

The Heart of Lent

Today, as in the past, the heart of Lent is inner penitence and reconciliation with God. If you want Lent to be special this year, begin with self-examination and inner healing:

- Set aside this period to examine and evaluate your life as a Christian.
- Spiritual renewal is possible only if you're willing to repent for your sins and change your life for God.

The apostle Paul wrote that achieving inner change was the responsibility of each Christian and the Church as a whole: *"So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."* 2 Corinthians 5:20

Reconciliation with God involves:

Sorrow for Sins: Changing your life begins when you admit that Christ suffered and died for your sins.



Spiritual Growth: Christian maturity begins when you acknowledge dependence on God. Resolve to accept and carry out his will.

Commitment: Realize that commitment to God is more than just going to church—it involves carrying out God's will daily, whatever the circumstances.

Perseverance: Keep your hope and faith in Easter's promises alive all year long, every year. Realize that Christians of every age have experienced times of testing and overcome temptation and despair.

Penitential practices encourage inner change. Traditional lenten practices include: fasting, special commitments, good works and almsgiving, prayer and reflection, studying Scripture, and participation in church worship services.

Some hints for observing Lent:

Observe Lent with Others: Lent is a time for strengthening family ties. Everyone, including children, should pray, read Scripture aloud, and attend church services together. Help children draw pictures or write

stories/poems about Christ's Passion and Resurrection. Start or revive family Lenten traditions.

Plan Your Lenten Program: Be realistic. Begin only what you can accomplish. For example, give up between-meal snacks rather than pledge a strict fast that you can't carry out or fast only on Wednesdays and Fridays. Be honest. Choose penitential practices that require genuine effort and self-control.

Be Fair: Try to incorporate penitential practices into your daily life without making others feel uncomfortable or guilty.

Develop Helpful Attitudes: Approach Lent joyfully. Think of it as a time of opportunity rather than sacrifice. Be loving toward others and open to God's will. Choose Lenten practices that will help you become a stronger and better Christian. And remember that it's important to practice good works and penance year round!

CHALLENGING QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION: *Why did God ask Abraham to kill his son Isaac? Wasn't this a cruel thing for God to ask of a father? And why did Abraham agree to kill his son? How could Isaac have ever loved his father again? (See Genesis 22)*



Lower elementary: This rarely evokes questions from small children. If it does, explain that the story begins with a very important line: "God tested Abraham." God wanted to know how deep and how real Abraham's faith was. So he asked him to do the hardest thing in the world a father could do. Because Abraham knew that God loved him he believed that whatever God asked of him would turn out for the best. And he was right!

Upper elementary-high school (this information would be applicable to this entire age range). Children and young people always need to be reminded about how the Bible came to be and how the Armenian Church understands Scripture. The **Truth** of Scripture does not lie only in individual events, dates, and episodes, but in their context and meaning as understood by the Church. That's why it's so important to read the Bible daily *and* read it together as a community.

