

# A Guide for the Season of Lent

## What is Lent?

The highlight of the year for Christians is Easter, the day when our Lord rose from the dead. Lent is a forty-day season of preparation for Easter. Lent always begins on a Wednesday, called Ash Wednesday.

Why 40 days? Because, Jesus fasted and was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days. Lent, then, is our time of fasting, prayer, temptation and repentance. Lent is not required anywhere in scriptures, but it has been a custom, which Christians have practiced for most of the last two thousand years.

In many languages, the word "Lent" actually means "fast." This is where the custom of giving up something for Lent originated.

However, just to confuse things, Lent is actually 46 days rather than 40 days. Why? Because the 40 days of Lent are supposed to be days of fasting, which means days of discipline and self-restraint. But Sunday, the Lord's Day, should never be a day of fasting, but a day of celebration! So each Sunday we suspend our Lenten disciplines and celebrate. Lent is 40 "fasting" days spread out over a total of 46 days beginning on Ash Wednesday.

The focus of Lent is always a time for serious, disciplined self-examination, a time spent in intensive prayer and repentance before the cross of Calvary. Put simply, Lent is a time to examine ourselves carefully. Here are some questions upon which you might pray and meditate during Lent:

- Am I sharing gladly what I have with others, especially the stranger and the poor?
- Do I have a gracious and patient attitude with others, especially those who irritate me?
- Do I feel the power of connection to God and the church in corporate worship?
- How is my devotional and prayer life progressing? Am I listening to God more and complaining less? Is it time for a change or a growth in my Bible study and prayer life?
- What are the lurking sin problems, which still plague me?

- Am I as thoughtful and forgiving of family as others, or do I take my frustrations out on them?
- Do I speak up for the maligned and oppressed, or do I remain silent in order to remain popular?

## Giving Something Up For Lent

In Lent, it's traditional to **give up** (or '*fast from*') something(s) that we do a lot of and that we find pleasure in. This 'giving up' is done:

- as a discipline for learning self-control, to free our minds from the chase after material things, to tell ourselves 'no' and make it stick;
- to identify with Christ's sufferings, and remember what the true pleasures are for followers of Christ;
- as an act of sorrow over our wrongdoings and our state of sin.

Sometimes we don't notice how certain things we do have gained power over us and dictate our actions. In Lent fasts, we discover these things and give them up so that God can be in charge. Franciscans use the term 'detachment': the less that 'stuff' preoccupies your life, the more room there is for God, as well as for yourself and for other people.

## Food Fasts

The most common thing is to fast from food for Lent. To Catholics, this means giving up meats on Fridays for the season, or to fast entirely for one day a week. You might try giving up pizza or fast food or snacks. Food fasts are not just the most traditional way of living Lent, they're also the simplest to do.

## Non-Food Fasts

If giving up food isn't much of a task for you, choose something else that you have to make a *serious effort* to give up. For many people, that means 40 days without something like television, impulse shopping, catalogue shopping, spending on credit cards, or even Facebook.

Remember, Jesus is not looking for self-torture, self-hatred, woe-is-me thinking, 40-day starvation and oceans of tears. Lent is for soberly looking into yourself and getting down to what's real. Sundays aren't counted in the 40 days of Lent, because every Sunday carries with it a part of the glow of

Easter Sunday. So it's not all gloom and doom. But even on the Sundays, the theme of repentance (turning from our ungodly ways) holds true. When you repent, you please God whether you fast or not, and that is what counts most for Lent.

## Adding Something For Lent

Lent is not all about giving things up. It's also about **adding** good things to our lives or to others' lives – the kind of good things that follow on what Jesus asks of us, especially that which relates to what we're giving up. Try these:

- Reconcile yourself to someone you don't like, or even hate or did something bad to, or just intentionally stayed away from.
- Do acts of kindness for people, just because the opportunity's there; give them little tastes of God's love.
- If you haven't taken the time lately to be in a refreshing, natural spot, do so.
- Take some time to study about what causes poverty. Follow the threads as far as you can. Not only does it better help you serve Christ, but you also add into yourself a useful education in economics, sociology, and biology.
- Think upon something ordinary that you do every day, and think about God while doing it, in a way that ties into what you're doing. Or think of a place you come to regularly, and each time think where Christ might be in this place, what Christ might do there, or what you might be led to do for Christ.
- Check out your ethnic heritage. How do Christians in it mark the season?
- Try to find a new way every day to bring to mind Jesus' death on the cross, and why it happened.

