

Protecting God's Creation • Embracing Gospel Justice • Nurturing Spiritual Fulfillment

Gratitude & Generosity

Our Lenten practice this week is almsgiving—exploring new ways of opening our hearts.

For forty days of Lent, we have been trying to embrace Christian simplicity by bringing contemporary meaning and value to the discipline of fasting. Abstaining from overconsuming or recklessly wasting God's creation is essential for anyone striving to walk in the footsteps of Jesus today. Taking up our cross means making decisions to die to our selfishness by overcoming self-centeredness and indifference to the needs of our world.

This week we recall how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, asking us to follow his example. We believe in Christ, but we also follow Christ by living and acting as Jesus did. Washing feet is a model of generosity and service for us to imitate.

We live in a nation of great wealth. Jesus had a lot to say about not being attached to our possessions and taking responsibility for the common good.

Gratitude and generosity go together like fire and heat. Gratitude is ignited when we realize how precious the fragile gift of being alive on this beautiful planet is and how blessed we are. Generosity naturally flows from a sense of being part of the web of God's creation. When it finally dawns on us that we participate in one vibrant community called life, we rediscover a responsibility to get involved and make a difference.

As Christians, we practice simplicity for the sake of generosity. Fasting and almsgiving are Lenten companions. In the end, our observance of Lent 4.2 is not only about doing less harm. It is about doing *more good* by sharing what we can. The goal is to bring forth a new springtime in our world—a human presence that is environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just.

"If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

—John 13:14-15

What the Church Is Saying

1. Justice Is Enlivened by Love

"Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society."

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

2. Generosity Is a Fundamental Christian Virtue

"Suffering today is because people are hoarding, not giving, not sharing. Jesus made it very clear. Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it to me. Give a glass of water, you give it to me. Receive a little child, you receive me. Clear."

—Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, MC (Mother Teresa)

3. Respect and Gratitude for the Gift of Creation

"Brothers and sisters: creation is not a property, which we can dispose of at will; much less so is it the property of some, of a few: creation is a gift, it is a present, a wonderful gift that God has given us to take care of and to use for the benefit of all, always with respect and gratitude."

—Pope Francis

4. Take Only Your Fair Share

"God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity."

—Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*

(Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)

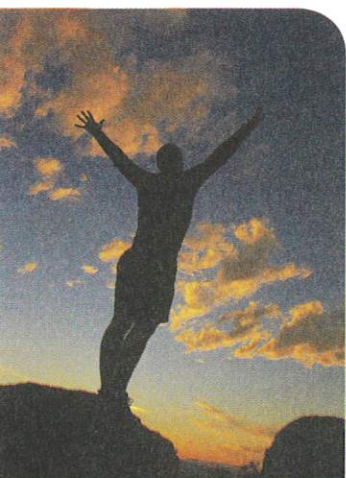
5. Concern for Our Neighbors Abroad

"The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. . . . Concern for our neighbor transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world."

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*

"True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring."

—Martin Luther King Jr



Use your voice to speak on behalf of the poor; the unborn of future generations, the immigrant, Earth, and those marginalized by our society.

Throughout Lent we have been discerning ways God might be calling us to embrace Gospel justice and protect creation by living more simply, reducing consumption, and wasting less. Now at the end of Lent, we have an opportunity to spend—and spend lavishly! Spend time getting involved in projects for the common good. Spend energy advocating for causes you believe in. Spend money to support organizations working to care for creation and promote justice. The opportunities are many. Challenge yourself to be charitable and act on behalf of the common good.

Action Steps



If There's Only One Thing You Can Do . . .

Join the microfinance movement. Fund at least a \$25 loan. Online organizations like Kiva.org, Oikocreditusa.org and Opportunity.org offer possibilities for microloans and job training for people in the developing world. You can help alleviate poverty through empowering people. Gift certificates from these organizations make great gifts for friends and family.

Connect

- ☐ Practice acts of social kindness—pick up litter, watch your neighbor's kids for free, visit a shut-in or a person in a nursing home, coordinate a meal for someone who has lost a loved one or is ill.
- ☐ Go out of your way to make contact with a person of another race, nationality, religion, or lifestyle. Consider inviting them for a meal.
- ☐ Buy fair-trade products. With each purchase you can “vote” for businesses that respect God's creation and ensure equitable pay for their laborers.
- ☐ Plant a tree. It's a personal investment in caring for future generations.
- ☐ Volunteer with an organization in your community working on behalf of social, racial, economic, or environmental justice. Or work with a group dedicated to care for Earth.

Making Choices

- \$8 buys fifteen organic apples OR twenty-five fruit trees for farmers in Honduras.
- \$30 buys a pair of jeans OR a first aid kit for a village in Haiti.
- \$73 buys a new mobile phone OR a new mobile health clinic to care for AIDS orphans in Uganda.
- \$2,400 buys a high-definition television OR schooling for an entire village in Tanzania.

Advocate

- ☐ Use your voice to speak on behalf of the poor, the unborn of future generations, the immigrant, Earth, and those marginalized by our society.
- ☐ Learn how to uproot causes of inequity and change policies to help lift people out of poverty. Look into Catholic Relief Services, Tearfund, or Micah Challenge.
- ☐ Speak to the powerful. Urge elected officials to support legislation making justice and creation-care a priority.
- ☐ Get involved by subscribing to the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, Franciscan Action Network, or Ignatian Solidarity Network.

Share

- ☐ Give to a project you care about. The Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance (www.give.org) can help you make informed decisions about giving, including an in-depth report on national charities.
- ☐ Contribute to Catholic Relief Services at www.crs.org.
- ☐ For ways to make a difference in peoples' lives year-round, join Catholics Confront Global Poverty at www.confrontglobalpoverty.org.
- ☐ Adopt a refugee family that has moved into your area. Donate furniture, household items, or clothing to help settle immigrant families.

Prayer



*Loving God,
your heart is open
to the call of your creatures and all creation.
Open our eyes to see the needs of others.
Open our ears to hear their cry.
Open our hearts that we might feel their anguish.
Open our hands that we might respond.
Give us compassion like your own.
Amen.*

Steps Continued

1. How rich are you? Input your earnings at globalrichlist.com and find out what percentile you're in.
2. Learn about Socially Responsible Investing (SRI).
3. Look into programs offered by JustFaith Ministries.
4. Explore online resources at Education for Justice.
5. Learn about the Charter for Compassion.

All this and more available online at www.Lent42.org.