

# Spiritual Growth and Discipline

February 18, 2026

Holy Mother Church, in her wisdom, has given us three beautiful disciplines to “return to the Lord with our whole heart” or in the words of Jesus, to “Repent and believe in the gospel” through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

While these are spiritual exercises—spiritual things that we actually do—I think they also have very deep symbolic meaning.

For example, fasting is something that is self-referential. It is directed to oneself, right? When we fast—when we give up beer, chocolate, food, entertainment, or something else that we maybe love a little too much—what we are really doing is exercising a form of self-mastery over our habits, our desires, even our feelings.

Fasting symbolically is about ourselves—working on the self, doing that self-work with the help of grace that needs to be done.

And then there is prayer. Prayer is about a relationship with God. Over these next forty days, we hope and pray that by doing our part, that relationship will be deepened.

And then there is almsgiving helping the poor. That’s directed to the other.

Are you seeing a pattern here in the wisdom of Holy Mother Church in giving us these spiritual disciplines and their deeper symbolic meaning?

Fasting: about myself.

Prayer: me and God.

Almsgiving: me and the other, especially the poor.

What does that sound like?

The greatest commandment.

Love God. Have a relationship with God.

Love others.

Be selfless, sacrificial, and helpful—especially to the poor.

Love yourself. Take care of yourself. Work on yourself. Try to grow in holiness.

So the program for spiritual growth in the Catholic Church during these forty days of Lent is so beautifully planned out and organic, as it fits into the most important commandment Jesus gave us.

Love of God—by trying to foster, from our end, an intimate relationship with the Lord through prayer.

Love your neighbor—by being more selfless and sacrificial and helpful, especially to the poor.

And then to do that work in us—to know what we need to do in this spiritual life—to turn away from sin and turn wholeheartedly to God.

So Holy Mother Church lays it out so beautifully for us.

And tonight, the crosses that are just about ready to be placed on our foreheads are a sign that we are ready to do that work and make this sacrifice.

And it's not just about us—it's about our Lord too. As we receive the grace of the Eucharist, we begin these next forty days really very much spiritually energized to do the work that our Lord has placed before us.

So with that, let us pray that the grace of Jesus may be upon all of us, and that the Lord may truly help us to grow in faith, hope, and love—especially love.

Love of God.  
Love of neighbor.  
And love of self.

And we're going to make a beautiful spiritual journey with fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

Amen.