

What to give up for Lent? by David H. Petersen <https://blogs.lcms.org/2018/what-to-give-up-for-lent/>

Giving up some small pleasure for Lent, like chocolate or coffee, can be a nice way to remind ourselves throughout Lent that it is Lent. When we reach out for those things we remember that we are denying ourselves in commemoration of Our Lord's suffering.

This isn't meant to please God or gain His favor. Nor can such a small denial make Lent more meaningful or increase faith. It is simply an attempt to keep ourselves mindful throughout the day that it is Lent. That is a valid Christian desire and discipline.

Curbing the flesh is always good. Cutting calories is probably appropriate for almost everyone reading this, and (though I hate to admit it) cutting caffeine would probably hurt few of us either.

But Lent isn't ultimately about giving things up. Its purpose is not self-improvement in the conventional sense. Instead Lent is a season of preparation. We are preparing to celebrate Easter and the Church is always prepared in the same way: by repentance.

True repentance is not simply feeling sorry, and it certainly isn't an emotional frenzy of despair. Nor is it merely an outward discipline for the world to see. True repentance means turning away from sin in sorrow and also turning toward God in joy. That is to say, that true repentance is *faith*. It expects forgiveness. It trusts in Christ to give it. Judas was not truly repentant (Matthew 27:3-5). He was only remorseful. He did not think he could be forgiven. He did not trust Jesus to love him. In contrast, St. Peter was repentant (Mark 14:66-72). He was more than remorseful. He was sorry for his sins and ashamed of what he had done, but even more than this, he trusted in Christ to be merciful.

Lent is therefore not so much a time of "giving things up" as it is a time for adding things that increase our awareness of God's mercy in Christ Jesus. When Lent leads us to repentance, it isn't to make us sad or to somehow get God's attention. It is to strengthen our faith. Part of that strengthening includes an increased awareness of our great need — and yes, that often means a stern preaching of the Law. But that is not the real mark or purpose of Lent. For Lent also includes, and is mostly focused on, the solution to that need: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our redemption. Nearly all of our churches will add midweek services during Lent and also Holy Week services, not for the primary purpose of preaching the Law but rather that we might have more opportunities to receive God's forgiveness, hear His Word and receive His Sacrament.

So if you're looking for something to give up this Lent, I suggest you give up a few hours each Wednesday evening and go to Church. Don't do it to make yourself sad. Do it for the joy of hearing God's Word and receiving His gifts. There, by the means of Grace, repentance is educated and edified and faith is fed. That is what Lent is meant for.

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