



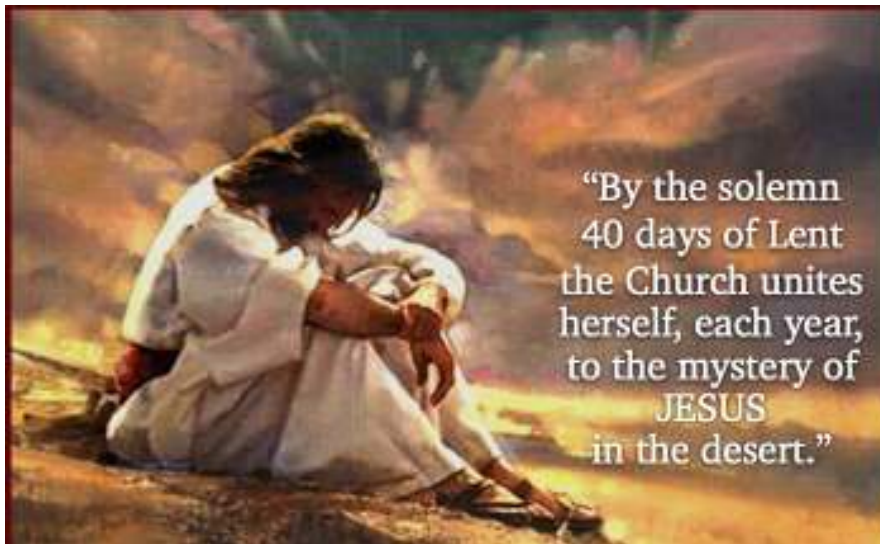
The Liturgical Seasons of the Catholic Church



LENT

Preparation and Penance

A season of almsgiving, fasting, reflection and prayer to ensure repentance and renewal.



Lent is the period of 40 days which comes before Easter in the Christian calendar. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and concluding at sundown on Holy Thursday. The official liturgical color for the season of Lent is violet.

Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter and Christ's Death and Resurrection, through which we attain redemption.

By observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days and nights before He took up His ministry from God the Father.

The word Lent derives from the Middle English word *lenten*, meaning springtime – the time of lengthening days.

During the early history of the Church, Lent had a connection to the preparation of catechumens, with their baptism being held at Easter. However, once Christianity became widespread and most people were baptized as infants, this link became lost. Instead, the themes of repentance and fasting became dominant. Vatican II restored the order of catechumens. Since then, most adult converts to Catholicism are baptized at the Easter Vigil, which takes place after sundown on Holy Saturday. As a result, the ancient baptismal meaning of Lent is once again becoming important.

One of the **precepts** of the Church is **fasting and abstinence** during Lent. This should take place on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent as a minimum. Fasting means to limit food to one full meal a day with the possibility of two smaller meals (not adding up to a full meal) as needed. Abstinence means not eating meat, although fish is allowed. This is so long as one's work or health don't make it inadvisable to fast or abstain from meat, if it is inadvisable then you are not obligated to do so. This includes mental health: Fasting may be harmful for someone who struggles with an eating disorder. Such a person might do an alternate penance on the days of fasting. Also Pregnant and nursing women are exempt from the fast. At one time, people gave up all animal products and during the whole Lenten season. Since chickens continue to produce eggs and cows milk, the custom developed to make the milk into cheese and colour the eggs so that when Easter arrived, no food would be wasted.

Many Catholics were taught as children to **"give up something"** for Lent. The sacrifices in Lent are really penance, in the same spirit as the Ninevites that repented at the preaching of Jonah. But many Catholics now **"add something"** during Lent rather than giving up something, either to address personal habits that need work or to add some outreach to others in need. They strive to be the best version of themselves, just as God would want them to be for the sacrifices and extra things we do for Lent help us grow closer to Christ. We are missing out on so many graces if we do not participate fully in Lent. It is not necessary to be perfect, but we should put forth a good effort. A good practice is to do something extra in prayer, something involving fasting (whether limiting our intake of food or giving up something non food-related), and something involving almsgiving (giving money or goods to the needy or doing extra acts of charity).

