
How Lent Got Its Name

The Saxons called the month of March "lencten monath" because during March, the days grow longer or lengthen. The great fast between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday fell during the weeks of March. This fast began to be called Lencten-foesten, or Lent.

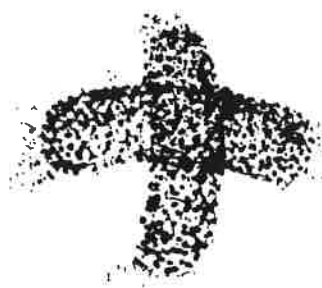
Early in the seventh century, the Lenten fast was fixed at forty days. This was done to remind people of Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert.

Lent Today

The Lenten season begins with Ash Wednesday. On that day, Catholics receive ashes on their foreheads and hear the words: "Repent and believe the good news."

Lent is a period of renewal and repentance. Catholics are asked to renew their Baptismal promises. Families are asked to look at their lives and see what has to be changed or renewed to live up to their promises at Baptism. Each member of a family must decide what sacrifices they are willing to make to become the Christians they promised to be.

Lent is a time to prepare for Easter, the celebration of Christ's new life. Children should be encouraged to do positive things during this season in preparation for Easter. Families can join together to make a joint resolution that can be kept throughout the days of Lent. Lent often provides a good opportunity for families to change something that they don't like about themselves and their lives together.



Family Prayer

According to Clement of Alexandria, "Prayer is conversation with God." Families can learn prayer by conversing with each other. Conversation involves thinking, listening, and speaking. It has been said that, in this age of high technology, conversation is becoming a lost art. Hopefully, by keeping alive the art of conversation among family members, we can keep alive their ability, not only to share company and conversation with one another, but with their God. Time has to be built into the day when members of a family can relax and share their day, their thoughts, and their dreams. Perhaps a prime time for communication and conversation can be selected each day, such as some time after school or work, at the dinner table, or before going to bed. This might also be a good time for family prayer.

Many years ago, the Knights of Columbus printed bumper stickers, put up billboards, and painted this motto everywhere. It said: "The family that prays together, stays together."

Perhaps after so many years, something can be added to that motto. Families that talk to each other regularly are also more likely to form bonds that are not easily broken. Communication seems to be the key in relationships between spouses, parents, and children and people with their God.

FRIDAYS IN LENT

FASTING AND ABSTINENCE

Talk to your children about fasting and abstinence, especially on Fridays during Lent. Jesus was crucified on a Friday. Tell them you are not going to eat meat that day. Ask them for help in coming up with some menu ideas: macaroni and cheese, pasta with meatless tomato sauce, scrambled eggs and toast, soup and grilled cheese, rice and beans, potato pancakes, vegetarian tacos, pierogi, tuna and noodle casserole

Explain how fasting means limited eating and no snacking. This applies to all healthy Catholics over 14 years. Pregnant or nursing women are exempt. Fasting means only a minimum of foods between meals, this food should be essential type food and not junk food. Young people can become quite vigilant with each other, and with parents, once they understand what fasting is all about.

FASTING, SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

The value of self-denial must be learned early in a person's life. Lent provides an excellent opportunity to teach children the necessity of self-denial in our permissive society. Learning about the spirit of fasting can include restriction of luxuries such as having dinner in a restaurant, watching television, playing computer games, shopping or going out with friends.

A good spring cleaning can help children evaluate the excesses in their lives. They can be encouraged to give away clothing, toys, games or other possessions to those in need. They can also be encouraged to give time to the Lord by volunteering their services.

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THE CROSS

In the symbol of the Cross we can see the magnitude of the human tragedy, the ravages of original sin, and the infinite love of God. Lent is a particularly appropriate time to attempt to understand the true meaning of this sacred image through prayerful meditation. Lent is a perfect opportunity to study the traditions surrounding the Christian symbol of the Cross. Looking at the Cross in prayer helps us truly to see it. Most Christians have crosses in their homes. If your home lacks a displayed crucifix, Lent is a good time to acquire and exhibit this Christian symbol of faith.

It is fitting that Christians glorify the Cross as a sign of Christ's resurrection and victory

over sin and death, of course. We should also remember that the Cross of Jesus' crucifixion was an emblem of physical

anguish and

personal

defilement, of debasement and humiliation, of degradation and

shame. It was a means of execution, like a gallows or a gas chamber. What the Son of God endured for us was the depth of ugliness and humiliation. We need to be reminded of the tremendous personal cost of love.

