

PRAYING LENT

From the *Online Ministries*, CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY



COOKING LENT

For those of us who are able to prepare our own meals, Lent can be a wonderful time to bring together our meal preparation and our spirituality. Food is so rich in symbolism. Because it involves preparation, each step of doing it can be open to meaning. And if we are cooking for our family, sharing the meal can become part of our Lenten prayer and ritual.

The Fridays of Lent

Each of the Fridays of Lent are days we abstain from meat together. This is intended to be a religious experience and so we need to explore it and prepare for it. Of course, many of us can't afford to eat meat every day, so avoiding meat is itself not a sacrifice. We may live in a region where livestock disease has caused a severe shortage or absence of meat. Some of us are vegetarians, and don't have meat in our diet at all. Others of us might really enjoy seafood or a fish fry on Fridays. For all of us, not eating meat on Friday, for whatever reason, allows us to have some taste of a religious experience, that places us together with our sisters and brothers around the world. How meaningful and powerful the experience is, depends upon how reflective we are about it, and the kind of choices we make, to ensure that there is some sacrifice and some experience of solidarity in our Lenten Fridays.

Meat-less in Penance and Solidarity

Our desire is that Friday be a day of Penance and that we have in it some experience of solidarity with the truly hungry of the earth.

First of all, we want to remember that we are keeping these Fridays special because this is that day our Lord gave himself for us - selflessly and completely. This is the day that commemorates the Friday that approaches, which we call

"Good." This commemoration is not intended to be sad or artificially gloomy. These Fridays are to be days that touch us deeply, because we remember that we are incredibly loved and we have been redeemed from the victory sin and death might have had over our lives. These are days to look upon a crucifix and feel the gratitude in our hearts, but also to feel the freedom - freedom from our sin and death, and freed to love and give of ourselves more generously. All of our experience tells us that we can't or won't be self-sacrificing without this experience of gratitude and without spiritual freedom. The Fridays of Lent are a spiritual exercise to offer us both of these graces.

Secondly, we desire to make our Lenten journey one that places us not only with Jesus, but with the poor of the world. What does gratitude do, if not help us to be mindful of and assist us in having affection for our sisters and brothers who have so much less than we do? One way we can intentionally place ourselves with the poor of the earth is to prepare our meals on these Fridays in ways that lets us share a communion with them. Then, our penance and solidarity come together - and that can be a very wonderful religious experience.

Cooking as Prayer

If prayer is "raising our minds and hearts to God," and being in a relationship with God, then anything can be prayer. And preparing a meal can certainly be a wonderful prayer. And, if our cooking is for our family or others with whom we live, then it can be a great act of love.

It starts, as always, with desire. While I'm putting on my apron, or getting out my equipment, I can begin by

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.

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naming my desire for this time.

"Dear Lord, as you nourish us with your love, let me prepare this nourishment with you at my side. Give me the joy of being creative and loving, self-sacrificing and generous. As part of my baptism and my priesthood, let me offer this meal as a religious experience for me and for my family. As I prepare, help me to contemplate the women of the *campos* and *barrios* and villages around the world who are preparing meals today for their families - with great love, and with what they have. Thank you for your love. I now prepare to share it. Amen."

Of course, we could add many words that are special to our circumstances.

"Let this meal nourish Pedro with your love. He so full of tension and worry. I love him and deeply desire to offer him this meal as something different, and a sign of my care and our faith." "Oh, Lord, Meg needs you so much these days. She seems so distracted and not herself. Through our prayer and the sharing of this meal, give her the security of your love. And through our faith in your dying and rising for us, help her place the difficulties she is experiencing at school into her relationship with you."

Just imagine how different our "getting dinner together" can be, if we fill those early busy moments of preparation with prayer, naming our desires so explicitly.

What shall we eat?

One of the easiest and simplest meals that can place us in solidarity, in even a symbolic way, with much of the poor of the world is Rice and Beans. This meal is healthy, nourishing and filling. Praying with its preparation and eating it - feeling humble and honored to share it with our sisters and brothers in so many countries - can be a great source of devotion for us and our families. But, there are many other meatless and simple meals that can offer us similar graces. We will share them in the weeks ahead.

**Blessed are you,
Lord God of all creation,
for it is from your goodness,
that we have this food,
and the graces you give us
in preparing and sharing it.**

**Bless us O Lord, and these your gifts,
which we are about to receive,
from your bounty,
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Rice and Beans

Preparing rice and beans is very simple. In its most basic form, a variety of dry beans can be soaked overnight (itself a reflection on our "dryness" and our need for "living water" to be restored).

A variety of ingredients are optional, but not necessary, to add different flavorings and cultural leanings to the beans.

It is common to sauté onions and garlic in a pot, and simply to add the beans along with enough water to cover them. This is brought to a boil and then let simmer for an hour.

This is served over a generous bed of rice. The rice is easily prepared by putting a cup or two of rice in a pot, with twice as many cups of water, and a touch of salt. This is brought to a boil and then reduced to a simmer for 20-40 minutes, depending upon the type of rice used.

Other ingredients:

Along with the onions, any of the following can be sautéed and added in a variety of combinations.

Sliced peppers - sweet or hot
whole or crushed olives
chopped cilantro
diced tomatoes
a variety of uncooked pastas
barley