

OPENING PRAYER: The Fast God Chooses

(adapted from a prayer attributed to Blessed Teresa of Calcutta)

Leader: Lent is traditionally a time of “giving up” something—of fasting. Each year most of us give up a favorite food, a favorite activity or an unwanted habit. But there are other ways to fast.

A Reading from the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 58:6–11)

Reader 1: Is this not, rather,
the fast that I choose:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking off every yoke?

Reader 2: Is it not sharing your bread
with the hungry, bringing the
afflicted and the homeless into
your house; Clothing the naked
when you see them, and not
turning your back on your
own flesh?

Reader 1: Then your light shall break
forth like the dawn, and your
wound shall quickly be healed;
Your vindication shall go before
you, and the glory of the LORD
shall be your rear guard.

Reader 2: Then you shall call, and the
LORD will answer, you shall
cry for help, and he will say:
“Here I am!”

Reader 1: If you remove the yoke from
among you, the accusing finger,
and malicious speech;
If you lavish your food on the
hungry and satisfy the afflicted;
Then your light shall rise in the
darkness, and your gloom shall
become like midday;

Reader 2: Then the LORD will guide you
always and satisfy your thirst
in parched places, will give
strength to your bones
And you shall be like a watered
garden, like a flowing spring
whose waters never fail.

Leader: That we may see you in our
brothers and sisters, we pray

ALL: Lord, open our eyes.

Leader: That we may hear the cries
of the hungry, the cold, the
frightened and the oppressed,
we pray

ALL: Lord, open our ears.

Leader: That we may love each other as
you love us, we pray

ALL: Lord, open our hearts.

Leader: Renew in us your spirit, we pray

ALL: Lord, free us and make us one.

Leader: Heavenly Father, we truly desire
to open our eyes, ears and hearts
to your will and be your light
to the world. We ask this in the
name of Jesus, our courageous
and compassionate savior, Amen.

GAME: Bag of Similes

By using simple objects to create similes, participants will share some of their attitudes about poverty.

Materials:

Cloth bag or medium-size gift bag, and an assortment of at least 40 small odds and ends (a paper clip, eraser, pencil, etc.)

Instructions:

- Put all the items in the bag before the activity.
- Invite each participant to take one item from the bag (without looking).
- Tell participants it's an exercise in thinking in similes—a comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid. Give them a minute to think about how the object they chose is like poverty or being poor and ask them to share.

NOTE: This activity should give you some interesting insights into how participants understand poverty or the poor. If necessary, supplement with a basic definition of poverty. For example: Poverty is when at least one of someone's basic needs are not being met. It is not just economic.

OPENING ACTIVITY: The difference between fairness and justice

By using equal means to compete for resources (candy), participants will discover the difference between equality and justice, and grasp a basic understanding of the morality of a preferential option for the poor.

Materials:

Large bowl for each group, large bag of small candies for each group, plastic spoon for each participant—plus one extra for each group—blindfold for each group and copies of the lower portion of this sheet, cut into pieces for each small group.

Instructions:

Divide participants into small groups of eight.

- Tell participants all groups will have equal bowls of candy and each participant will be given a spoon.
- They will be given 2 minutes to scoop as much candy as they can out of the bowls for themselves.
- They can keep any candy they get.
- Before you begin, give each participant one of the instruction cards. Allow them 1 minute to make the necessary preparations. At the end of 2 minutes of playing, have participants count the pieces of candy each of them acquired.

Comments: Note that each group was given an equal amount of candy and each person was treated fairly—each received one spoon. Why was there such a difference in what participants accumulated? Ask if those who worked harder got more. Point out that although everyone was treated fairly and equally, everyone didn't start out equal. Note the difference between fairness and justice. To achieve justice, those with greater needs need to receive preferential treatment. The aim of justice is not to treat everyone the same, but to make sure that everyone has equal access to meeting their basic needs.

You lack education, so you don't know how to use a spoon. Hold the "bowl" of the spoon in your hand and try to scoop with the handle.

You were injured in a war and have no arms. To use the spoon, you must hold it in your mouth.

Your mother lacked adequate nutrition when she was pregnant, so you were born blind. You must wear a blindfold before using the spoon.

You were born into the privileged upper class. You had a spoon before you were given a second one—so now you have two spoons.

You live in a dangerous, violent area and are afraid of approaching the bowl. You must stand 4 feet from the table when using your spoon.

You are a fatherless small child. You must sit on the floor when using your spoon.

You were driven out of your home by rebels and are now a refugee. You need to go to another table with your spoon and beg to join the group.

You are a member of a despised minority. You must sit with your back to the table when using the spoon.

CLOSING PRAYER: You Cry With Us

We see so much suffering and sadness
and darkness in the world, O God,
and we cry out to you.

We cry out for peace and joy and happiness.
We cry out for a way to make things better.
And you cry with us.

We forget, O God, that you do not desire such suffering.
You do not desire such sadness.
We forget, O God,
that you desire only that which is good.

And so, you have given us the means forward.
You have given us the way to peace.

May we hear the cries of those who walk with us.
May we hear your cry, O God.
May we find the courage, the strength, the perseverance
to use those good things you have given us
to build up a world of your love, your peace.

Because we know you walk with us.
Our pain is your pain.
You, who died for our sins.
You, who wept at the death of your friend.
You, who knows both our deepest sadness
and our greatest joys.

Amen