

V+J

## Lent 2024: Not “Just Another Lent!”

St. Francis de Sales reminds us not to see this Lent as “just another Lent.” Such an attitude may prevent us from receiving the rich spiritual blessings of this holy season. During Lent we closely follow Jesus as he experiences growing hostility to his person and message, a hostility that ends tragically in his passion and death.

Evocatively, St. Francis de Sales describes the Season of Lent as “the autumn of the spiritual life.” In his day, autumn was the time to harvest the grains, fruits and vegetables that would see people through the barren and frozen winter ahead. For Francis, it is by following Jesus liturgically as he makes his way to Jerusalem and by observing the three Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving that we harvest the graces, insights, strength and inspirations to see us through whatever shape any spiritual winter make take for each of us.

For de Sales, **prayer** is simply a heart-to-heart conversation with God. The content of that conversation need only be whatever is on the front burner of our lives at that time. In prayer, we simply speak to God from the heart about whatever we wish, and we listen to whatever God, from his heart, may say to us in return. Prayer is not rocket science. It is simply a warm, open and honest heart-to-heart conversation between friends.

The Church has wisely limited the days of physical **fasting** during Lent, preferring instead to encourage us to fast from anything—such as food, possessions, hurts, prejudices, vanities, and so on—that keep us from living Jesus more fully by embracing in our own lives his simplicity, humility, gentleness and foot-washing service of others.

**Almsgiving** may be the most misunderstood of all three Lenten practices. Almsgiving is rooted in our gratitude to God for his many blessings to us and to our family. In Salesian spirituality, gratitude always engenders generosity, that is, we thank God for his blessings to us by caring in concrete and tangible ways for those for whom blessings are little or few. The Church expects each of us to be honest with ourselves and to stretch ourselves to do whatever we can do to share our blessings with others, and to do so with a warm smile, wide open arms and a generous heart. This pleases the Lord who has a special love for the poor, the outcast, the marginalized and the neglected.

May this Lent of 2024 not be “just another Lent!”

—Rev. Lewis Fiorelli, OSFS