

Finally, Lent is over. Let's celebrate Easter. For some people, that means doing everything they did before Lent, only more vigorously. Each Lent the church invites us to perform disciplines of penance and charity. Some of us have eaten less, drunk less, watched television less, gambled less. Others have devoted more time to family, prayed more, or finally joined a 12-step program. Lent invited us to renewal. Now it's Easter. Now what?

A good Lent should make us better people, more aware of our failures, more aware of God's love, more disciplined as human beings. A good Lent makes us healthier. It makes us more conscious of the world around us, more ready to give to those in need. Lent should have changed us in some ways we don't want to change back.

But there are some habits we will go back to. If you gave up chocolate all during Lent, for example, it will be hard not to bite the head off the nearest chocolate bunny today. But maybe your craving has lessened, maybe you'll have more control over what you eat and take better care of your body because this year you've kept a good Lent. Easter does not oblige us to return to doing everything we did before Lent got here. It invites us into a new way of life, a way that is more charitable and more disciplined, a way that brings an inner peace and happiness.

St. Paul tells the Corinthians to celebrate passover in a new way. One Jewish passover custom was to throw out old yeast and make unleavened bread, a sign of leaving behind the former life of slavery and entering into a new life of freedom. Paul tells Christians to "celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

We could make some Easter resolutions too. What yeast do you throw out? What bread do you bake? What will you do to make this season a sign of your new self? Did you form some new habits this Lent that you really want to keep?

This is the Easter of the jubilee year 2000, the Easter of our reconciliation, the Easter of our peace. During this season let us pursue happiness in ways that will truly bring us contentment. Let us not live with malice and wickedness, but with sincerity and truth. When we share the joy of the risen Christ, all the world will know that at the center of Christianity lies the happiness of life in Christ.