

Lent 2017 – Empty, Fill, and Spill (Lent, Easter, Pentecost) The St. James 90 Day Challenge

The church gives us the gift of Liturgical Seasons as a vehicle for spiritual growth throughout the year. At St. James we're going to observe each Liturgical Season more closely through intentional spiritual practice in order to deepen our faith and our ability to live in the freedom of God's love. Instead of allowing these seasons to simply move past us, we're going to come to each with a greater **awareness**, with a conscious **intention** to do the spiritual work we're called to do, and to **consent** to say yes to our mission as Christians. Let's look at these seasons, and the spiritual movement inherent in each.

LENT: EMPTY

During the season of Lent we're called to **empty** ourselves of the obsessive concerns of life and self that prevent us from recognizing the hand of God in our lives. There are two ways we are emptied. One is through life – when we suffer, or become diminished in any way, when we love unconditionally. All of these empty us – they use up relational energy. There are also Spiritual Practices that can empty us – learning to surrender or “hand over” to God, practicing solitude, silence, and simplification of life. All of these help us unclutter our minds and hearts. Fasting from negativity and meditation both allow us to quiet the inner noise that robs us of peace and of the energy needed to be for others. In this culture we tend to become hoarders – we hold on to our “stuff,” our routines and activities, our opinions, our sin, hurts, thoughts and emotions, expectations of others, our image of self. All of this clinging robs us of life-giving energy.

Become aware of any defensiveness, tendency to judge others, obsessive inner self-chatter. All of these negative tendencies signal that we're becoming full of ourselves – and then there's no room for God or others. Instead of “giving up” sweets or alcohol, let's let go of the behaviors and attitudes that keep us self-absorbed and self-obsessed. By **emptying** ourselves of negativity and self-absorption we create a space for a greater awareness of God and the needs of others.

EASTER SEASON: FILL

Throughout the joy of the Easter season we'll strive to open our hearts to God's love within us. We'll allow ourselves to be **filled** through a greater commitment to prayer, by practicing Lectio Divina (a more conscious way of hearing, responding, and living out of the Scripture), participating in the Eucharist to receive the intimacy of God's love, and through Reconciliation as a means of **filling** ourselves with God's mercy, unconditional forgiveness, and Divine healing.

PENTECOST: SPILL

After having emptied yourself of yourself, then filling your cup to overflowing with God's unconditional love, forgiveness, and Divine healing, we **spill** this grace out to others. Without first emptying, and then filling that space with God, this kind of Discipleship just isn't possible – we can't give what we don't have. During the celebration of Pentecost and the months that follow, we become vehicles for God's compassionate love, we become God's hands, God's voice, God's mercy and care for others. St. Paul said, “*I am already being poured out like a libation.*” That is what **spill** calls us to do.

Life as a Christian is a constant cycle of **“Empty, Fill, and Spill.”** Let’s begin it now, mindfully, committing anew each and every day. Throughout these powerful Liturgical seasons we’ll share some practical strategies to assist you. And, when you fall, as you surely will, remember, these are all *practices*. Begin again, tomorrow.