

LENT FAQ

When Does Lent Start in 2012?

Lent starts on Ash Wed, Feb 22 and ends with the start of the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Good Thursday, which is the beginning of the Triduum. Easter Sunday is April 8.

What is Lent?

Lent is a time when the Catholic Church collectively enters into preparation for the celebration of Easter. Lent originally developed as a forty-day retreat, preparing converts to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. It is now a part of our Church's liturgical calendar and a season of conversion for all. Conversion is the process of turning away from sin and turning to God.

Are Sundays a part of Lent?

Sundays are always a day of celebration of Christ's passion and Resurrection, so we celebrate on these days. While still part of the season of Lent, they have a mixture of both celebration (because it is Sunday) and repentance (because it is Lent).

Does this mean I can "cheat" on Sundays?

Since Sundays are not part of the penitential season, you are not *required* to practice signs of penitence on these days. But, there is no reason you can't do them either. If you feel you are "cheating" then it isn't helping! Since the Church has some conflicting information (different documents state different things) I think you should do what you feel is best regarding the Lenten season and Sundays. In other words, follow your conscience.

Why forty days and not some other number?

Because 40 is a special number in the Bible. It signifies preparation for something special - as in the 40 day flood of Noah.

- *Moses stayed on the Mount Sinai forty days (Ex 24:18),
- Jonah gives the people of Ninevah forty days to repent (Jon 3:4) - (there are many other Old Testament stories)
- *Jesus, before starting his ministry, spent 40 days in the desert in prayer and fasting (Matt 4:2).

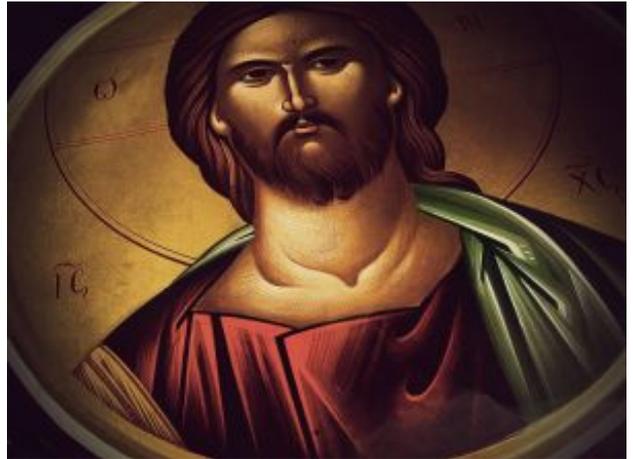
So, as in the Bible, we spend 40 days in preparing ourselves to rejoice at the Resurrection of our Lord at Easter.

What is Ash Wednesday all about?

Ash Wednesday is so named because this first day of Lent is where we are marked with ashes to show the repentance of our sins and mourning. This is also a Biblical sign that we live today. We can see this in several verses.

- "I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes" (Dan 9:3)
- Other verses include: 1 Sam 4:12, Jon 3:6, Esther 4:1 and Matt 11:20-21

Today, ashes are still this same sign of repentance and mourning for our sins. They also represent our mortality. "I am nothing but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). We started as nothing and our bodies will become dust and ashes after our death. Reminding ourselves that nobody escapes physical death, we look forward to eternal life.



So, why are the ashes made into a cross on the forehead?

Because it is the ancient sign of being marked by Christ in our baptism. We are no longer our own, but Jesus Christ owns us. The book of Revelation tells us that all the elect will be marked by the sign of Christ - "On Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." (Rev 14:1)

Where do we get the ashes?

They come from burning the palms from last years Palm Sunday Masses.

Who can receive ashes?

Anyone can receive ashes on Ash Wed. While we have communion only for Catholics who are in good standing with the Church, all may receive ashes.

Is Ash Wed a holy day of Obligation?

No. But all Catholics are strongly urged to attend, because it is the start of the Lenten season.

Do we have to fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wed?

Yes. This means that all Catholics from 14 and up are required to abstain from meat and Catholics 18-60 are required to eat only one average meal and two snacks without anything else. Children, the elderly and those who are sick are not obligated to do this.

Why fast?

Again, this is because we are called to by Jesus. By denying ourselves something good, we remember what the highest good of all is - GOD. We also practice self-discipline and self-mastery, which we need in order to achieve holiness. Jesus fasted in the desert and calls us to as well.

- "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." (Matt 6: 16)
- "and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer." (Luke 2:37)
- Fasting also helps focus us in our prayer. *Yet when they were ill, I...humbled myself with fasting." (Psalm 35:13)

Why abstain from meat?

Because of the spiritual discipline it provides. "In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia . . . 'I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.'" (Dan 10:1-3) We give up meat, which still today is a luxury in some parts of the world, as a good thing that we offer up in order to remember that Christ is better than food and needed more by all of us than anything else.

Why is fish not considered meat?

Because it was the food of the poor who could not afford meat, yet could catch fish to sustain themselves.

So, what are the other days of fast and abstinence?

Good Friday is a day of fasting and abstinence. All Fridays during Lent are days of abstinence from meat, this is because Christ died on a Friday.

So, why do people "give up" things during Lent?

While we are not required to "give something up" we are required to do something penitential. Lent is a great time to break a bad habit and give it to the Lord. These sins and vices we should not take back after Lent. It is also a time to give something up that is good during this season. This is why people give up something they enjoy. In doing so we can draw closer to God by our temporary sacrifice. We should find an appropriate balance of giving something up and not completely cutting ourselves off of good things. We will find our need for God if we do it correctly.

What else then IS required during Lent?

The Church asks us to increase our prayer, fasting and almsgiving. It is assumed that we are already doing these things and should merely increase them.

Got any suggestions?

First off, pray about what you are going to do for Lent. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in your spiritual practice of Lent. Then find a few things that you feel called to do. Don't do too much or too little. Stretch yourself, but don't pick things you won't stick to.