

I want to read you a quote from our diocesan newspaper.

"I sometimes wonder if so much leniency is good for the Christian soul. Human nature rebels at sacrifice, but when the law of the Church is firm and explicit, we generally obey, at least we did obey the rules without question half a century ago. Since then obedience has disappeared and laws of all kinds are ignored and our people are none the better for it. Forty years ago in this city of whose material growth we are so proud, Lent was truly a time of penance and genuine self-sacrifice."

If you remember reading this in our diocesan paper, you have an awfully good memory. Those words were written by Mrs. Blake L. Woodson for the Catholic Register in 1916. She complains that the laws of fast and abstinence had been changed. She used to eat meat only once a day on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, and no meat at all from Tuesday of Holy Week till Easter Sunday.

Mrs. Woodson continues, "We have grown in the last forty years beyond our greatest expectations, but we have lost the contentment, peace and love of order which we knew as a smaller town. I do not believe we are any happier because things have been made so easy for us. We are forgetting the great significance of Lent."

Now, I'm sure very few of us would want a return to the old days, but it's good to remember that the purpose of keeping a strict Lent was to fight temptation. The theory was that if you could master the appetites of your body through a fast, you would be stronger to resist other temptations in life. Personally, I think it's a good theory, and I still encourage people to make some kind of fasting a part of Lent for the same reason. Lent is like a training season for the spiritual combat we find ourselves in all year round.

Certainly, Jesus knew the value of fasting to resist temptation. Before his public life, he spent forty days in the desert without food. There, the devil tempted him three ways: to eat, giving in to the desires of his flesh; to selfishness, having angels support him; to power, controlling all the kingdoms of the world.

The devil tempts us, too, in three ways: to buy and consume what we do not need, to think only of ourselves, to have power over others. Now, I know some people think the best way to avoid temptation is to give in to it, but there is another way.

Your lenten resolutions can help you fight your temptations. Pray for those with whom you struggle for power, fast from things you do not need, do charity instead of focusing on yourself. Prayer, fasting, and charity are three traditional antidotes to the temptations of the devil.

Mrs. Woodson writes, "It was well for us to subdue the flesh, and though sometimes we felt weak, still there was a delightful peace, flooding soul and body, as we knelt at the Altar, great crowds of us on Easter Sunday morning. There was a feeling of joy, as if we were clean and pure in soul and body, and our Lenten sacrifices seemed as nothing when encompassed by the light of the Resurrection. May we all forget for a while the bustle and activity of this great metropolis, forget its allurements and pleasures for a few weeks to follow Him who suffered and gave His life that we might enjoy the delights of Heaven whose doors he opened for us."