

People give up on lenten resolutions for different reasons. Many start the season with high ideals. "I'm going to pray more. I'm going to quit eating desserts. I'll finally visit my grandmother." Or even the basics: "I'll not eat meat on Fridays. I'll fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday." Then, mid-season, we can take stock of where we are and rate ourselves. People give up on resolutions for different reasons. We stay up so late we can't wake up early to pray. We pass by a cookie tray and can't resist. We're too tired to visit grandma. Sometimes our reasons are noble; other times they are not.

Some people keep resolutions very well during Lent. They attend daily mass. They exercise. They recycle. Throughout the season they develop a few habits that will stick and make them better persons when Easter arrives.

Lent is a discipline like spring training or studying for an exam. We deprive ourselves of some pleasures to focus our attention more firmly on the supreme pleasure of life in Christ.

St. Paul tells the Philippians the supreme good is knowing Christ Jesus the Lord. Paul has lost everything -- probably his family, homeland, and possessions -- but he considers all possessions as rubbish when compared to the overwhelming good of knowing Christ Jesus.

We've all known what it's like to sacrifice. Parents sacrifice their resources to provide for their children. Lovers sacrifice their time to be with the beloved. Firefighters and police officers sacrifice their lives for the safety of the public good. Once you have identified what means the most to you, you will sacrifice everything for it.

Lent gives us a six-week trial run, to sacrifice some earthly comforts to find the supreme good of Christ. Fasting weakens an excessive reliance on foods that feed our obsession with ourselves. Charity corrects our behaviors to make us think more of others. Prayer turns our hearts and minds to God. Giving up distractions during this season creates a vacuum in which we find our supreme good, knowing Christ Jesus the Lord.

Lent is a trial run for life. In six weeks it tests our ability to make Christ the supreme good around bigger questions in our lives. For example, when we consider the time we give to our families and closest friends, does it reflect the gospel's call to love? When we consider the type of job we hold, does it help build the reign of God? When we consider how we distribute our monthly income, does it reflect selfless care for the needy? When we consider our primary forms of private entertainment, are they sources of pride or embarrassment? In short, how close are we to saying with St. Paul, "I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him"?