

20. The Season of Lent.

Lent is a season of conversion, a time of freedom. Through Jesus' innocent sacrifice in his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, we are raised to the fullness of life with God as His children.

Key terms:

Ash Wednesday:	The first day of the season of Lent takes its name from the symbolic practice of placing black ash on a believer's forehead in the shape of a cross, representing grief, death, judgement and repentance.
Lent:	A liturgical season lasting for 40 days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending the Thursday before Easter, intended for spiritual reflection and preparation, corresponding to the 40 days Jesus fasted in the wilderness.
Fasting:	To deny satisfaction of a physical need or desire in order to devote that time to prayer, reflection, and service.
Prayer:	The elevation of the mind and heart to God in praise of his glory; a petition made to God for some desired good, or in thanksgiving for a good received, or in intercession for others before God. Through prayer, the Christian experiences a communion with God through Christ in the Church.
Almsgiving:	Money or goods given to the poor as an act of penance or fraternal charity. Almsgiving, together with prayer and fasting, are traditionally recommended to foster the state of interior penance.
Abstinence:	Refraining from eating the flesh-meat of warm-blooded land animals, including birds. Examples: beef, sheep, pork, chicken, and other fowl. Eggs, milk products, fish and shellfish are permitted.
Penance:	The outward expression of internal repentance – the turning away from sin.
Conversion:	(from the Latin <i>converto</i> 'to turn around') a turning away from sin, and a turning towards God.
Holy Week:	It includes Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and traces the steps of Jesus during he last week of his earthly life.
Paschal:	The Pesach (Hebrew) or Passover is the Jewish Feast celebrating the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. (Ex. 12)
Paschal Mystery:	the central events of Christ's redemptive work, specifically his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.
Passion:	The suffering of Jesus from his agony in Gethsemane to his crucifixion.
Redemption:	Jesus' saving actions that ransomed us from sin and reconciled us to the Father.

THE REWARD OF LENT

- Longing for New Life through God's story of redemption (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12; Rom 8:21-22).
- Make us attentive to our own mortality, our dependence on God and our responsibility to our neighbour. (2Cor 6:2)
- Greater intimacy with God.
- A renewal of the contemplative and active balance in our lives.
- Frees us from a false sense of self.

THE BLESSINGS OF ALMSGIVING

- The archangel Gabriel, the great messenger for God, exhorted Tobit and his son Tobiah, “Prayer and fasting are good, but better than either is almsgiving accompanied by righteousness. It is better to give alms than to store up gold, for almsgiving saves one from death and expiates every sin. Those who give alms shall enjoy a full life” (Tob 12:8,9).
- Alms for the poor is ‘penitential’ (Sir 3:30):
“Water extinguishes a blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin.”
- frees us from narrow self-interest”.
- “infuses our actions with graciousness”.
- “elevates our vision” to see “treasure in heaven”.
- Gives us “a foretaste of the joy of the Kingdom of heaven.” (Pope Francis)

KEY DAYS DURING LENT

- Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. The ashes used to mark the forehead symbolise our grief for the things we have done wrong and the resulting division of imperfect people from a perfect God.
- Maundy Thursday is the day before Good Friday. It commemorates the night before Jesus died, when He shared the Passover meal with His closest friends and followers.
- Good Friday is the day Christians remember Jesus’ death. The “Good” reflects how Jesus’ death was a sacrifice on our behalf so we can receive God’s forgiveness for our wrongs, or sins.
- Easter Sunday is the joyful celebration of Jesus rising from the dead to give us the opportunity of eternal life. While people still die, Jesus made the way for people to have a relationship with God in this life and to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

REASONS TO FAST DURING LENT

- Jesus fasted. Fasting was a Jewish tradition that Jesus clearly expected would continue.
- Fasting is a traditional sign of sorrow (Neh 9:1; Est 4:3; 1Mac 3:47).
- Fasting helps us empty ourselves and focus on God and others (Mt. 6:24).
- Fasting gives us a familiar ‘yearning’ feeling (Jn. 4:10; 6:27 – “living water” and the “food that endures”).
- Fasting helps us develop self-discipline (Lk. 16:10).
- Fasting reminds us that our bodies are part of our prayer (2Sam 12:16).
- Fasting deepens our mindfulness of others.
- Fasting builds our sense of community as Church – the Jewish leaders and prophets ‘proclaimed a fast’ among the people to unify them in prayer.....a holy assembly (1 Chr 20:3; Joel 1:14).
- Fasting makes Easter more joyful (Lk. 15:16).
- Fasting helps us imitate Jesus (Phil 3:10).

SYMBOLS OF LENT AND THEIR MEANING

Ashes.

- In the Old Testament ashes represent death and sorrow for sins.
- Ashes serve as a reminder of human mortality and therefore the need to do penance. Our bodies are made of dust (Gen 2:7), and upon death they return to “dust and ashes” (Gen 18:17).
- In biblical times, once people admitted their sins, they covered themselves with sackcloth and ashes (Jer 6:26; 25:34; Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:6,10):

- as a public admission of guilt,
- a plea for God’s mercy,
- a promise to reform,
- and a pledge to resist future temptation.
- Ashes are applied to the forehead in the Sign of the Cross with one of two statements:
 - “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel” (Mk 1:15) or
 - “Remember you are dust and unto dust you will return” (Gen 3:19).