Ash Wednesday which opens Lent has its roots in ancient Jewish traditions and is also mentioned in the writings from the Second-century Church. It is one of the most popular and important holy days in the liturgical calendar.

Applying ashes to the forehead on Ash Wednesday takes place 46 days before Easter Sunday. (The Sunday's in Lent are not counted as they should be a day for celebration with Mass.) It is chiefly observed by Catholics, although many other Christians observe it too. Recently, movements have developed that involve pastors distributing ashes to passersby in public places. This isn't considered taboo, but this practice is distinctly Protestant. Catholics should still receive ashes within the context of Mass.

During Mass, Priests bless the ashes and all are invited to accept the ashes as a **visible symbol of penance**. Even non-Christians and the excommunicated are welcome to receive the ashes. The ashes are made from blessed palm branches, taken from the previous year's Palm Sunday Mass

While the ashes **symbolize penance and contrition**, they are also a reminder that God is **gracious and merciful to those who call on Him with repentant hearts** - His **Divine mercy** should be of utmost importance to us during Lent. Receiving the ashes should humble our hearts and remind us that our time on Earth to do God's work is fleeting, so we need to be prepared and ready.

They are a reminder to help us **develop a spirit of humility and sacrifice**.

Further, the ashes **symbolize the dust from which God made us**.

As the priest applies the ashes to a person's forehead, he speaks the words:

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Alternatively, the priest may speak the words, "Repent and believe in the Gospel."

Ashes **also symbolize grief**, in this case, grief that we have sinned and caused division from God.

It is important to remember that Ash Wednesday is a day of penitential prayer and fasting and abstinence. Some faithful take the rest of the day off work and remain home. It is generally inappropriate to dine out, to shop, or to go about in public after receiving the ashes. Feasting is highly inappropriate. Small children, the elderly and sick are exempt from this observance.

After the Priest has applied the ashes it is not required that a person wear the ashes for the rest of the day, and they may be washed off after Mass. However, many people keep the ashes as a reminder until the evening.

In some cases, ashes may be delivered by a Priest or a family member to those who are sick or shut-in.

Other Definitions Concerning Lent

Carnival

Originally a celebration just before Lent. Carnival is Latin for "farewell to meat."

Mardi Gras

Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday, refers to events of the Carnival celebration, beginning on or after the Christian feasts of the Epiphany (Three Kings Day) and culminating on the day before Ash Wednesday (known as Shrove Tuesday). Mardi Gras is French for "Fat Tuesday", reflecting the practice of the last night of eating rich, fatty foods before the ritual fasting of the Lenten season.

Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day)

Shrove Tuesday, is derived from the word shrive, meaning "to administer the sacrament of confession to; to absolve." It is the day before Ash Wednesday so is not part of Lent.

Laetare Sunday

The fourth Sunday of Lent, which marks the halfway point, celebrated with rose vestments instead of the usual violet. Laetare means "to rejoice" in Latin, and the lighter vestments signify a brief celebration in expectation of Easter, even in the midst of Lent.

Palm Sunday

The celebration of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem before he was arrested. In Scripture, people placed palm branches on the road as Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem. Catholics usually have a blessing of palms and then hold the palms as the priest enters the church. It marks the start of Holy Week.

Passion Sunday

Passion Sunday is another name for Palm Sunday. This name is appropriate because at the Mass for this Sunday, the passion of the Lord (the story of Jesus' arrest and death) is traditionally read.

Spy Wednesday

A name for the Wednesday of Holy Week that alludes to Judas agreeing with the Sanhedrin to betray Jesus.

Paschal Triduum

The "Great Three Days" -the three-part celebration beginning with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, continuing with The Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, and concluding with the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday.

Maundy Thursday

An ancient English name for Holy Thursday. It comes from the Latin, Mandatum novum da nobis ("I give you a new commandment," John 13:34) that began the ancient foot-washing ceremony. The Last Supper is commemorated.

Good Friday

Christian holiday commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus and his death at Calvary on the Friday preceding Easter Sunday, and may coincide with the Jewish observance of Passover.

