

Did you give up anything for Lent? Are you sticking with it so far?



Plenty of folks don't bother with this Christian tradition, and that's fine by me. But having returned to the church only a couple of years ago, after what seemed like a lifetime away, I still have the proverbial 'zeal of the convert.' I'm like one of those naturalized citizens, born in a far away land, who's totally gung-ho about being an American – you know... sporting a car flag, reciting the pledge every day, only "buying American." I love the rituals and symbols of my new, old faith, and I tend to embrace them with an all-out (possibly annoying?) enthusiasm.

But Lent has transcended its Christian roots, and is part of the culture at large, isn't it? Even those not of a religious bent seem to agree that giving up something we really like, but don't really need – if only for a finite period – can be a beneficial exercise in self-discipline. I could never do it for that reason alone – don't have the self-discipline! – so I'm glad to have a supernatural incentive. (I firmly believe that some of us need religion more than others, and unfortunately – or fortunately, depending on your perspective – I'm one of them. Left to my own devices, I'm a very bad girl.)

Anyway, religious or not, I'm sure they're plenty of you out there doing the Self-Denial Shuffle right about now... either by choice, or by necessity. We've all had our share of "epiphanies" lately, haven't we?

I had a really hard time deciding what to give up. (That I didn't already *have* to, that is.) Since I had blissfully ignored Lent –

and

self-discipline – for most of my adult life, the possibilities were endless!

I thought about the old standby, chocolate. I'm not a choc-o-holic, per se, but I *am* quite fond of my two squares a day of Dove Dark. The more I pondered it, though, chocolate just seemed too cliché. And frankly, too easy.

Next, I considered giving up talk radio. No more smooth, sophisticated NPR. No more raucous AM chit-chat. Nada. One day, well before Lent, I gave the idea a test run. On my way to pick up Amelia from school, I listened to some Beatles. "*Because the world is round... it turns me on...*"

Nice. Soothing. I wondered

what Ira Flato was discussing on Science Friday... but not too hard. Next, on a lark, I got really radical and switched off the stereo. Silence. Just the whirring hum of my car. My mind wandered. I thought about News of the Hour... and figured it couldn't be good. I imagined Sean Hannity screaming about "conservatism in exile"... and was filled with gratitude that I couldn't hear him. I just sat there in the school car line, idling and thinking. My thoughts were random and scattered at first, but then they began to organize themselves... a pattern began to emerge. The clamoring voices that fill my head – and my car – on a daily basis grew fainter and fainter, until there was only one voice. Could it be? Nah. Yes! It was mine.

This was good. I *liked* this. Giving up talk radio would actually be pleasant – in other words, a lame excuse for a sacrifice. (Hey, Jesus, thanks for giving up your life for me. In return I'm giving up... Garrison Keillor? Right.)

The thought of sacrificing television passed through my mind, but I couldn't figure out the logistics, since our TV in the family room is rather unavoidable. I could probably have managed it, but only if I could talk my husband and daughter into going along for the ride. This seemed highly unlikely.

Next, I considered Facebook. A couple of my more pious FB friends had posted that they might give it up for Lent, and the notion had been floating in the back of mind for days, where I

was secretly hoping it would stay. But now the time had come to look it square in the eye. I thought of all the friendships I'd recently revived on Facebook... all the pictures of childhood friends with *their* children... the sweet notes from long-lost college pals... the funny status updates and witty comments that made me smile when I was blue... the feeling of community...

I thought of all these things... and I just couldn't bear to give them up. I knew full well this was a weakness on my part, and I made a mental note to throw it on the "to be repented" pile, along with all my other sins.

Since I was already thinking in terms of the Internet, I moved on to blogs. Political blogs, to be specific. This was an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone – fulfill my Lenten discipline and break an unhealthy addiction. After all, what had my little politics obsession done for me lately? Lured me into arguments? Wasted my time? Angered me? Hurt my feelings? Puffed me up with pride? Disillusioned me? All that and less! Much like dark chocolate, politics makes you sick when you over-indulge. But unlike dark chocolate, it neither fights cancer nor tastes yummy. So, yes, this was it! I'd say buh-bye to Crunchy Con, NRO, Huffington Post, Atlantic Monthly, The Politico, et. al. Maybe I'd even stop reading magazines, too.... See ya, *Time*. Late
r, N
ewsweek...

But then I remembered: Oh, yeah... I write about this stuff in my column. Even if I didn't, it's an editor's job to *know* about this stuff. And, um... by the way, it's actually *good* to be informed. Responsible. My duty as an American citizen.

It was then that something dawned on me: I didn't have to give up *knowing* about politics... I just had to give up

commenting

on politics. When I read a blog I disagreed with, I didn't actually
need

to spend precious time crafting a careful, concise counter-argument to post before a bunch of strangers. And when I read a blog I

did

like, there was no law saying I had to chime in with my support or additional commentary.

There's a funny cartoon going 'round the blogosphere featuring a female stick figure, hunched over a computer. A voice bubble from the next room reads, "Honey, aren't you coming to bed?" The hunched stick-figure responds, "I can't! This is important. Somebody's wrong on the Internet!"

I don't *have* to be that cartoon stick-figure. There are too many voices out there already, holding forth on every topic under the sun. While I enjoy it immensely – it's a hobby, like collecting stamps – there's simply no good reason I should be adding to that cacophony. My voice is unnecessary. So I shall withdraw from the debate for forty days. At least.

And I'm taking my "no comment" policy one step further. I'm not even going to respond to my critics at my own website. Not even in self-defense! You can insult my intelligence, tear down my character, completely misconstrue the meaning of an entire column... and I'll be mum. And this, dear reader, this will be a *true* sacrifice. For I loathe being mum. I loathe being misunderstood... I loathe being understood and disagreed with... I loathe being verbally spanked without spanking back ... and I really, really loathe giving up the last word.

Which is exactly why I'm doing it. God help me. (Seriously God... I'll need your help.)

If you don't like what you've read here, feel free to express your disapproval at www.lcweekly.com. Just don't expect me to write back.