



What is Greener Lent?

A Lenten Program to return our hearts to God through prayer, fasting and almsgiving through the lens of *Laudato Sí*.

Jesus is not just a historical figure who developed a circle of followers and taught an ethical way of life. There are lots of ethical teachers, but Jesus is different. He is God. To believe in Jesus means that you make a radical commitment to follow him, leaving behind your own pursuits to follow His plan. You love the things that he loves and your heart breaks for the things that break His. The sacraments, prayers, charitable works and practices of our Catholic Church bring us into a full communion with God.

The practice of Lent

One of those practices is Lent. Lent is a 40 day period of prayer, fasting and abstinence, and almsgiving ending beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending at sundown on Holy Thursday¹. Although there was much diversity in fasting before Easter in the first three centuries after Christ, and Lenten requirements have changed throughout church history, for centuries Lent has been, and still is, our most defined and important penitential season. It is designed to prepare our hearts to celebrate the Lord's resurrection. According to the United

¹ If Sundays are included, the number of days from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday exceeds 40. Calculations for Greener Lent are based on a 40-day Lent, from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday, and excluding Sundays.

States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), “We are called not only to abstain from luxuries during Lent, but to a true inner conversion of heart as we seek to follow Christ's will more faithfully.²”

This is the reason for Greener Lent. It is to prepare ourselves for Easter by experiencing a true inner conversion. Greener Lent's focus is on prayer, fasting and giving to the poor through the lens of the ecological crisis. Pope Francis eloquently explains the crisis in *Laudato Si*.

Laudato Si

Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. They have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering which is even now taking place throughout our world. (25)

Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving

The Greener Lent lenten program encourages participants to do the following:

Intensify prayers, especially for the poor whose livelihoods are being severely impacted by the climate crisis. Weekly correspondence to participants emphasizes prayer, although each participant may achieve that in different ways, e.g. Adoration, rosary, etc.

Sacrificially reducing the amount of meat we are used to. Participants choose a fasting level which asks them to reduce or eliminate meat. This is a sign of penance for sin. The Church has traditionally used its authority to establish days of fast and abstinence during Lent, and Greener Lent builds upon this. Biblically, giving up meat is found in Daniel.

“In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia . . . ‘I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over’” (Dan. 10:1-3).

Giving alms to the poor. The poor have suffered the worst effects of a crisis that they did little to create. Each year, Greener Lent participants are encouraged to donate the money saved from abstaining from meat to CRS or Cross Catholic Outreach where it will be used to give the poor the ability to work and live with dignity. The annual goal is around \$4,000 to \$5,000, depending on the number of expected total participants.

² *What is Lent?* (no date) USCCB. United State Conference of Catholic Bishops. Available at: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-worship/liturgical-year/lent> (Accessed: November 9, 2022).

Further inspiration is from Father Hugh Barbour:

Again, the principle of evaluation is love. Almsgiving—the works of mercy we perform for others—bestows goodness upon others for their happiness and perfection. Prayer is for oneself or for others; when it is of intercession for others, it is a work of mercy, and an alms of love. Fasting and other bodily penances are for our own individual mortification and liberation from our unruly passions. Although we can fast for certain intentions, such as the conversion of sinners, even so the act of fasting itself is intrinsically ordered to the correction and perfection of the one who fasts. It is clear in Sacred Scripture that generosity to the poor is more pleasing to God, along with prayer and self-denial, than either of these two without almsgiving. This means even that it is more powerful than bodily penance to cancel the debt of our sins. Of course, a believer must engage in all these acts of devotion, but it is good to know that if you have relatively failed in bodily penance through weakness, performing acts of love for those in need is still the mark of a “successful” Lent³.

Easy to Understand and Use

The mechanics of Greener Lent are easy. People sign-up on the Greener Lent website before Lent or anytime during Lent using their real or fake name and a valid email address (to receive correspondence). The estimated amount of carbon equivalents saved from reducing the consumption of meat are calculated and reported by parish (if a parish is officially participating) and in total for all participants. Participants formally commit to daily prayer on the website. The number of people praying, participating, and progress towards almsgiving goals are displayed on a dashboard on the Greener Lent website.

Evangelization and Building Community

A parish joining Greener Lent promotes community by visually showing the community's penitential practice. However, many participants do not belong to a participating parish and others do not belong to any church, as some people are only interested in Greener Lent to encourage them to reduce their personal carbon footprint. These folks receive the same messages as those “in the pews”, so Greener Lent becomes an evangelization tool for communicating with a hard to reach audience.

An article for the St. Anthony Messenger emphasizes the community aspect of fasting. Fasting builds a sense of community as a church. Fasting during Lent is something we do together. Like wearing ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday, fasting is a beautiful bond we share as Catholic Christians.

³ Fr. Hugh Barbour, O.P. (2019) *The most valuable lenten observance*, *Catholic Answers*. Catholic Answers. Available at: <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/the-most-valuable-lenten-penance> (Accessed: November 9, 2022).

Just as the leaders and prophets of Israel used to “proclaim a fast” among the people to unify them in prayer (2 Chr 20:3; Joel 1:14), so we “proclaim a fast” during this season of repentance and transformation. Fasting binds us together in one spirit, one mission. It gives us an identity and a communal purpose. And it can change us not only as individuals, but also as a community⁴.

No individual participant’s data is available for faith communities or communicated to others, to keep in mind Jesus’s saying, “Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them”.

The Basics

Support is provided by Deacon Josh Klickman, Coordinator for Human Life and Dignity for the Diocese of Raleigh, NC. He may be reached at Joshua.Klickman@raldioc.org with questions. Greener Lent is provided for free to any US faith community that strives to worship God and love others. Promotional materials are available for free and may be co-branded with their logo. The Greener Lent website and weekly correspondence is in English and Spanish. Contact rosemaryherhold@greenerlent.org with questions.

⁴ Ekeh, A. (no date) *10 reasons to fast this lent, 10 Reasons to Fast This Lent* | *Franciscan Media*. Available at: <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/st-anthony-messenger/march-2019/10-reasons-to-fast-this-lent> (Accessed: November 9, 2022).