

LENT: FASTING

Word of the week

Luke 4: 1-13

Jesus returned from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the desert, where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days. In all that time he ate nothing, so that he was hungry when it was over.

The Devil said to him, "If you are God's son, order this stone to turn into bread." But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone.'" Then the Devil took him up and showed him in a second all the kingdoms of the world. "I will give you all this power and all this wealth," the Devil told him. "It has all been handed over to me, and I can give it to anyone I choose.

All this will be yours, then, if you worship me."

Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'" Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem and set him on the highest point of the Temple, and said to him, "If you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here. For the scripture says, 'God will order his angels to take good care of you.' It also says, 'They will hold you up with their hands so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.'"

But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the Devil finished tempting Jesus in every way, he left him for a while.



Prayer for the week

God of life, you gave your Son Jesus strength in the desert. Give us the strength to do what we know is right and to give up something so that we are able to help others. Strengthen us in our fasting and help us to see that sacrificing something small each day can help us to journey with others, understanding that not everyone has what we have. Amen.

Here are some of the spiritual benefits of fasting:

It's a form of penance. Throughout the Old Testament, people covered themselves in ashes, took off their fine clothes, and fasted in order to express their repentance from sin.

Fasting serves a similar purpose today.

It makes room for God. By emptying ourselves, even if just a little bit, we make room for God to enter our lives more fully. When fasting is hard, we are moved to turn to God in prayer for help.

It strengthens the will. Fasting is a spiritual discipline; just as physical exercise makes our body stronger, fasting strengthens our will. Practicing self-denial in small things strengthens our will to resist the wrong things in other areas of our lives.

It prepares us for mission. Fasting imitates the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert. Just as Jesus used this time to prepare for his public mission, fasting prepares us to continue his mission. It helps us in a very small way to understand the suffering Christ.

Whatever small suffering we experience when we fast brings us closer to the suffering Christ and all people who suffer on a daily basis.

If you have given something up for Lent or give up something each day why not think of the homeless in Preston who we are supporting this Lent. Our fasting and can help us to understand better, in a very small way, the suffering of those people.



Watch the squirrel scene from 2005 re-make of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. How might our determination to get whatever we want get us into trouble? How might fasting help us?



Fasting isn't always about not eating. We can fast from lots of different things. Have a few moments of silence to think about things in your life that you could fast from so that you can either help someone else, have more time for your friends or family or make more time for God.

After some time to think for yourself share with the person next to you some of the ideas you had.

Give up harsh words: use generous ones.

Give up unhappiness: take up gratitude.

Give up anger: take up gentleness and patience.

Give up pessimism: take up hope and optimism.

Give up worrying: take up trust in God.

Give up complaining: value what you have.

Give up stress: take up prayer.

Give up judging others: discover Jesus within them.

Give up sorrow and bitterness: fill your heart with joy.

Give up selfishness: take up compassion for others.

Give up being unforgiving: learn reconciliation.

Give up words: fill yourself with silence, and listen to others.

