

## *Lenten Ideas for Teens and Tweens by Sister Suzanne (and for me, too)*

It seems like every year Lent sneaks up on me. I know it's coming, yet I still find myself scrambling at the last minute to find something to read and to think of something meaningful to do or not do. Not this year. This year I think I've got a game plan – or at least the beginnings of one. It dawned on me then that I wasn't the only one who needed to prepare for the resurrection of our Lord. So, to get beyond just giving up sweets I've compiled a list of ideas for teens, tweens and me. Here are some things I'm going to suggest that we consider giving up and taking on for Lent.

**LEARN TO PRAY BETTER.** Prayer is the key to holiness and to growing closer to God. It should be as important to us as oxygen. And yet it's so easy to forget to pray or to get distracted at prayer. Having a prayer system can help. Here are some of my favorite ways to add prayer to my day or to make my prayers more meaningful.

Aspirations – These are short, silent prayers offered up anytime and anyplace – *Jesus, I love you. Lord, have Mercy. Jesus, I believe. Help me with my unbelief. Lord, I need you. Mother Mary, prayer for us.* Any small way that we can turn our hearts and minds to the Lord throughout the day is pleasing to Him and can help us grow in holiness.

Keeping a prayer journal – It's easy to say, "I'm going to pray for Brittany." Or "I'm going to be more thankful." But as we all know, it is easier said than prayed. I'm going to encourage you to write down your prayer intentions and blessings. As any seasoned prayer knows, writing down prayers not only helps us remember what to pray, but allows us to look back later and see how God has worked in our lives.

Participate in Mass every Sunday and when you receive Communion pray to Jesus for our brothers and sisters over the whole world. And don't forget our job it to become who we receive—the living God in us.

**BEFRIEND THE FRIENDLESS** I often remember the outcast and the bullied. I realize that our Lord suffered much more than bullying, but still for the sake of His suffering, I hope that we will make an effort to relieve the suffering of someone else being mocked, ridiculed, or forgotten. A kind word, a smile, or a "how's it going?" might mean the world to someone who feels invisible most of the time. I hope this Lenten season you might invite a loner to sit with you at lunch, compliment a kid who others barely notice, or in some way, make a special effort at kindness.

**LISTEN TO CHRISTIAN MUSIC** I'm not going to lie. I'm not a huge fan of contemporary Christian music. It's just not my thing. But it is better than most of the vile, brainless junk on pop radio. Lent is a great time for all of us to cleanse our hearts *and* minds. I might give Christian music a try this Lenten season. How about you?

**SERVE** It's tempting to see Lent an excellent time for kids to kick some bad habits or to take on a few more household chores. Make a few sacrifices. You could pledge to keep your room clean for the entire 40 days of Lent or to quit leaving your junk in the car. Why not feed two birds with one crumb and surprise your family with some surprise self-sacrifice. I encourage you to think of new and sacrificial ways to serve your family, friends, church, or community. Go to the Bloomsburg Library and

volunteer to read to somebody younger than you or an elder. Ask for Ammon Young, the director, and he will help you.

**SHOW SOME GRATITUDE** Write some hand-written, text or email thank yous. Thank you notes are a concrete way to express gratitude, often to someone who isn't expecting it – a former teacher, an aging relative, an admired adult. One thank you note a week during Lent is a modest, but meaningful goal. And it has the power to touch the lives of both the sender and the receiver.

**KEEP the COIN JAR** for collecting money that I am giving you to save money for **Catholic Relief Services**. Children in developing countries need our support. Give what you collected to me on April 13, and we will send it with our donations from the Stations of the Cross to CRS.

**PUT DOWN YOUR PHONE** This one is pretty obvious. Lots of young people probably quit or limit social media for Lent. That's great. I'm not asking you to give up all social media. And I don't want you to give it up just to be able to say you gave up something in the Lent. I want you to make better use of your time in general. By limiting social media, you will have more time for prayer, spiritual reading, or just being quiet before God. What better way to grow closer to Him? How much should you limit? I think I'll leave that up to each of you. My prayer is that you will make space for God.

**READ GOOD BOOKS** Obviously spiritual reading – the Bible, the lives of the Saints, stories from the mission field are a powerful addition to anyone's Lenten disciplines, but I'd also like to see you read some classic literature during Lent. I know! I know! Lent is not about getting you to do what I want you to do, but developing a taste for literature that draws our senses to what is true and beautiful. It is a worthwhile pursuit any time of the year. Why not make Lent a time to let God develop in us a taste for what is lovely and true in literature instead of what is ugly and common and popular. The Bloomsburg Library is a great place to find the best books! Do you have your own library card? Hint! Hint!

**IF YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING NICE, DON'T SAY ANYTHING AT ALL** Of course we should always avoid gossip and unkind talk, but sometimes we forget that this rule applies even when it's people we don't know. For some reason we feel totally free to make catty remarks about a stranger's outfit or a celebrity's weight. After all, we don't know them, and they don't know us. What can it hurt? But poison is poison. Why put it out there? I'm not sure which, if any, of these things, you will choose. The point is not to make yourself miserable or to "accomplish" some Lenten chores. But Lent is a time set apart. Our lives should be different during these days to remind us that because of Him our lives *are* different. We are different. Yes, we are called to go with Christ into the desert. But if we come out smug in our own spiritual toughness, we've missed the point. We go into the desert to be with our Lord. We do this through prayer but also by being willing to shed those things which we hold dear, but that might (or might not) keep us from loving Him fully. It is my job to guide you to choose meaningful Lenten practices. It's a big job. The opportunities of grace offered to us during this time are boundless, and I don't want you to miss out. I will be praying for you. On April 13 we will do the Stations of the Cross together for the whole parish because we are in this together. You mean the world to me and especially to God.

# Jesus, our Life and Love in Lent