



# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Repent and believe in the Good News**

**Ten suggestions for a Good Lent – an action plan!**

## **Sunday before Lent**

### **1. Decide on your Lenten sacrifice**

Lent is a season of solemnity and sacrifice as we seek to follow the example of Jesus' exodus into the desert; our sacrifice is a reminder of the self-sacrifice Jesus made to save us from our sins. Because of this, it is a Lenten tradition to *sacrifice* something for these 40 days. Think about all the trivial things in our lives that shift our focus away from God. ***What is something your life could do without?*** But remember, it is a spiritual sacrifice, not a time for dieting or something that proves to be quite easy to give up. Keep in mind it is modelling the sacrifice of Jesus so no short cuts!

### **2. Include something special in your Lenten routine**

Giving up chocolate or Facebook for 40 days is great, but ***why not do something positive, too***, instead of just removing the negative? Resolve to spend more time volunteering, with your family, pray more, or somehow get in touch with your faith. Some families decide to set aside their spare change during these 40 days and do something with that money. Either donate it to the church or to a local charity, or spend it on goods for those in need. It is a way, focusing on those that don't have anything to sacrifice in the first place. Write down your commitment and carry it in your wallet or purse so you don't forget.

### **3. Go to one extra service each week**

In addition to weekly Sunday service, it's good to go to church frequently, especially during Lent. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday when we remember that we come from dust and to dust we shall return. This could be a Eucharistic celebration (many parishes put on extra opportunities), morning prayer, evening prayer or perhaps a Stations of the Cross – another traditional liturgy for Fridays during Lent.

### **4. Put aside extra time for spiritual activities – Bible reflection or prayer/meditation**

If we are not doing the *Lectio Divina* – the spiritual reading of the scriptures – Lent would be a good time to begin (lectio available through the parish). If not, build in a period of quiet for reading through the Gospels or the Epistles and prayerfully seek to discern how it applies to our daily circumstances.

### **5. Take time for self-examination and reflection**

Lent is meant to be a time of solemn reflection, the season when we seek to assess, as honestly as we can, before God, the state of our relationship with the God who created us, who sent Jesus as our Saviour. How would I assess my discipleship? Where do I fail? What could I be doing to grow in faithfulness? Where is God on my list of daily priorities, activities? Keep a daily journal of your thoughts if it helps. What is vital is to take some time to think about how I embody Christ's message.

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## **6. Fast and abstain**

As Jesus told his disciples, some “demons” can only be cast out by *prayer and fasting*. Giving up a meal or two per week (Friday fasting is traditional throughout Lent) is one way to assist us in “feeling the pain” of what Lent is meant to be like. If fasting from food isn’t a healthy or reasonable option for you, fast from something other than food. Make sure it’s something that’s a challenge — like your phone, Facebook, a television show— something that will make you appreciate that it is a real sacrifice. Commit to this and stick to it. If you are finding this a real challenge, then it means you are opening up genuine opportunities for engaging with the Holy Spirit. Pray through those times.

## **7. Take something on**

Lent is a great opportunity for us to build up some good habits. Commit to making one act of unsolicited kindness to a stranger each day. Maybe focus on patience, or gentleness, or mercy. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** offers a list of spiritual gifts that can help shape our daily spiritual commitment. Whatever we choose, we should allow our Lenten promises to help us grow in faith and virtue. In addition to bettering your own life, take this time to build habits *that enrich the lives of others*.

## **8. Give generously to a good cause**

Many Churches have Lenten projects and encourage the faithful to make Lent a time for generously (and sacrificially) giving to one of these worthwhile causes. Find one in which you have an interest, in which you believe and make that your special Lenten project for this year. This might be a personal contact or something in which others are involved. It is about making that sacrifice in the name of Christ, a sacrifice that will support and encourage others and be an opportunity to express love.

## **9. Add purple “decorations” to your living space**

This one is really simple but can be very helpful. The colour of Lent is purple so why not add a few touches of deep, royal purple into your home to remind you that these 40 days are important and we do not want to waste them. A few purple candles, a purple table runner, purple serviettes, something nice and simple that will serve to keep the idea of Lent in our minds as we work through the season.

## **10. Above all else - work with the Holy Spirit in responding to Jesus’ call to repent**

*In the end*, the above activities are all about seeking the grace of the Holy Spirit to assist us in repenting. It is not about us doing as though we had the power to make ourselves into better disciples by our own efforts. It is about us *opening* ourselves up to what God can, seeks to do and will most certainly do to those who come with a *humble and contrite heart*.

*If we do not* come out of Lent into the glorious joys of Easter as new men and women, with a renewed commitment to our faith; a pledge to return to the fundamentals of the Christian life as set down in the Bible; a passion for living Christ-centred lives; and with an overwhelming desire to love God and to love our neighbour more deeply than we have before, then we may need to wonder whether or not we have made the best use of those forty days. If we put in the hard yards, God will do the rest.

*Lent is God’s invitation* in which he renews his call for us to return to the basics of our faith and to not presume we are already doing that! God invites us to ponder again on what it means to follow a Christ who lived, died and rose again from the grave in order that we may have an abundance of life and so that the whole of the world can be transformed by living under the rule of Almighty God.

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