

- This coming week we will pass the halfway point of Lent, and thus it is a good time for us to evaluate how well we are doing with our Lenten resolutions.
- But as we evaluate our Lenten efforts, it's not enough simply to fulfill our resolutions. The real question is whether or not our Lenten resolutions are helping us to grow in holiness.
- Are we making true spiritual progress? Are we becoming holier people?
- Keep in mind that our Lenten prayers, fastings, and penances are not things to be checked off a spiritual "to-do" list. They are a means to making reparation for sin, for growing in holiness, and they are a means for growing closer to God.
- We pray more, we fast more, we do more penances, and we give more alms during Lent so that we can become spotless brides for Christ, by whose Paschal Mystery we are freed from our sins and made ready for Heaven.
- As we begin our spiritual lives, growth in holiness comes about largely through our own efforts. If we wish to grow closer to our Lord in holiness, then we must begin by praying and fasting and giving alms.
- Through prayer we learn how to focus our attention on God so that we can come to know and trust Him. In prayer we learn to submit ourselves to God's humble yoke, and we receive the grace to give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him.
- By the practice of denying ourselves through fasting those things that we enjoy, we learn to master our wills so that we have the courage to turn away from even the most enticing sins.
- And by giving alms, we foster important virtues such as generosity and charity.
- Thus, prayer, fasting, and alms-giving are absolutely essential if we wish to grow in holiness; they are not merely good ideas. If we are not willing to do these things, then we will never make progress in the spiritual life.
- But in addition to prayer, fasting, and alms-giving, we must be willing to move away from and detach ourselves from the things of the world, especially our mortal sins.
- You see, there is a radical detachment from the things of the world as well as from one's own sinful desires that is necessary for our souls to become a worthy dwelling place for our Lord.
- As we move away from and detach ourselves from the things of the world, we become more and more capable of attaching ourselves to God! Remember: you cannot love both God and mammon. We all must choose Whom or what we will love in this life.
- If we choose to love the mammon of this world more than we love God, and especially if we choose to love sin more than we love God, we will jeopardize our immortal souls.
- Our beautiful epistle today from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians calls us to a life of grace, free from attachments to sin. St. Paul tells us that we must walk in love simply because Christ has loved us, and He has proven His love by dying for us on Calvary.
- Thus, St. Paul tells us in no uncertain terms that we must put away our grievous sins, reminding us that no "fornicator, or unclean, or covetous person . . . hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."
- St. Paul reminds us in no uncertain terms that we are called to walk as children of the light, and that we must no longer engage in our former darkness.
- While it is true that we are focusing on the mercy of God in this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, I think it's important for us to bear in mind that God does not give us His mercy in "willy-nilly" fashion.

- While our Lord is indeed quick to forgive anyone who repents of his or her sins, we must repent! We must turn away from all that is not pleasing to Him.
- As we overcome our sins and detach ourselves from the things of this world, as we persevere in prayer, fasting, and alms-giving, we prepare our souls for union with our Lord. But as we do these things, we often must contend with temptation and suffering.
- The evil one always knows when we are making progress in the spiritual life, and so he will always try to derail it by tempting us to sin and turn away from God. Not even our Lord was free from the temptations of the devil.
- In today's Gospel Holy Mother Church revisits the battle between our Lord and our eternal enemy. In this open battle between them, we see that the devil is no match for our Lord. He easily exorcizes the mute man.
- However, even though the devil is no match for our Lord, he is a match for us! As an angel – albeit a fallen one – the evil one is naturally much more powerful than we humans.
- And as we move away from and detach ourselves from our grievous sins and try to live our lives in accordance with God's will, it is so very necessary that we do not relapse into our former way of life, or to take on new sins.
- As the Gospel warns us today, when we kick out a demon from our lives, he is often wont to return again with 7 more demons stronger than himself to retake us. So great vigilance is necessary so that we may truly live as children of the light.
- Once we have found freedom from the shackles of sin, we mustn't put on those shackles once again, for it may be much more difficult to be freed of them the next time.
- Ultimately, my brothers and sisters, today's readings are an encouragement from Holy Mother Church to persevere in our battle for holiness. This coming week we will pass the halfway point in Lent, and so we mustn't let our energies flag now!
- But even more than being vigilant and persevering in our personal battle for holiness, we are called today to humbly submit to the power and authority of Jesus Christ.
- In truth, it is our Lord who does the lion's share of the work of making us holy. It is He who will battle the evil one for us. And so if we take upon ourselves His gentle yoke, He will be victorious in our cause.
- Let us, therefore, renew our trust in our merciful Lord. Let us live our lives in a manner pleasing to Him so that we may indeed be worthy of the promises of Christ.