**The Lenten Disciplines: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving**

When we fast, we voluntarily deny ourselves something that is good, in order to increase self-control, create space for God, and deepen our solidarity with others.

Traditionally, fasting has involved **food**. By fasting from food, we develop self-control (not simply eating every time we feel hungry), we experience the deeper spiritual hunger that we have for God, we realize our total dependence on God, we experience solidarity with the poor (who often cannot eat when they are hungry), and we also save time (buying, preparing, and eating the food) and money.

**Examples**: no fast food, give up Dunkin’ Donuts, no snacks between meals, give up a favorite food, abstain from meat on an additional day beyond just Fridays. Make a note of the money you save by your fasting.

Additionally, in our time, there are two other important areas where we can fast: **technology** and purchasing. We are so exposed to technology that often we lose the capacity to quiet ourselves and be attentive to God and the needs of others in our lives. The lack of silence has a very serious effect on us spiritually. Further, technology consumes a lot of our time, often more than we are aware of.

**Examples**: give up TV (or some amount of TV time), give up Facebook (or limit your time to 30 minutes a day), turn your phone off when you are with family and friends and give your full attention to them, only use the internet as needed for work. Reflect on the ways that the time saved in this way can give you extra opportunities for prayer or service to others.

Finally, we can benefit greatly by fasting from **buying new things** for a period of time. Our culture pushes a consumerist mentality upon us day after day. We buy and buy and buy, often without reflecting on what we really need and often without being mindful of those who go without. Furthermore, we tend not to be grateful for the things we already have; we are always on to the next thing that we need to buy.

**Examples**: choose one area (or more than one) where you will make no new purchases – electronics, clothing, shoes.

Fasting flows into our prayer and almsgiving. As we experience physical hunger, we can come to know our deeper spiritual hunger and dependence upon God, which deepens and focuses our prayer. Also, the time saved preparing and eating food or watching TV, going online, or texting, can be given to prayer. And, as we come to experience solidarity with the poor, we are drawn to pray for them and ask God to send His blessings upon them.

Regarding almsgiving, in addition to the prayers we offer for the poor and needy, we can give the money saved on food and buying new things to the poor. This helps to keep our fasting from becoming a mere personal challenge (“Look what I gave up for Lent! I bet I did more than you!”). In this way, we come to understand that it is not sacrifice *in itself* that is valuable, but the *love* with which the sacrifice is made. The Church teaches this regarding Jesus’ death on the cross: “It is love ‘to the end’ that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction” (CCC 616). Likewise, by giving what we save to those in need, our fasting is an act of love.