LENT

LIBBY: Hey, Kai, what's up?

LENT KAI: Well, Libby, I really want to do Lent right this year, you know?

LIBBY: All right, take a seat. Let's get started.

LENT KAI: Well, no, no sitting or reclining for me during Lent. It's far too comfortable. Also, no solid foods, no clothing fresh out of the dryer. No electronics.

LIBBY: Hold on. That might be a little too extreme. I mean, no electronics?

LENT KAI: Oh, no. I've already failed.

LIBBY: Well, maybe now you won't feel too guilty about sitting down.

LENTKAI: I feel guilty about everything.

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

LIBBY: Hi, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Welcome to Catholic Central.

LIBBY: When most people think about Lent they think about something they have to give up. But Lent is so much more than that.

KAI: Lent is a time to help us grow spiritually and prepare to celebrate Easter. The word Lent comes from the Anglo Saxon would *lencten*, which means spring, a time when the days start to lengthen. So we can look at Lent as a time of lengthening or stretching ourselves spiritually,

LIBBY: But it's not extreme stretching as in Cirque de Soleil.

KAI: It's more like a journey that God invites us on in order to grow closer to Him. Throughout the year, the Catholic Church has different seasons, which are all meant to help us celebrate and grow in our relationship with God.

LIBBY: Can you imagine what life would be like if we never celebrated Christmas or Easter?

KAI: Or National Taco Day?

LIBBY: Yum. All great feasts require preparation to fully appreciate them and almost every major religion has a similar time of preparation and purification.

KAI: Even secular society has its own traditions. At New Year's, you can find people giving up everything from unhealthy food to everything they did the night before.

LIBBY: The first mention of Lent was found in 325 A.D. at the Church’s Council of Nicaea. It's the same council that gave us the Nicene Creed, which all Christians profess.

KAI: At the council, Lent was mentioned as a time of 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter. It was a time of spiritual preparation for adults who were converting to Christianity. At the end of the 40 days, on Easter, they'd be baptized.

LIBBY: Eventually, other Christians wanted in to support the new converts, but also because they recognized their own need for ongoing penance and conversion.

KAI: At the Council of Nicaea, the word used for Lent was *tessarakonta*, which in Greek, means 40.

LIBBY: But not to symbolize the mini-midlife crisis we all have during Lent.

KAI: No, remember 40 is a significant number in the Bible. During the flood with Noah, it rained 40 days and 40 nights. After leaving Egypt, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, and Jesus spent 40 days in the desert fasting and being tempted by the Devil before starting his public ministry.

LIBBY: And what do all of those have in common?

KAI: Destruction, confusion, suffering?

LIBBY: Yes, but also these were times of preparation. That's what Lent is. Just like training for a Spartan race, Lent is a time to train spiritually. Try harder.

COACH LIBBY:

Come on, Kai, squeeze those arms. Let's go. Get in the game. Faster fasting. Come on, twinkletoes, do it for the poor!

KAI: We do that by renewing our focus on three common practices; prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

LIBBY: First, prayer. Christians are encouraged to pray every day anyway, but Lent is a time to refocus our prayer life and maybe even add a little more to it.

KAI: For instance, you could add a few minutes to your prayer time each day, attend Mass more frequently, or learn a new prayer you've been putting off -- like the Rosary.

LIBBY: Conveniently, we have episodes on *The Rosary*, *Praying With the Bible*, and *The Mass*, so you can't make excuses.

KAI: Next is fasting. Catholics fast on Ash Wednesday, which is the first day of Lent, and on Good Friday. That means you can have one full-meal and two smaller meals or snacks that don't equal a full meal even if you piled them on top of each other.

LIBBY: On Ash Wednesday and Fridays during Lent, Catholics also abstain from meat.

KAI: That means no cheeseburgers, chicken or the ultimate sacrifice … bacon.

LIBBY: Catholics can eat fish on Fridays.

KAI: There are a few reasons why. Throughout history, meat was considered a luxury, but fish was not, because there was a ton of it. So Catholics practiced eating fish on Fridays as a way to deny themselves the deliciousness of meat and show solidarity with the poor.

LIBBY: Also, Catholics give up meat on Fridays in order to honor the sacrifice of Jesus who gave up hHs flesh for us on Good Friday.

KAI: Over time, abstaining from meat on Fridays became a generally accepted active penance in the Christian community.

LIBBY: Fun fact in the 1960s and McDonald's out of the Filet-O-Fish because burger sales dropped during Lent. So if you've ever enjoyed a Filet-O-Fish, on behalf of Catholics everywhere, you're welcome.

KAI: Besides abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent, throughout the 40 days, Catholics also give up something good that they normally enjoy. It's another way to show their commitment to God.

LIBBY: And it's a way to honor Jesus' command to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. A lot of people give up candy or chocolate.

KAI: But really it can be anything you choose. Say you're addicted to TV, especially, I don't know, shows where the people finally get the kitchen of their dreams. Not that I'd know anything about that.

LIBBY: Either way. It's OK. One person’s sacrifice is no better than another's. It's a personal choice, but whatever it is, it's meant as a way to remind ourselves that we are in a season of preparation.

KAI: It's always about God, not about us or our own effort.

LIBBY: In addition to prayer and fasting, the third common practice during Lent is almsgiving. An alm refers to food, money or some other material good given to the poor as an act of charity. So during Lent, we try to add an extra activity that will help or bless someone.

KAI: It could be volunteering at a soup kitchen, and visiting the sick, writing letters to someone in prison or just performing a kind act.

LIBBY: You can also combine fasting and almsgiving like skipping a meal and giving the money you save to a local food pantry.

KAI: And I for one am planning to make sure that I spend 55 minutes of every hour in prayer down at the cafeteria, inside of the prison where I pay the prisoners to let me volunteer.

LIBBY: Whoa, whoa, easy there. The point of all of this is not to make ourselves suffer or show how spiritual we are. It's to help ourselves grow in our relationship with God.

KAI: But what happens if someone forgot that it's a Friday and enjoyed a juicy bacon cheeseburger? Is Lent ruined? I'm asking for a friend.

LIBBY: Don't beat yourself up about it if we fail. It's just another reminder that we still need God's grace in our lives.

KAI: Yeah, good point, Libby, like if you get a flat tire, you don't just slash the other three tires, you fix the flat and get back on the road.

LIBBY: The point of Lent is to take the focus off of ourselves and put it on God; to remember the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross and to thank Him for it.

KAI: So to recap, Lent is the 40-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter. A time when Catholics practice, prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

LIBBY: Those are things we should try to do anyway throughout the year.

KAI: But Lent is a special opportunity to help us reprioritize and get back on track spiritually to prepare to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

LIBBY: Listen up. As with all training regimens, keep your eyes on the prize, no pain, no gain, and move it or lose it.

KAI: If you want to learn more about how not to lose it during Lent, check out our website at CatholicCentral.com.

LIBBY: I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. See you next time.

LENT KAI: Traffic Lights. How many traffic lights did I go past when I was coming here today? I'm can't get out of bed in the morning without feeling ... Where are you going?

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