

The Season of Lent

In the Catholic faith, God often uses how humans perceive the physical world to impart something spiritual. He uses the seasons of the year to ingrain divine lessons. One such season is Lent.

The liturgical cycle invites you not to just read the Scriptures, but to live them. You can experience biblical history and Jesus' earthly life through the sacraments, sacramentals, celebrations, and times of fasting.

Lent is an opportunity to put your spiritual house in order. Prayer and attending Mass should take on greater importance. Liturgically, you can walk with Moses and the Israelites as they receive the Ten Commandments and spend forty years in the desert. You can see Jesus at His baptism and experience forty days in the desert with Him. Sacramentally, you recall your own baptism, and adults new to the faith prepare for theirs at the Easter Vigil. You should also make a good Lenten confession, especially if serious sin prevents you from receiving Communion in a state of grace.

This year, Lent begins on February 14. Ash Wednesday's Gospel reading highlights prayer, fasting, and almsgiving as dependable practices of Lent to help you grow spiritually (Matthew 6.1–6, 16–18). The ashes come from burnt palm leaves from a previous Palm Sunday. They are applied to the forehead in the form of a cross with the words "turn from sin and believe the Good News." (Mark 1.15) This sacramental is rich in meaning. We publicly acknowledge that we are made of dust and this body will one day die. We repent of sin. Moreover, we commit to the disciplines of Lent.

During Lent, fasting (only one full meal) and abstinence (no meat) on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (March 30), and abstinence on the other Fridays are obligatory.

Why fast? A little self-denial is healthy. It gives you a tiny insight into Jesus' agony on the cross for you. It gives you a hint of the suffering of the needy who do not share your abundance. It also asserts that you are not a slave to your appetites. The opposite of self-control, unbroken self-indulgence, is an idolatry: "Their end is destruction; their god is the belly." (Philippians 3.19)

I invite you to join me in my weekly Monday abstinence from the internet and social media. Unplugging helps me concentrate on what is important. I have more time for human interaction, prayer, and listening to God's Word.

Additional traditional acts of "giving up" sweets, alcohol, tobacco or other pleasures during Lent could help you personalize your spirit of Lenten sacrifice.

Almsgiving flows naturally from the money you will save by making these sacrifices. I urge you to care for the needy by supporting the Diocesan Works appeal on the first Sunday of Lent. Please also contribute on Share Lent Sunday, March 18. This Lenten campaign for the poor of the world is conducted by Development and Peace, the social justice charity promoted by the Bishops of Canada.

The gospels of the first two Sundays focus on Our Lord's temptation and transfiguration. They will remind you of the glory of Christ that awaits you in overcoming temptation and sin.

On the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent, John's Gospel tells of Christ's glorification through His cross and resurrection.

Passion Sunday recalls Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and His sufferings as recounted in Mark's Gospel. The Passion narrative brings Lent to a climax and leads into the Sacred Triduum from Holy Thursday to the Easter Vigil.

May the Lord bless you as we set out to celebrate the Easter mystery "with the joy of minds made pure" (Lenten prayer).

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