Violet.

- Violet is the liturgical colour for the season of Lent, as well as the colour of the stole worn by the priest for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Violet is a sombre colour which symbolizes mourning, suffering, humility, regret, and the willingness to do penance, particularly fasting.
- Violet’s association with suffering is based upon Jesus’ Passion when the soldiers clothed him in a purple cloak and tortured him (Mk 15:17-20; Jn 19:2-3).

Stones.

- Stones are a symbol of austerity and rigor, desolation and misery, severity and sadness.
- The devil used stones to tempt Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread” (Mt 4:3), but Jesus made them a symbol for overcoming temptation when he replied, “One does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4; Dt 8:3).

Fish.

- A fish is a Lenten symbol for the obligation to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and to abstain from all flesh meat on every Friday in Lent.

Incense.

- A symbol for prayer:
 - “Let my prayer come like incense before you” (Ps 141:2);
 - it was customary to burn incense in the Temple to worship God (Lk 1:9);
 - and in John’s vision of heaven the elders were gathered around the throne of the Lamb, and “Each held bowls filled with incense which are the prayers of the holy ones” (Rev 5:8).

EXPLORE!

- Explore with the candidates the importance of prayer, fasting and almsgiving during Lent.
- Help them discern what disciplines to practice (what to give up or take on) in order to cultivate virtue in their lives.
- Explore the correlation between the liberation of the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt and our liberation from sin through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, the Passover and the Last Supper.
- Explore with the candidates what it means to experience forgiveness in their lives.
- God had a ‘plan’ for humanity when he sent His Son into the world. Do you think God has a plan for you? Can you imagine what it might be?

The Season of Lent — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think God put the tree in the garden of Eden? (Gen. 2:8-9)
 2. What ‘disciplines’ or practices can I adopt during Lent help you listen for God’s voice?
 3. Why is forgiveness and reconciliation an integral part of our preparation during Lent?
 4. How did Jesus respond to Satan’s temptation? And what does his response teach us about how to resist temptation in our lives?
 5. Why is prayer an essential element to understanding the season of Lent?
 6. (*For private reflection*) Is there a habit or sin in my life that repeatedly gets in the way of loving God with my whole heart or loving my neighbour as myself?
 7. How can you integrate acts of compassion and service into your Lenten practice? What impact might these actions have on your own spiritual growth and the world around you?
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SUGGESTIONS FOR A FRUITFUL LENT

- Read the Bible
- Attend Daily Mass
- Eucharistic Adoration
- Complete Works of Mercy
- Pray the Rosary and/or Divine Mercy Chaplet
- Pray for others
- Pilgrimage
- Spiritual Reading
- Pray for the Stations of the Cross

PRAYER

Psalm 22 or Psalm 51

or

Gospel Reflection:	Year A	Matt. 4:1-11
	Year B	Mk. 1:12-15
	Year C	Lk. 4:1-13

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

The Season of Lent

Scripture

Gen. 7:4	God sends rain on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights when Noah and his family enter the Ark.
Gen. 22:1-18	Abraham offers his son Isaac to God.
Ex. 12:1-31	The sacrifice of the perfect lamb protects the Israelites from death.
Ex. 24:18	Moses sits on Mount Sinai receiving the ten commandments from God for 40 days.
Is. 53:1-12	Prophecy of the Suffering Servant who will bear our sins and intercede for us.
Is. 58:6-7	The type of fast required by the Lord – taking on something.
1Kgs. 19:8	Elijah walked 40 days and 40 nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.
Dan 9:3	Seek the Lord by prayer and pleas of mercy, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.
Job 42:6	At the end of his confession, Job puts on sackcloth and ashes.
Jon. 3:5-6	After Jonah preaches of conversion and repentance, the people proclaim a fast and put on sackcloth.
Joel 2:12-14	Return to the Lord with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning.
Mt. 4:1-11	Jesus spent 40 days in the desert fasting, praying and being tempted by the devil.
Mt. 6:16-18	The disposition towards fasting.
Mk. 1:12-15	The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness for forty days.
Mk. 10:45	Jesus came to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
Lk. 4:1-13	Jesus undergoes 40 days of fasting in the desert.
Jn. 12:32-33	By his Passion and Death, Jesus will draw all humanity to himself.
Jn. 15:13	There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.
Jn. 19:14	Pilate condemns Jesus to death at the sixth hour (as the Passover lambs are slain).

Catechism

512, 517	Jesus' entire life was redemptive; its chief mysteries are the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery.
538-540	Jesus seeks solitude in the desert immediately after his baptism by John. There in the desert, he reveals himself as God's servant, obedient to the divine will. His victory over Satan, anticipates victory at the Passion.
595-618	The reality and meaning of Jesus' Passion and Death.
1091-1092	The Church's liturgy relives the great events of salvation history and unites the Church to the life and mission of Christ.
1095	The Holy Spirit prepares us to receive Christ, through the liturgy of the Church, i.e. Lent and the Easter Vigil.
1163-1166	When the liturgy is celebrated and the liturgical seasons.
1434	Fasting, abstinence, prayer, charity, almsgiving and self-denial express conversion in relation to oneself, God and others.
1438	The Season of Lent is an intense moment of penitential practice, charitable and missionary work.