



By Pat Haggerty

The other day I was driving in my car listening to the Catholic Channel on Sirius Radio. A Catholic sister was on talking about Lent. She said that we shouldn't view Lent as the Catholic Church's "weight loss plan." I actually chuckled out loud! That really struck me.

There is certainly nothing wrong with giving up things---food in particular---during Lent. What we must remember is why we are giving it up. Is it to bring us closer to God? Is it to offer up something we love in a spirit of restraint? Is it to call to mind Jesus' own fasting in the desert?

My "plan" this Lent is to give of my time. I am reminded of the importance of time constantly in my daily life. There never seems to be enough of it! In a spirit of Lenten sacrifice, I want to focus on how much time I am giving the Lord and how much time I am offering others.

In the front of our church is a Lenten quote for us to ponder: "Watch and pray with me." We hear these words in Matthew's gospel when he is recounting Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus said to Peter and the two sons of Zebedee: "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." A little later, when he found them sleeping, he tells them, "watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

We should certainly heed this admonition. If we watch and pray, maybe we can avoid some of the temptations surrounding us---the lure of too much television, the lure of excessive use of technology, the lure of going out to eat instead of eating simply at home. Instead, we can focus on spending more time in the presence of the Lord. It can be whatever you decide. How much time is the right time for you?

One might also decide to do more spiritual reading. I have certain spiritual sights I follow on-line. I am concentrating on those, and I've selected one new book to read. In addition, we could think of how we can bring social justice into the spirit of our Lenten practice. What can we do to help those around us? Are we filling our canisters for the poor? Are we helping our elderly neighbors? Are we giving of our time at the local food pantry?

Lent is a time for us to get closer to God. What makes the most sense for each of us? No matter what it is, it should involve *watching* and *praying*.