

REFLECT. We started Lent on Wednesday, **Fr Paulino Mondo** of Mbuya Parish gives us tips on what we should focus on beyond sacrificing the things we like.

From childhood, our first question for Lent was often, "What are you giving up for Lent?" Giving something up for these 40 days is a custom that, when we were younger, helped us enter the season with purpose and greater awareness of self.

As adults, we might want to look at Lent in a deeper way. We are probably more settled into our behaviours and patterns of life and sometimes giving up something is where we begin -- and end -- our reflections on Lent. It can be tempting to say, "I am giving up meat, alcohol, movie watching or even all sweets and mobile phone attachments. But without more reflection, it can be more about me than any conversation with God.

Lent isn't simply about us "giving up" something. The real grace is when we recognise that it is a season in which God wants to give us something. God wants to help us transform the way we live and love our families.

It is easier for us to simply choose something to give up -- then we can dismiss Lent! "I am giving up TV for Lent." "I am giving up movies... Snacks... Soda pop." We give it up and exercise our willpower for 40 days to prove to ourselves and to God that we can do it. And at the end of Lent, we can return to what we gave up.

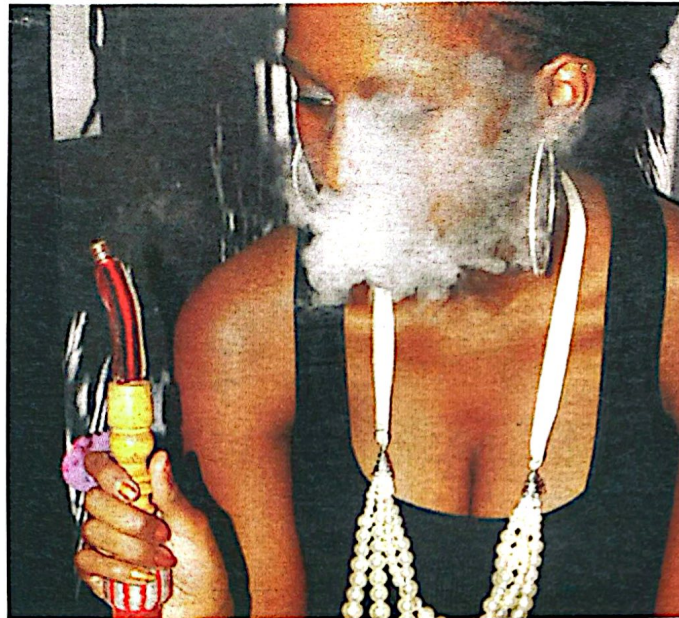
Ask yourself

But this year, we can reflect and ask the deeper question: What is God inviting me to change this Lent? How do I know what God might be stirring in me? I begin by listening to the movements in my heart. Where am I feeling uncomfortable with the choices I am making? With the things I have done? With the habitual ways I respond? The Lord will be speaking to me in those small nagging moments of discomfort in my heart.

It might be that we know deep down that we drink too much and that giving up alcohol would make us less irritable each night. Then, giving up alcohol would be the right thing. Asking what we would like to change about ourselves this Lent requires reflection. What pattern of behaviour in my life needs changing? What do I need more of in my life? Patience? Unselfishness? More loving behaviour toward my spouse or children?

But each of us can think of something that gets in the way of our being loving and self-

Lent is more than giving up what we take pleasure in



This Lent we should give up habits that affect our health. FILE PHOTO

REFLECT

Where do we need a breakthrough? What is the barrier that keeps us from asking for healing? In our own lives, we need to break through our denials, defensiveness and our unwillingness to look at ourselves. Discovering what the barrier is in my life is critical. If we don't know what the barrier is, these weeks of Lent are a great time to reflect upon it. When we identify the barrier, we have made the breakthrough. That's when Jesus can heal us of it.

sacrificing. Often, the ordinary conflicts, divisions and difficulties in our family life result from selfishness on my part. I choose to fight. I choose to defend my opinion. I choose to use things I know about my partner, my children, my parents against them. I choose to hurt them.

The results of that behaviour are never good and always divisive. Imagine a Lenten practice in which each of us would tell members of our family -- those whom we have

most offended in these ways -- that we are sorry and ask them to help us to work with us to bring more unity and peace to our family life.

We can ask: What would it cost me to change this behaviour? What would it mean if I didn't walk around my family acting crabby all the time? What if I decided to be more loving and patient with my spouse this Lent? What if I did decide to "give up" something really destructive in my life such as alcohol, pornography or online friendships? As I reflect, I might realise that changing a particular way I live is coming to me as a call from God and I don't have to do it alone. God is moving my heart to reflect on these changes and God will remain faithful and help me to stay open to the grace being offered to me for change.

I need help. It may be something that I don't want to change or acknowledge. I don't think I can change it. But that's where talking to God can make the difference. I am not doing this alone; I am doing it with God.

Challenges and solutions

When I look at challenges with my spouse, I might discover that one of the barriers to communication in my marriage is that I interrupt and disagree. In some place in my head I know that is an annoying habit, but I am not free enough to simply listen without objecting. Maybe I am unable to receive what my spouse says without coming to the conclusion that my spouse is wrong. What if sharing a different point of view was not about winning an argument but to advancing communication between us?

In asking God for help, we might ponder one of the many healing gospels, like Mark 2: 1-12. In this story, a group of friends carried a mat with a paralysed man to Jesus, who was teaching inside a house. So many people crowded around the house that the friends were unable to get the mat inside. So they went up to the roof and moved aside the tiles and lowered their friend on the mat to Jesus below. The words to this gospel say that the friends on the roof had "broken through" the tiles to lower their friend into the house for healing. Their breakthrough led directly to the healing.

Why is this a good Lenten penance? Because it gets my attention where I live every day. It allows God's grace into my soul and into the place where my real life exists. That's where Jesus stands with me every day, waiting for me to be lowered from the roof so he can touch me and heal me.