



Blow the horn in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly! Gather the people, sanctify the congregation; assemble the elderly; gather the children, even infants nursing at the breast; let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her bridal tent. (Joel 2:15-16)

February 17, 2026

Hello Everyone —

You are merciful to all, O Lord, and despise nothing that you have made. You overlook people's sins, to bring them to repentance, and you spare them, for you are the Lord our God.

With these words, the entrance antiphon for the Mass on Ash Wednesday, we once again launch the season of Lent. What powerful and comforting words they are. If only we could attune our hearts to such an attitude of mercy and new beginnings in our dealings with others.

As Lent gets underway, here are a couple of reflections on one of the key practices of the journey to Easter, namely **fasting**.

Today people **fast** for all kinds of reasons, including sometimes political reasons. It is important, therefore, to discern the uniquely Christian content of fasting. It is first of all revealed to us in the interdependence between two events which we find in the Bible: one at the beginning of the Old Testament and the other at the beginning of the New Testament. The first event is the "breaking of the fast" by Adam in Paradise. He ate the forbidden fruit. This is how our original sin is revealed to us. Christ, the New Adam — and this is the second event — begins by fasting. Adam was tempted and he succumbed to temptation; Christ was tempted and he overcame that temptation. The results of Adam's failure are expulsion from Paradise and death. The fruits of Christ's victory are the destruction of death and our return to Paradise.

(Alexander Schmemmann, Great Lent)

As a period of purification, Lent is not merely a period of bodily **fasting**. It is a period of general readjustment, of thorough renovation from the outer spheres of life down to the roots of its innermost fibers. We have only to glance at the chain of prayers which runs through the Lenten liturgy from Ash Wednesday to Easter to see the meaning of Lent. It is a chastisement of the body in order that the soul may grow. It is purification and liberation. It is a cure, and the fasts are meant to be medicinal. It is a sacred observance, nay, it is direct sanctification. It is the only route to freedom and fulfillment, for it loosens the grip of evil and leads us, worn and weary, to full and wholesome restoration.

(Theodore Wesseling, OSB, The Cleansing of the Temple)

A prayer for Lent:

Merciful God,

You called us forth from the dust of the earth;

you claimed us for Christ in the waters of baptism.

Look upon us as we enter these Forty Days

bearing the mark of ashes,

and bless our journey through the desert of Lent to the font of rebirth.

May our **fasting** be hunger for justice;

our alms, a making of peace;

our prayer, the chant of humble and grateful hearts.

All that we do and pray is in the name of Jesus,

for in his Cross you proclaim your love forever and ever. Amen.

As I do for you, please pray for me,

Most Reverend Jeffrey S. Grob
Archbishop of Milwaukee

