



# THE FOUNDATIONS OF LENT

**THE MOST IMPORTANT THING** anyone can do for Lent is to “return to the Lord with your whole heart” (Joel 2:12). That’s the root meaning of repent: to turn around. Catholics have traditionally expressed sorrow for sin and the desire to live as genuine disciples of Christ through the three traditional Lenten disciplines of **fasting**, **almsgiving** and **prayer**—which help to turn us toward Christ as the true source of happiness. These are forms of self-denial: we deny the tendency in us to seek happiness in physical pleasure, in economic security, or in power. Just as Jesus was tempted in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11), we must face our temptation to put pleasure, property or power ahead of our relationship to God.

**LENTEN DISCIPLINES** prepare us to receive the grace of Easter. By virtue of Christ’s victory over death, our relationship to pleasure, property and power is no longer a matter of following our own selfish inclinations, but of gratefully receiving all that the Lord has to give us.

**Fasting and abstinence** practiced as the Church instructs is a good beginning. A bodily way to remind ourselves that we need God above all things, fasting is also a sacrifice, a gift back to God of our heart’s intent to depend more completely on God. The interior free desire to deepen our relationship to God is the essence of a Lenten fast.

**Almsgiving** readjusts our priorities while it expresses both our love of neighbor and our trust in God. A free gift to those in need confirms our basic trust in Providence while concretely helping those in need. Just as we fast without starving ourselves, so we give alms without jeopardizing our security or that of our family. The point is to give from the heart.

**Prayer** is a recognition that we need help to turn back to God. From daily Mass to the Rosary to Centering Prayer to the Stations of the Cross to Eucharistic Adoration, the Church encourages a wealth of prayerful practices. A very simple way to pray is to sit quietly for a moment before taking up one of the Gospels and slowly reading a passage that you like. Simply sit with the passage for a bit, savoring the Word and allowing it to touch you, read it again slowly, and then respond to God.



# THE EVENTS OF LENT AND HOLY WEEK

**Lent** is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning *spring*. The season lasts from Ash Wednesday until the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday.

**Ash Wednesday** marks the beginning of Lent, often observed by receiving a cross of ashes on the forehead at Mass.

**Holy Week** includes the days from Palm Sunday through Easter.

**Palm** or **Passion Sunday** has contrasting names, one because of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem (to the waving palm branches), the other because this Sunday begins our focus on Jesus' days of suffering and death.

**Paschal Triduum**, from the Latin for "three days," extends from evening Holy Thursday through Easter Sunday.

**Maundy (Holy) Thursday** gets its name from Jesus' "new commandment" (*mandatum* in Latin) to love one another, which he spoke during the passover meal when he washed his disciples' feet and instituted the Holy Eucharist. Typically the Catholic Church now refers to this day as **Holy Thursday** and it is also notable for being the day on which the *Chrism Mass* is celebrated.

**Good Friday** marks the events of Jesus' trial, crucifixion, death and burial, sometimes with special *Tre Ore* (*three hour*) observances. The altar is stripped of all decoration and the church darkened until Saturday's Easter Vigil.

**Easter Vigil** is celebrated on Holy Saturday evening after sundown; traditionally a time for baptizing, confirming and receiving new members.

**Easter**, named after an ancient spring festival, is the "great Sunday," on which each Sunday Eucharist is modeled.

## READINGS FOR LENT 2021

Ash Wednesday: . J1 2:12-18; 2 Cor 5:20—6:2; Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

1st Sunday: ..... Gn 9:8-15; 1 Pt 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15

2nd Sunday: ..... Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Rom 8:31b-34; Mk 9:2-10

3rd Sunday: ..... Ex 20:1-17; 1 Cor 1:22-25; Jn 2:13-25

4th Sunday: ..... 2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23; Eph 2:4-10; Jn 3:14-21

5th Sunday: ..... Jer 31:31-34; Heb 5:7-9; Jn 12:20-33

Palm Sunday: .... Mk 11:1-10; Is 50:4-7; Phil 2:6-11; Mk 14:1—15:47

Holy Thursday: .. Ex 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Jn 13:1-15

Good Friday: ..... Is 52:13—53:12; Heb 4:14-16, 5:7-9; Jn 18:1—19:42

Easter Vigil: ..... Gn 1:1—2:2 ; Gn 22:1-18; Ex 14:15—15:1;

Is 54:5-14; Is 55:1-11; Bar 3:9-15, 32—4:4;

Ez 36:16-17a, 18-28, 18-28; Rom 6:3-11; Mark 16:1-7

## *Christ in the Desert*

Lenten observance in the early centuries of the Church was closely linked with Christ's forty days of testing in the desert. So the Lenten journey has long been seen as going with Jesus, figuratively, at least, into the desert. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes: "By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert" (#540).

"Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry" (Luke 4:1-2). Jesus was tempted by the devil to use his divine and human powers only for his own personal desires rather than to use them generously and unselfishly for others according to God's plan of redemption.

During Lent, we practice disciplines that are aimed at renewing and transforming our lives, to help us rise with Christ to the often harsh challenges of self-giving love.

### LENTEN REGULATIONS FOR FASTING & ABSTINENCE

The Church teaches that Catholics in good health should observe the following practices during Lent unless for some serious reason they are unable to do so:

Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59 should fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In addition, all Catholics 14 years old and older should abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent.

Fasting as explained by the U.S. bishops means partaking of only one full meal and two smaller meals that do not equal the main meal. Abstinence forbids the use of meat, but not of eggs, milk products or condiments made of animal fat.