What to do before Lent begins.

Anything worth doing is worth preparing for.

Just imagine that this Lent is going to be different from every other Lent we've experienced. Imagine that there will be many graces offered me this year. Let's even imagine that God is going to help transform our lives, with greater freedom, greater joy, deeper desires for love and service.

If we want it, we will choose it.

Lent will be this wonderful season of grace for us if we give ourselves to it. And, we will give ourselves to it to the degree we really want it badly. So, in these days before Lent, we need to prepare our hearts. We need to prepare by realizing how much we want to grow in freedom, how much we need to lighten our spirits and experience some real joy, and how much some parts of our lives really need changing.

So, preparing our hearts is a process of preparing our desires. This means practicing our sense of anticipation. If I imagine Lent as an "ordeal" or a time I dread in some way, then I've already predisposed myself to not get very much out of it. These days before Lent are a time to start anticipating something wonderful that is about to happen.

Our Focus: On what God wants to give us.

Our sense of excitement and anticipation will grow more easily if we begin to imagine what God wants to give us. There is really something coming that we can truly look forward to. If we get too focused on ourselves, and what we are going to do or not do, we could risk missing the gift God wants to give us. We have to keep aware of the fact that grace comes from God. This is about God's great desire to bless us. Then, it is easier for us to imagine that we really want to do is place ourselves in a space to receive what God wants to give us.

Not starting from a dead stop.

Taking some time to get ready for Lent will ensure that we aren't going to miss the first week or two of Lent, because we are just getting started. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, but we want to be ready to really take off on that day, rather than just beginning to think about Lent on that day. Part of what makes a vacation or a special anniversary so special is the build-up to it.

Before we get to Ash Wednesday, we should start asking ourselves some questions and we should start

Visit the Online Ministries site: Praying Lent.
In addition to this resource for Lent, there are many others to support our journey through Lent. And, there is a Lenten Daily Prayer for each day of Lent.

www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html
with some preparations. "What does God want to
give me this year?" This question may require that I
slow down a bit and listen to my inner spirit. For
example, even if I'm very busy, I realize I'm hungry
when I hear my stomach start "growling." "What am
I going to be doing on Ash Wednesday?" Too often,
Ash Wednesday is like every other day, except that I
manage to get to church and get ashes on my
forehead. Is there anything else I can do on Ash
Wednesday? How will fasting and abstaining
happen for me, for my family on that special day?

**Lent is not something I need to do alone.**

If I have a spouse, or children, or some close friends,
or distant e-mail companions, I can begin now to
talk about how we will support each other in this
Lenten journey. The anticipation and the
preparation is transformed with the companionship
of family and close friends. We shouldn't be
deterred by the fear that our spouse or children or
friends "won't be into it." Jesus said, "Fear is
useless; what's needed is trust." Let's begin now to
tell others about our desires. Let's help support
others' expectations. Let's help others see that Lent
doesn't have to be something I avoid, and certainly
can't be reduced to "giving up candy." We can help
our loved ones to begin to imagine what they could
receive from God in these days.

Ash Wednesday is great place to start with our
planning. "What are we going to eat?" We
shouldn't be embarrassed if we really haven't fasted
in a long time, or perhaps ever before. We can plan
to intentionally have only one full meal on Ash
Wednesday. We can make that meal very
meaningful and symbolic.

**Getting ready, means getting my house ready,
too. And, it can means lots of choices.**

In the days before Lent, we can read some of the
resources here that give concrete ideas of ways to
get ready to begin. Choosing Lent, Acting Lent gives
a number of ways we can enter Lent with our whole
selves, - as body-persons, who use our senses to help
us experience things deeply. The symbols in our
home, and the concrete choices we make can shape
the way we will begin Lent, as individuals and as a
family.

**And, it doesn't take much time.**

It doesn't a lot of time to prepare for the beginning of
Lent. It just takes desire and focus. God can do so
much with that. We can give God more of a space to
touch our hearts if we begin to establish some simple
patterns. We could wake up each morning, and for
something like a half a minute to a minute, stand by
the edge of our beds, and just ask the Lord for the
grace to let this day be one in which I long for the
beginning of Lent. Perhaps we need to ask for
specific helps or graces to get ready to begin
Lent. Whatever we try to say, our Lord can
understand the Spirit trying to speak through our
simple words. And all it takes is the time to find and
put on our slippers. And each night, in the days
ahead, we can practice giving thanks to God before I
go to bed. This simple pattern, in the morning and
evening can stir our spirits to look forward to and
prepare for Lent, as a season of grace.

May our Lord bless us all on this journey ahead.

www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent