnly rejected Satan and all his works, and his empty promises. Our parents and God parents did this for us at our Baptism and each year on Easter, we repeat our profession, for ourselves. Lent is a great time for us to examine seriously where we have fallen short of these promises.

Perhaps we have fallen in two or three areas, and we need to repent. Choose ONE of those and this Lent resolve that you will push ahead of that. For example, suppose you have fallen into the habit of using God's name (O my God!!! or God ---- etc.) as an exclamation. Maybe you could work on that.

Try this for Lent — when you wake up, before you do anything else (anything else) ask God to help you remember to use his name in a positive manner two times every day, in front of others — spouse, child, parent, co-worker, boss, neighbor, the police officer who pulls you over, etc., etc.

You do not have to be a theologian, just use common language. Perhaps you and a friend are admiring a beautiful sunset you might say, “Wow! God can really paint.” If you are in the car and someone cuts you off you could say, “Keep her safe Lord.” You could say to your son, “I am so grateful God gave you to us.” When leaving the supermarket, you could say to the cashier, “May God bless your day.”

I have learned that there are 2,753,825,462 ways to praise God and the list is always growing. God will never make us do this. He WILL help us succeed, but we must begin the effort. First choose an accountability person (spouse, child, friend, etc.) to support you. Imagine getting home after working and your son asks you, “Have you done your two?” Maybe you only praised God once that day you could say, “God gave me a son who is strong.” You got your two. About half way through try to increase to 3 times a day.

The more you do this, the more the good habit overtakes the bad habit. Repetitive behavior can lead us to the positive or negative. After all, repetitive behavior is what got us using God's name in vain; so too will the positive repetitive behavior of praising God more and more help us develop the new habit.

I suggest you pick just one thing you need to change — if are looking for a behavior to change and cannot come up with one, ask someone who lives with you. They will have a list.

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*Msgr. Bill*