## Prayers & Readings for the Lent Season

### Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth: grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence, that we may remember that it

is only by your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

*Psalm 51*

### **Litany of Penitence**

Most holy and merciful Father: we confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word and deed; by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

### *Sins Against Self*

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness; the pride, hypocrisy and impatience in our lives,

We confess to you, Lord, our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people; our anger at our own frustration and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves; our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work; our negligence in prayer and worship and our failure to commend the faith that is in us.

### *Sins Against Our Neighbour*

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done: for our blindness to human need and suffering and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

Accept our repentance, Lord, for all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us.

### *Sins Against Creation*

For our waste and pollution of your creation and our lack of concern for those who come after us, restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us; favourably hear us, for your mercy is great. Accomplish in us the work of your salvation, that we may show your glory to the world.

By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord, bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

### *Psalms 103*

### *Wednesday, February 17 – Saturday, February 20*

These initial readings help us focus on two major aspects of Lent: being aware of our condition and confessing, both individually and together.

Wednesday	We have done wrong	Daniel 9:4-19
Thursday	Sit alone in silence	Lamentations 3:19-30
Friday	Troubled by my sin	Psalms 38
Saturday	We acknowledge our sin	Isaiah 59:9-14

### *Temptation of Jesus: Monday, February 22 – Saturday, February 27*

This week we concentrate on the temptations of Jesus, observing how he responds to temptation and what we might be able to learn from those responses.

Monday	Temptation of Jesus	Matthew 4:1-11
Tuesday	Made like us	Hebrews 2:5-18
Wednesday	Tempted on the cross	Luke 23:35-43
Thursday	The Great High Priest	Hebrews 4:14-5:10
Friday	“Not my will...”	Matthew 26:36-45
Saturday	Draw near to God	Hebrews 10:19-25

### *Our Temptation: Monday, March 1 – Saturday, March 6*

The readings this week help remind us of our own temptations and how we might learn to respond more appropriately.

Monday	Common to man	1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Tuesday	“Each one is tempted when...”	James 1:12-15
Wednesday	For a little while	1 Peter 1:3-7
Thursday	Watch yourself	Galatians 6:1-5
Friday	Avoid the wicked path	Proverbs 4:10-15
Saturday	Pure joy	James 1:2-8

### *Resting in God's Presence: Monday, March 8 – Saturday, March 13*

This week, may you be reminded that “God is here” and may you find comfort and encouragement through these readings.

Monday	Joy in God's Presence	Psalms 16:7-11
Tuesday	Love and rest	1 John 3:11-20
Wednesday	“Come to me...”	Matthew 11:28-30
Thursday	No separation	Romans 8:37-39
Friday	Better is one day	Psalms 84
Saturday	Enter that rest	Hebrews 4:1-11

### *Healing Power of Jesus: Monday, March 15 – Saturday, March 20*

These readings focus on the great compassion of Jesus and the power of God to heal and change the lives of people.

Monday	“Someone touched me”	Luke 8:40-48
Tuesday	Heals blind and mute	Matthew 9:27-33
Wednesday	“Unless the Lord...”	Psalms 94:17-19
Thursday	Do you want to get well?	John 5:1-14
Friday	Faith of centurion	Matthew 8:5-13
Saturday	Healing on Sabbath	Luke 13:10-17

### *Mystery of Christ: Monday, March 22 – Saturday, March 27*

This week's readings focus our attention on the mysterious duality of Jesus: fully man and fully God.

Monday	Very nature of God	Philippians 2:5-11
Tuesday	Man of sorrows	Isaiah 53:1-7
Wednesday	Image of the invisible God	Colossians 1:15-22
Thursday	Radiance of God's glory	Hebrews 1:3-13
Friday	Wisdom of God	1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Saturday	Lives to intercede	Hebrews 7:22-28

### *Holy Week: Monday, March 29 – Saturday, April 3*

As we enter Holy Week, these readings help us focus on the grace and mercy of God demonstrated through the cross and new life through the resurrection of Jesus.

Monday	Power of His resurrection	Philippians 3:7-11
Tuesday	Eagerly await	1 Corinthians 1:4-9
Wednesday	Riches of God's grace	Ephesians 1:3-14
Thursday	Great love of God	Psalms 57:7-11
Good Friday	The death of Jesus	John 19:16-42
Saturday	Alive in Christ	Ephesians 2:1-10

### *The Gospel Accounts of Jesus Crucifixion and Death*

Matthew 27:32-56

Mark 15:21-41

Luke 23:26-49

John 19:17-37