

Landry: Pick the tools and get started on a Lenten spiritual reno



When my wife and I purchased our first home in 2006, I knew that I was going to be learning a lot about what it takes to fix and maintain a house. Among the immediate work that needed to be done before we could move in was replacing some old switch covers and furnace vents, hanging a door on the laundry room, and a fair bit of painting.

Included in this list was one simple job: taking wallpaper out of the downstairs bedroom before I could paint in there. It turned out that this project should have been a higher priority. Pulling off the wallpaper revealed surface mold on two of the walls. I knew that I had to get the mold gone before my wife (who was six months pregnant at the time) and I moved in, so in short order I cut out the offending pieces and tried to replace them. Never having worked with drywall before, the end result left what looked like speed bumps across the basement wall – a defect which would only be remedied a few years later with the help of a professional painter.

Over the nine years that we owned that house, I wound up updating and improving nearly every part of the interior (and a good chunk of the exterior) of that house. Many of the projects were things we planned in advance, but there was an equal number of jobs that came up unexpectedly when something wore out or ceased to properly serve our family. All in all, those nine years gave me a bit of a crash course in home maintenance. Generally, I found that the result of the work was always rewarding, but I'm not sure that I ever took on a project that didn't involve more work than I anticipated and require the help of others

to be successfully completed.

As we enter the season of Lent it might be easy to compare this season, the Church's annual retreat, to a home improvement project. Hopefully we are all entering into the season with a plan for some sort of spiritual renovation. Maybe all you need is the ongoing maintenance Lent provides you with in the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Praying a little bit more helps us to easily draw nearer to Christ. A commitment to fasting (both from meat on Fridays as well as whatever we might choose to give up) helps us to recognize the many blessings we have and to focus on those things which are the most important. And an effort to give more to others in time, talents, or financially helps us to better look out for the least of our brothers and sisters.

But for many of us, a discussion of these disciplines might bring to light the fact that we need more than just a little "maintenance" on our hearts – it might be that we need a more significant spiritual renovation. Perhaps we've lost the habit or the will to consistently show up in prayer. Maybe it's a lingering sin we just can't seem to move beyond. It could even be a particular aspect of Church teaching we don't understand (or disagree with) that seems to be holding us back from a richer life of faith.

The beauty here is that the three traditional Lenten disciplines all still apply. If we don't pray at all, starting the conversation honestly doesn't require more than a few minutes each day. As a simple suggestion, you could start each day by reading a chapter from one of the Gospels, and then end each day with a brief examination of conscience. Whatever you do in prayer, it's important to ensure that you commit to something simple that you can do, and that you dedicate some time to both talking to God and listening for His voice.

If you feel like you're stuck with a lingering sin, fasting is a wonderful remedy. The choice to give up something good (meat, sweets, coffee, etc) for the sake of something better (Christ) helps train you in the virtue of self-control. Learning to say 'no' helps each of us to make more deliberate choices on where and when we invest ourselves.

I'd also encourage you take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, either on the Day of Confessions next week, or at your parishes Lenten Penitential service. Finally, if we're struggling to understand some dynamic of our faith, giving our time to the Church – perhaps by attending a Lenten mission or Bible study – can help us find the insight we lack.

Ultimately one of the biggest lessons I learned from home renovations is probably one of the most important when it comes to spiritual ones. Whether you're replacing a doorknob or a fence, at some point you just have to get started. Perhaps the most important thing we can do at the beginning of Lent is to get started with whatever prayers, fasting, and giving we can ... and to allow God to bring up those things which are keeping us from Him. Then the

renovations can start.

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“Lent is a time of going very deeply into ourselves... What is it that stands between us and God? Between us and our brothers and sisters? Between us and life, the life of the Spirit? Whatever it is, let us relentlessly tear it out, without a moment’s hesitation.”

-Catherine Doherty, writer, speaker and founder of the Madonna House Apostolate