

Dear Saints,

Lent is upon us again. Traditionally, Christians give up something for lent. I would like you to consider incorporating this practice into your Christian piety. Piety here just means way of life. I am using way of life language because I do not want this practice to become trivial. That is what happened to me when this practice was imposed upon me when I was young. I put very little thought into what I would give up.

There is a wonderful verse in First Corinthians:

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything.” (1 Corinthians 6:12)

Paul understands the weakness of our flesh. Flesh is rightly often equated with the Old Adam. The Old Adam is composed of both body and soul. The new man is also both body and soul. Your body and soul are intertwined and impact each other. Paul rightly warns you of the danger of being enslaved by the appetites of your body. This will affect both your body and your soul. The practice of giving up something for lent is meant to show you if you are enslaved to something.

We typically are much too kind when we examine ourselves against the mirror of the law. Jesus is not using allegorical language when He says, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23) Giving up something for lent that is truly difficult to give up is one way we can deny ourselves for the sake of Christ. And the biggest lesson may be to fail and find out that we are enslaved to something. A lesser lesson may be that it might actually be good for both our body and soul to give up something we struggle with giving up.

What about Christian freedom? This is a great question. We are free in Christ, which Paul clearly confesses in 1 Corinthians 6:12. I am certainly not imposing upon you that you *must* give up something for lent. If I were to do that, I would be guilty of violating your Christian freedom. But far too often, we use “Christian freedom” as an excuse not to live a pious life. I am asking you to seriously *consider* giving something up for lent. I would also encourage you not to tell anyone. There is a temptation to pride when we broadcast what we are doing. I am giving up something for lent and I may fail, or I may not. Either way, it will be an opportunity for me to turn to God in prayer.

Prayer is an important part of the Christian life. We love to turn to God in prayer when things are going poorly. And that is not a bad thing. That is a very good thing. But God desires for us to pray to Him in all times, both good and bad. Prayer during a self-imposed “bad” time during lent is a good practice to incorporate daily prayer as a normal part of your Christian piety.

I pray that your lent will be a fruitful season of considering your life in Christ. And any meditation on your life in Christ will always bear fruit.

In Christ,  
Pastor Maggard