



Giving things up for Lent

BY FR. LARRY RICE

Ask nearly anyone who grew up Catholic what they're doing for Lent, and they'll probably tell you what they're "giving up" for Lent. The notion of giving up some pleasure for the 40 days of Lent is very much in keeping with the penitential character of the season. Of course, the primary pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. All of these are intended to turn our hearts back to God, to purify us, and prepare us for the celebration of Christ's resurrection at Easter. One of the things that the whole Church gives up for Lent is the acclamation "Alleluia", before the proclamation of the Gospel.

Of course, when it comes to giving things up for Lent, people often get into trouble by taking on too much, or by working from the wrong motivation. To take on too much is to set oneself up for failure. Several years ago, I decided to give up both meat and chocolate for Lent. Instead of turning my heart back to God, this only served to make

me irritable, as every bacon cheeseburger or peanut butter cup I encountered began to take on demonic proportions. The following year, I decided that perhaps the spiritual discipline of Lent was what I needed to help me lose 10 pounds by Easter. This was obviously the wrong motivation, because it made my Lenten practice all about me. This discipline is supposed to get us out of ourselves, and back to God. Needless to say, by Easter I still had those 10 pounds, and felt like a failure besides. The gift of humility comes from all sorts of interesting places.

So this year, I'm trying a different tack. For Lent, I'm giving up.... complaining. I'm also trying to give up a grudge that I've been quietly carrying around since Christmas. I've also given up elevators, as an occasional reminder of my tendency to take the easy path. Time will tell, but I think I might make it all the way to Easter this year.

