

“Hence the three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving.”

Lent, the period of 40 days that precedes the celebration of Easter, has its origin in the early days of the Church. Converts seeking to become Christian, who at that time were mostly adults, spent several years in study and preparation. Under the threat of Roman persecution, becoming a Christian was serious business, so their process of preparation was intensive! Then they went through a final period of “purification and enlightenment” for the 40 days before their baptism at Easter. The rest of the Church began to observe the season of Lent in solidarity with these newest Christians. It became an opportunity for all Christians to recall and renew the commitment of their baptism.

Today we know Lent as a season of conversion: we acknowledge the ways we have turned away from God in our lives and we focus on turning our hearts and minds back toward God. Hence the three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These observances help us turn away from whatever has distracted or derailed us and to turn back to God.

PRAYER- Is essential before any action we take as Christians. Pray in thanksgiving to God for all He has given you and your family. Pray to ask God for guidance on how you may draw closer to Him. Pray for others that you know may be struggling. Pray for those around the world who have less than you do. Make time to pray daily.

FASTING & ABSTINENCE- Giving something up for Lent is ultimately a form of fasting. Depriving yourself of something you enjoy and “offering it up” as penance is pleasing to God for atonement of sins. Christ suffered and died on the cross our sins. Our suffering joins us with Christ and will draw us closer to Him. The minimum requirement is to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays during Lent, but giving up more for the purpose of refining oneself is more meaningful. Together with prayer, fasting helps us develop our goal – a deeper conversion.

ALMSGIVING- Is our response to God. It’s an expression of gratitude for all God has given us and a realization that the Body of Christ is never just “me and God”. Through prayer and fasting we come to a deeper understanding that the needs of all are the responsibility of all the Body of Christ.

Lenten Charity:

- **RICE BOWL** : Catholic Relief Services helps children and families around the world who live in poverty. Teach your children more about the world’s needy. Visit www.crsricebowl.org for stories of hope and to find out how you can donate.

Do pretzels really have anything to do with Lent?

The pretzel indeed has its origins as an official food of Lent. However, much of the information available is based on tradition that has been handed down through the ages.



In the early Church, the Lenten abstinence and fasting laws were more strict than what the faithful practice today. Many areas of the Church abstained from all forms of meat and animal products, while others made exceptions for food like fish. For example, Pope St. Gregory (d. 604), writing to St. Augustine of Canterbury, issued the following rule: "We abstain from flesh, meat, and from all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese and eggs." Second, the general rule was for a person to have one meal a day, in the evening or at three o'clock in the afternoon, and smaller snacks to maintain strength. So a need arose for a very simple food which would fulfil the abstinence and fasting laws.

According to pretzel maker Snyders of Hanover, a young monk in the early 600s in Italy was preparing a special Lenten bread of water, flour and salt. To remind his brother monks that Lent was a time of prayer, he rolled the bread dough in strips and then shaped each strip in the form of crossed arms, mimicking the then popular prayer position of folding ones arms over each other on the chest. The bread was then baked as a soft bread, just like the big soft pretzels one can find today.

Because these breads were shaped into the form of crossed arms, they were called *bracellae*, the Latin word for "little arms." From this word, the Germans derived the word *bretzel* which has since mutated to the familiar word *pretzel*.

Apparently, this simple Lenten food became very popular. Pretzels were enjoyed by all people. They became a symbol of good luck, long life and prosperity. Interestingly, they were also a common food given to the poor and hungry. Not only were pretzels easy to give to someone in need, but also they were both a substantial food to satisfy the hunger and a spiritual reminder of God knowing a persons needs and answering our prayers.

By FR. WILLIAM SAUNDERS

Rev. William Saunders. "Lenten Pretzels." *Arlington Catholic Herald*.