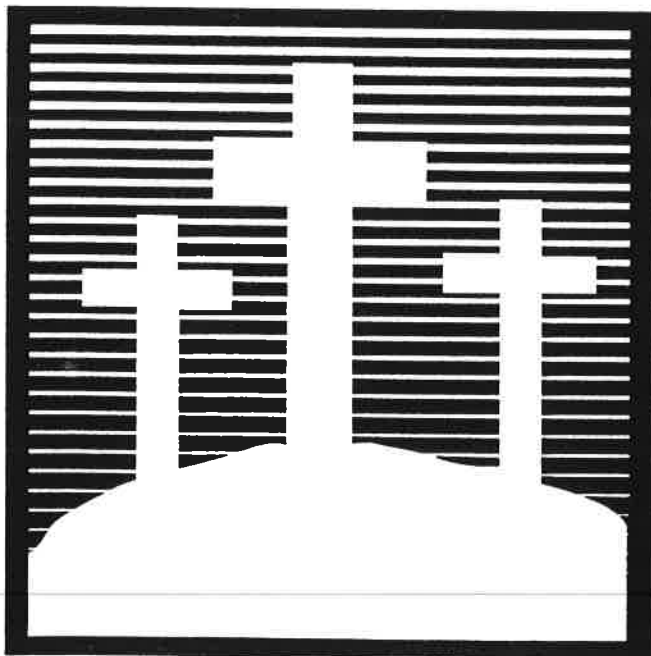


A LOOK AT LENT IN THE PAST

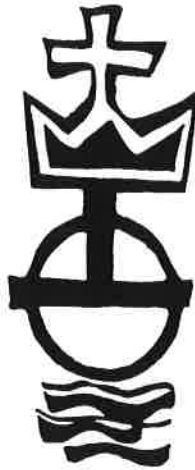
Over the centuries the Church has changed the way people approach the season of Lent. The Church in the first centuries after the death and resurrection of Jesus had a short period of prayer and fasting. This was preparation for an all night vigil and a celebration of the Eucharist.

For new Christians preparing to be baptized, Lent became an important period of preparation. It was a time of prayer, meditation and good works. For Christians who had committed serious sins, Lent became a time of penance. On the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, sinners were enrolled as public penitents and were sprinkled with ashes as a sign of their repentance.

By the Middle Ages the forty days of Lent had been set. It was based on the forty days Christ spent fasting and praying in the desert. Christians were encouraged to fast and pray. Fewer candidates prepared for Easter Baptism however, and Lent became more of a time of spiritual renewal for all Christians.



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A LOOK AT LENT TODAY

This century saw many changes in the manner in which the Church encouraged the faithful to observe the season of Lent. Strict rules for fasting and abstinence were changed. In some dioceses abstinence from meat is still required on all Fridays during Lent. Fasting is usually required only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday in most places. The relaxing of the laws of fast and abstinence was meant to leave room for people to make personal choices about the best way to make Lent a spiritual preparation for Easter for themselves.

The Second Vatican Council went back to the early Christian practice of having candidates prepare for Easter Baptism. The faithful were encouraged to choose forms of penance and other Lenten practices that would foster their own personal spiritual growth and satisfy their own spiritual needs.

A Positive Attitude

The emphasis today is on a positive attitude toward Lent, one in which people are requested to think of ways in which they could do charitable works, build community, and renew their own spiritual life. Christians are asked to recall their baptism and take the commitment of being a Christian more seriously.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) has become an important part of the Lenten Season in most parishes. There is a return to the idea of having candidates for Easter Baptism enter the final stages of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation during Lent. These candidates, or catechumens, are accepted into the Church during the Easter Vigil. They receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

A LOOK AT LENT OF THE FUTURE

No one knows what kind of world their children will grow up in or how their children will live out their faith. Families who attempt to plan and share special times together, however, will derive benefits from the experience that cannot always be measured.

The season of Lent is a perfect opportunity for parents to share their faith. What a family chooses to do for Lent is not as important as the fact that the spirit of Lent is still a part of their lives. Lent is a time of spiritual renewal, a time to take a good look at our lives, a time to make the changes necessary to become better Christians.

No one knows what Lent will be like for the next generation of Christians. But how Christians families celebrate it now can lay out a positive path for them to take. It must be remembered always that Lent is the road to Easter and we are Easter People, a people looking with hope to a future in Christ.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

The Way of the Cross, sometimes called stations, is a Lenten devotional practice. It traces Jesus' journey from His trial before Pilate to His death and burial. Many churches have, placed on the walls, the Stations depicting each stage of this journey.

During Lent, parishes schedule this special devotion as a time for the community to meditate on Christ's Passion together. Moving from stations to station, the story of Jesus' death is told. At each station, songs are sung and prayers are said. Older children will find the Stations a good way to follow the story of the Passion. Younger children may benefit more from a walk from station to station with a parent.

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REMEMBERING BAPTISM



Lent is a perfect time for families to take out family albums, videos, or pictures taken on the baptismal day of the children in the family. Spend some time talking about what happened, how it was celebrated, who was there, and what it all means.

Pray as if every-
thing depended
upon God,
and work as if
everything de-
pendded upon you.

Francis Cardinal Spellman

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY LENTEN PRACTICES

Plan to:

- serve simple meals.
- donate clothing to the needy.
- help feed the poor.
- pray together.
- volunteer for a good cause.
- help one another.
- visit the sick and lonely.
- read scripture together.
- make time for family projects.
- go to Mass.

