

## **Trascript from an interview with Joe Paprocki on [www.loyolapress.com](http://www.loyolapress.com)**

### **Why do we have a season of Lent?**

Joe Paprocki: Well the reason that we have Lent is really because we have Easter. Easter of course is the celebration of new life from death and what a perfect time to celebrate Baptism. So we have Lent because people are preparing to be baptized at the Easter vigil. And these last 40 days of their preparation before Easter are so intense that we as a community journey with them and prepare to renew our Baptism with them.

### **Why is Lent 40 days?**

Joe Paprocki: Well the reason that Lent is 40 days is because 40 is a biblically symbolic number. The Israelites wander the desert for 40 years. Jesus was tempted in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights. So 40 symbolizes a significant amount of time during which ones faith is tested and strengthened.

### **Why do we start Lent by wearing ashes?**

Joe Paprocki: Ashes remind us of our mortality. After all, that's what we turn into when we die. And when we come face to face with our mortality, we tend to become more willing to get our lives in order and focus on what's really important. It's kind of like Ebenezer Scrooge facing up to his own death and deciding to mend his ways before it's too late. Well in the same way, we wear ashes in the shape of a cross on our foreheads to symbolize our willingness to change, to die to sin, and to be born to new life in Baptism.

### **Why do we practice prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during Lent?**

Joe Paprocki: We call these three practices: prayer, fasting, and giving alms the Lenten disciplines. You'll notice that the word disciple and discipline share the same root from the Latin word "discere" which means to learn. It takes discipline to learn to be a disciple of Christ. And these three Lenten disciplines help us to learn how to follow Christ more closely. Prayer opens us up to God. Fasting purifies us. If we can control basic desires like hunger then we can learn to control stronger desires that pull us away from God. And finally, giving alms allows God's mercy to flow freely through us. We don't give alms to earn grace but in response to God's abundance and merciful grace that we ourselves have received.

### **Why do we give up things during Lent?**

Joe Paprocki: Well we give things up during Lent as another way of practicing discipline. By exercising self-control, we can free our minds from desires for material possessions and pleasures, and focus on the true happiness that can only come from faith and Jesus Christ. So we give up things that are obviously unhealthy for us such as smoking or excessive eating and drinking, or swearing, and things like that.

But we can also give up things that aren't bad in and of themselves but that clutter up our lives such as watching TV, listening to music, shopping, and so on. With less clutter, we can focus on what's really important, our relationship with Jesus.

### **Why do we give up meat on Fridays?**

Joe Paprocki: Well, meat is a symbol of luxury and wealth. When you think about it, we talk about getting a job that pays enough to put meat on the table. So to abstain from meat is a sacrifice for most people, a way of doing without and living more simply.

Now of course, if you're already a vegetarian then you should seek some other form of sacrifice, abstaining from a certain food that brings you great pleasure. And of course, giving up meat is not an excuse to pig out on lobster. The idea is to eat simply.

Finally, Jesus died on a Friday and so Fridays are seen as a day of penance and that's why we abstain from meat on Fridays.

### **I've given stuff up for Lent, but is there anything additional I can take on?**

Joe Paprocki: There's a lot of things people can do during lent as opposed to giving up things, it's nice to take on things; to fill some of that space that perhaps we have now that we've given up activities such as watching TV programs. And now we have some time in our evening to devote to some sort of service. I think it's nice to do some small things, like doing random acts of kindness for people, but I also think it's good to take on some bigger projects like going and volunteering at a soup kitchen. It doesn't have to be every night during lent or even once a week, but that you're going to make a Lenten project and do something extraordinary that you don't normally fit into your schedule.

### **Why is purple the color of Lent?**

Joe Paprocki: Purple is always been associated with sorrow and mourning. And during Lent we recall the suffering and death of Jesus. Purple is also the color of royalty and through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we come to recognize him as our King.

### **Why do we pray the Stations of the Cross during Lent?**

Joe Paprocki: Oh back in the early Church, Christians would make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to retrace the steps of Jesus on His way to the cross. And of course as the Church grew and such a pilgrimage became unrealistic for many people, they began to retrace the steps of Jesus on His way to the cross by reflecting on pictures that depicted those scenes. Well during Lent, especially on Fridays when we reflect on the crucifixion of Jesus, praying on the stations of the cross has become a time-honored devotion.

### **Is Lent a sad or somber time?**

Joe Paprocki: Well interestingly enough, the liturgies of Lent continually refer to this as a

joyful season so Lent is not a sad or somber time but it is however a sober time. The joy we experienced during Lent is an eyes-wide-open joy. A joy that recognizes and embraces the suffering of the cross that leads to the joy of the resurrection.