

Catholic Courier

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 115 NO. 21 ■ THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2004 ■ www.CatholicCourier.com ■ 75¢ ■ 16 PAGES

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Getting the most from Lent

Lent is a time to pray and grow closer to God, observed Kathleen Chesto, who admitted thinking, as a child, that the nature of Lent was "intrinsically tied to candy."

"You gave it up for Lent and then you got so much on Easter morning that you got sick," she recalled with a chuckle.

As she grew up, however, Chesto realized that there was much more to the liturgical season than simply abstaining from a certain type of food or a bad habit.

"We have kind of fallen into giving up things for the sake of giving them up, almost to prove that we can. There isn't much point in doing that if it doesn't remind us of something we do have or to pray," said Chesto, leader for the annual Winton Culver Parishes' Lenten Retreat March 1-3. In her visits to Rochester's St. Ambrose, St. John the Evangelist and St. James churches, she suggested looking at Lent as an opportunity to "fast" from the rushed pace of everyday life and spend more time in prayer and meditation.

"I think it should be a time of renewal and rebirth, and that's what it was in the early church," she said.

Chesto, who is from Southbury, Conn., and holds a doctorate in ministry, said she's not advising people to stop making personal sacrifices during Lent. Rather, she suggested, use such sacrifices to make a difference in someone else's life. If you give up smoking for Lent, try donating to charity the money you would have spent on cigarettes, she explained.

If you can't think of something you want to give up, you can try doing something extra, she added. One year, she wrote a note each Lenten day to someone in her life who had been Christ to her in some small way. She got the idea from a homily in which the priest talked about people being "God's love letters" to each other, and said writing the notes helped her to focus on her blessings.

Sister Chris Treichel, OSF, pastoral administrator at Sacred Heart Parish in Auburn and St. Anne's Parish in Owasco, shares similar sentiments. For her, Lent is not only about giving something up, but also about doing something for others, she said. Last year during Lent, she and the rest of the parishes' staff put their names

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Crosiers/CNS

An archaeological replica of the cross of Jesus stands in the Scripture garden of Biblical Resources in Tantur, Israel. The penitential season of Lent began Feb. 25.

Story by Jennifer Burke

