



CRS' Operation Rice Bowl invites Catholics in the United States to foster solidarity with the poor through the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. In turn, participants will learn about the stories of people throughout the world who are rising from poverty with the help of these relationships of solidarity.

Each week in Lent you will receive a reflection that focuses on the traditional practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. You will encounter the stories of people rising from poverty in Madagascar, Vietnam, El Salvador, Zambia, India, and the United States. And you'll reflect on how you can help to address the root causes of poverty with the help of Catholic social teaching.



Before you pray, fast, learn and give...

Today's Gospel reading from the sixth chapter of Matthew (Mt 6:1-6, 16-18) suggests that, when it comes to the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we have to get our priorities in order. It is not enough simply to do these actions. The Ash Wednesday readings challenge us to *look beyond* the mere practices and *towards* the greater task of living out our faith and drawing closer to God through these practices. The goal is not a new one, but is repeated over and over throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, including in today's reading from Joel. We are called to

return to God. And if we have strayed far from the Reign of God, it is our return to Him that merits the ashes of mourning and repentance that we receive today.

Lent gives us six weeks to enter deeply into the work of returning and rebuilding a loving relationship with God and with other people; however, the season can still get away from us. We have a few days between Ash Wednesday and the First Sunday of Lent to prepare ourselves to enter into this holy season. And that's good, because we have a little groundwork to do before we can begin our Lenten practices in earnest.

First we need to make some time.

In the remaining days before the first Sunday of Lent, take out your calendar and carve out the time you will set aside to be truly present for your prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Commit to a regular time of reflection each day. Set aside a journal for writing your prayers and insights. Find a prominent place for your Rice Bowl to remind you of the pressing global needs that call for your generosity. Read through CRS' Operation Rice Bowl Lenten Calendar so you can anticipate ways that you and your household can observe Lent together. And finally, be aware of the stories of Easter hope that lie among the Lenten ashes.