

- So what are you giving up for Lent? It's a question that we hear often this time of the year in Catholic circles.
- Perhaps you are giving up chocolate, or television, or alcohol, or desserts, or playing your favorite video game. The point is that in addition to praying more and giving alms, Catholics are called to fast from something during this holy season of Lent.
- We are called to make sacrifices in a particular way during the season of Lent as a means of growing in holiness. In fact, the word *sacrifice* is derived from two Latin words: "sacra" ("holy") and "facere" ("to make"). Thus it means "to make holy."
- Specifically, we make sacrifices in order to be more like God Himself. We make sacrifices in order to unite ourselves more closely to the One who sacrificed Himself for us.
- Moreover, as the first reading makes clear, God wants us to make sacrifices; He asks them of us. But God doesn't ask for sacrifices because He wants to see us suffer.
- God knew that Abraham held Isaac with a particular love because Isaac was the child of his old age. God knew that Isaac was the one thing Abraham held most dear! And yet God did not ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac just to make Abraham suffer.
- God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a test of Abraham's love. God wanted to know just how much Abraham loved Him. And obviously Abraham loved God a lot, because he was willing to give up that which was most dear to him for the sake of being obedient to God.
- And what God did do in return? The Lord said to Abraham: "Because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly."
- The same is true for us: if we are willing to sacrifice something we love, something of value, something that gives us comfort out of love for God, He will bless us abundantly too.
- Think about the second reading today. As St. Paul wrote, if God was willing to spare His own Son, "how will He not also give us everything else along with Him?" And in particular He will give us the blessing of holiness.
- Today we heard the Gospel account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. In seeing Jesus in all His divine glory and splendor, Peter, James and John saw Jesus as He will appear to us all in Heaven.
- Yet we must keep in mind that Christ is not the only one who will be transfigured. It's our destiny too. While none of us will ever possess the same glory as the Lord, we will share in His glory.
- We will have glorified bodies in Heaven, and all of our darkness, all of sinfulness will be washed away. We will be purified of our sinfulness such that we will shine like the stars in the heavens!
- The more that we purify ourselves of sin during our earthly life, the greater will our glory be in Heaven. And that's what Lent and our Lenten sacrifices are all about: purifying us of our sins – transfiguring us.
- Our Lenten sacrifices are meant to help us detach ourselves from the things of this world so that we can cling all the more closely to God.
- Sadly, we live in a society in which we are constantly told to consume. We are taught from a very young age the importance of having things, and lots of them. Whether it is food, money, clothes, a nice home or car, we are constantly barraged by an unending torrent of advertisements that tell us that we cannot be happy unless we have certain things.

- Despite the recent economic downturn, our society is the most affluent the world has ever known. Our buying power – our very capacity to consume – is exceedingly great even compared to Americans of just 30 years ago.
- While being comfortable is not a sin per se, selfishness and self-centeredness are sins. And that's a very sad hallmark of our society today. All too often we focus on ourselves and our own needs and wants, and not enough on the needs of others, and certainly not enough on God and His will for our lives.
- But there's more at stake with materialism than just selfishness and self-centeredness. When we become materialistic, we develop unhealthy attachments that can be very destructive to our souls – even to the point of damnation.
- This is a tragedy, because as Christians, our greatest hope is that we will eventually go Heaven. But earthly attachments act like anchors on our soul holding us down, making us desire the things of this world rather than the things of Heaven.
- Attachments become impediments to prayer and our awareness of God because our focus shifts to ourselves and away from God, thus limiting our ability to grow in holiness.
- Moreover, preferring an earthly good over God is an affront to Him because we are saying that we prefer something finite to Him who is infinite. Just as a husband who prefers golf to his wife insults his wife, we insult God whenever we prefer something finite to Him.
- Attachments also kill joy. We live in a world where many people seek to multiply experiences and accumulate possessions, thinking that doing so will increase their contentment.
- But the opposite is true. We become inured to joy with the overuse of created realities. The joys we gain from created things are only temporary, and the more we seek joy in them, the less we find true joy in God.
- Furthermore, attachments diminish our human dignity. Love places the lover on the level of the object loved. Love effects a likeness with the object loved. If we cling to material things, we are diminished. But if we cling to God, we are elevated, ennobled and beautified.
- Thus it is so important that we fight the temptation to be attached to worldly goods. And while we should do this throughout the year, Lent is a time to really focus on eliminating our attachments to material things. And this we do through fasting and sacrificing.
- Our sacrifices make us holy because they unite us to Christ who sacrificed everything for us on the cross. Our sacrifices make us holy because they help to free us from our attachments to earthly things. Our sacrifices make us holy because they increase our capacity to love God.
- Ask yourself: What am I most attached to? Am I willing to give up everything for God? Am I willing to be like Abraham and give up even that which is most dear to me? And if you haven't yet given up anything for Lent, it's not too late!
- While so many of us often try to do extra things for Lent, like going to daily Mass, praying more, or doing some type of service, let's not neglect the practice of fasting. It's not enough just to do extra things in Lent; we must fast! If we neglect to make sacrifices, we short-change ourselves.
- So let us fast well, my friends, and in giving up those things that we desire or that make life more pleasurable, let us be confident that our Father in Heaven is transfiguring us more into an image of His Son.