

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The major themes of Lent include: repentance, sacrifice, growth, and overcoming temptation.
- The practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving are central to Lent.
- Many symbols are associated with Lent.



Living Lent

We take time to prepare for things that are important to us.

If you value earning good grades in school, you take time to prepare for major tests. If your goal is to make the soccer team, you prepare for tryouts by practicing. If you have an important role in the school play, you put hours into rehearsal. You will prepare for your future career by working hard in school and attending a college or technical school that will give you the best possible training and education.

- *What are some other things you prepare for?*
- *Why is preparation important?*



During Lent, we prepare for the greatest celebration of the Church year—Easter. We follow the path of Jesus, who journeyed through his death to his resurrection.

While Lent is a time of serious reflection, it's a positive time, too. The Church teaches that Lent is a time of preparation; a time of spiritual growth. Lent and Easter are a lot like spring: New attitudes and fresh ways of looking at things are born. Old attitudes and unhealthy habits disappear. The dying and rebirth of nature and the dying and rebirth that takes place within our hearts reflects the great mystery of the death and resurrection of our Lord.

For you during the RCIA, Lent is also a time of purification and enlightenment, a time when you are called to respond to God with greater reflection and commitment.

Why Forty Days?

The season of Lent is the Church's preparation for Easter, a liturgical season of forty days. The number forty plays a key role in several passages of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The number forty isn't always literal and can be symbolic of any long period of trials or tests in the Bible.

How is forty used in the following passages?

Genesis 7:17–18

Exodus 34:27–29

Matthew 4:1–4

Acts 1:1–5

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us that Jesus spent forty days in the desert after his baptism in the Jordan River. "Jesus...was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil" (Luke 4:1–2).

Jesus' experience in the desert reminds us of the Israelites who were freed from Egyptian slavery only to wander in the desert for forty years on their way to the Promised Land. During that time, they were tempted and they sinned. But when the devil tempted Jesus, he did not give in to temptation. Because of his faithfulness to God, Jesus overcame the temptations he faced.

In a sense, Lent is a desert experience for each of us. It's a time when we step away from the world and reflect in prayer. It's important to take time and reflect on how you're living your faith. These are the moments God's voice comes to us the clearest. Preparing for Easter during Lent by refocusing our lives on God makes us ready to take part in the Easter celebration.

Lenten Symbols

For Catholics, Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and ends before the eucharistic liturgy on Holy Thursday evening. Holy Thursday evening, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday—the sacred Triduum—are the high point of the Church's liturgical year. (See E7: *Holy Week*.) The following symbols of Lent work to bring us closer to God while preparing us for the Easter season.

Ashes: The ashes we receive on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday remind us of the passage of time and our constant need to turn away from wrongdoing. Wearing ashes on our foreheads indicates our willingness to do penance.

Purple: The color purple is a sign of reflection and conversion. The priest's vestments and Church decorations are purple during Lent.

Palms: On the Sunday before Easter, Palm Sunday, we hold palms in imitation of the people of Jerusalem who honored Jesus by throwing palm branches in his path as he rode into the city.

- Are there other Lenten symbols you've seen around your church?
- How do these symbols help prepare you for Lent?



Preparing for Easter

"The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year...are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing."

CCC 1438

Lent focuses our attention on the reality of being human. This means our weakness and our potential to do good. Lent is also connected in a special way to the sacrament of penance. Historically, Lent was a time when people did public penance (prayers or actions that express sorrow for sin) to be reconciled with the Church. At the beginning of Lent, the bishop would place ashes on those seeking forgiveness and give them a public penance to perform. Then at Easter, they could receive the Eucharist as fully reconciled members of the Church. During Lent, many parishes still provide extra opportunities for their members to receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

- What are some ways you can prepare for Easter?
- What are some ways you've been preparing to come into the Catholic Church?



Why Is Fasting Part of Lent?

Fasting is a time-honored religious practice. (See 1 Samuel 7:5–16, 1 Kings 21:25–29, Joel 2:12–13, Acts 13:2–3, Acts 14:23.) Over the centuries, it was used as a way to concentrate better in prayer. Like other religious practices, however, fasting needs to be done in the right spirit and with an open heart.

The Church teaches that **fasting** (eating just one full meal per day) and **abstinence** (doing without certain foods) must be combined with prayer and works of charity for genuine Christian living. Fasting isn't the same as dieting, and we don't fast during Lent to lose weight or impress other people. In fact, Jesus even tells us not to call attention to ourselves when we fast (Matthew 6:16–18). Fasting is a spiritual practice that's meant to refocus attention on God.

All Catholics between the ages of fourteen and fifty-nine who are in good health are obliged to fast and abstain. In the United States, all Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence from meat. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of both fasting and abstinence.



Why Should I Give Something Up?

Jesus often required his disciples to give things up so that they could follow him. Members of the early Christian community in Jerusalem gave up ownership of their goods to support the community (Acts 2:44; 4:32).

When we give something up, our goal isn't to bring suffering into our lives. It's to focus our attention on God and bring him back into the center of our lives.

This might mean turning off the television or phone for a while or postponing time with friends to have more time to spend with the Lord. Giving up time to God in prayer might be a real penance for you. Or you can use your time, talent, and treasure to serve others.

The point isn't just to give up something for Lent but to actively pay attention to our lives and how God currently fits into them. Sometimes we discover we need to give something up, other times that we need to add something.

Lent is a good time to ask:

- What do I need to feel happy?
- What occupies a lot of my time and energy? Is it using more time and energy than it should?
- Do I have unhealthy habits that push me away from God?

- Ask yourself the questions above.
- How can you recenter your life on God this Lent?



Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are all important parts of Lent. As a group or with a partner, brainstorm ways you can pray, fast, and give this Lent. Include how those activities can help refocus your life on God.



Think about areas in your life where you need to make more of an effort to include God.

What could you give up or add to your life this Lent to help?



Journey of Faith for Teens: Enlightenment, E2 (826313)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

Imprimatur: "In accordance with CIC 827, permission to publish has been granted on June 30, 2016, by the Rev. Msgr. Mark S. Rivotuso, Vicar General, Archdiocese of St. Louis. Permission to publish is an indication that nothing contrary to Church teaching is contained in this work. It does not imply any endorsement of the opinions expressed in the publication; nor is any liability assumed by this permission."

Journey of Faith for Teens © 2000, 2016 Liguori Publications, Liguori, MO 63057. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, stored, transmitted, or posted in any form by any means without prior written permission. To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521. Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists. To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com. Editors of 2016 edition: Theresa Nienaber and Pat Fosarelli, MD, DMin. Design: Lorena Mitre Jimenez. Images: Shutterstock.

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. Excerpts from English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America © 1994 United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*; English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* © 1997 United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. Compliant with *The Roman Missal, Third Edition*. Printed in the United States of America. 20 19 18 17 16 / 5 4 3 2 1. Third Edition.