



A GUIDE TO...

Lent

WHAT IS LENT?

Lent is the Liturgical season of preparation leading up to Easter. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at the Easter Vigil - the Saturday night before Easter Sunday. Lent is one of the most important times of year for Catholics. Like Advent, Lent is a time of preparation. Whilst Advent is a time of joyful anticipation, Lent is a time of penitence and repentance.



40 DAYS

WHEN IS LENT?

The name LENT come from the English word 'lengthen' as it is the time of years when the daylight hours gets noticeably longer. The starting date of Lent always changes. This is because is based on Easter, which is based on the Jewish feast of Passover which takes its date from the luna calendar. Ash Wednesday is the Wednesday before the 6th Sunday before Easter. Lent is seven and a half weeks in total.

WHY 40 DAYS?

40 is a significant number with symbolic meaning that is used throughout scripture. In the Bible it is used to significant period of preparation or change - a generation or even a lifetime. Before receiving the 10 Commandments, Moses stayed up the mountain with God forty days (Ex 24:18, 34:28), the Hebrew spies checked out the Promised Land for forty days (Num 13:25), and Nineveh was given forty days to repent (Jon 3:4). Most significantly, after his baptism and before beginning his public ministry, Jesus spent forty days in the desert praying and fasting (Mat 4:2).

LENT & THE LIFE OF JESUS

Christian seasons often ask us to reflect on two aspects. Lent causes us to reflect on the beginning and end of Jesus' MINISTRY - ministry simply means his *working life*. Before going public, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert. Therefore the beginning of Lent focusses on Fasting & Prayer. Jesus' ministry ended with his PASSION and death. The last week of Lent is HOLY WEEK which starts on PALM SUNDAY and includes the LAST SUPPER and GOOD FRIDAY.



ASH WEDNESDAY



Jesus in the Desert



PALM SUNDAY



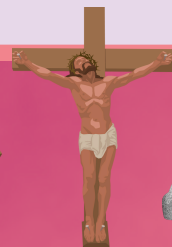
MAUNDY THURSDAY



Trial with Pontius Pilate



GOOD FRIDAY
Passion & Suffering



Crucifixion & Death



Burial

WHAT IS THE LITURGICAL COLOUR OF LENT?

Purple, is the liturgical colour worn during the season of Lent as it signifies penance and preparation. It also symbolises wealth and power, often worn by royalty. The Scriptures tell us that a purple garment was placed on Jesus during his Passion as a mockery of the claim he was *King of the Jews*. Other colours are worn at special times during Lent:

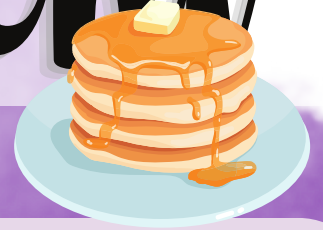
ROSE - at the halfway point. **RED** - on Palm Sunday & Good Friday. **WHITE** - on Maundy Thursday.



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WHAT DO CATHOLICS DO DURING LENT?



The Gospel reading from the Mass of Ash Wednesday (Matt 6:1-6, 16-18) introduces us to the three main disciplines of Lent.

FASTING, ALMSGIVING, PRAYER



FASTING

Fasting is the practice of eating no, or less food. Originally the Christian Lenten fast involved eating no food at all until sunset or evening prayer. It is believed the lenten fast was the inspiration behind the Ramadan fast of Muslims which began centuries later. Meals would be strictly vegan with the allowance of fish. During HOLY WEEK (the last week of Lent) Christians would eat only bread and vegetables.

WHAT ABOUT GIVING UP CHOCOLATE?

In 1966 an attempt was made by Pope Paul VI to make fasting more personal. Official fast days were reduced to just Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Catholics were only expected to abstain from meat on Fridays. Other personal fasts or abstinences were encouraged - the most popular now being chocolate.

ALMSGIVING

During Lent it is customary to have a particular focus on serving the needs of the poor. This causes us to look out from ourselves and become more aware of the needs of those around us. Catholic schools and parishes often have lots of fundraising initiatives during lent.

WHAT ABOUT PANCAKES & EGGS?

In preparation for their lenten fast, Catholic homes would use up all their dairy products in the period leading up to lent. A final clear out would happen on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. Pancakes are a great way of using up butter, milk eggs and flour. In French this day earned the name *Fat Tuesday* or 'Mardi Gras'. *Shrove Tuesday* comes from the old English word *shrive* which means to be absolved from sin and was related to the practice of receiving the Sacrament of Confession before Lent begins. *Mardi Gras*, *Shrove Tuesday* and *Pancake Day* is not official memorials in the Church calendar.

EASTER EGGS

Archeological evidence can date the custom decorating eggs at least 60,000 years! Many pagan cultures would have celebrated spring and the rebirth (resurrection?) of nature after winter. Christians adopted these customs into the celebration of Easter. With many Christians giving up Chocolate for Lent, chocolate eggs became a feature of celebrating the end of the Lenten fast and feast of Easter.

PRAYER

Catholics are encouraged to go deeper in prayer during lent. This might mean starting from scratch and trying to begin some form of daily habit of prayer. For others this might mean adding something extra such as reading scripture.

Certain prayers are especially recommended during Lent. These include: THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS and THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY.

WHY FAST, GIVE & PRAY?

Like many religious practices, fasting, focussing on the welfare of others, and time in prayer and meditation have been proven to improve our own self-esteem, mental health, and sense of happiness. These disciplines cause us to break free from unhealthy attachments and find greater joy in life.

Jesus said he came *that we would have life to the full* (John 10:10).



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WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACH ABOUT LENT?

A TIME OF CONVERSION & RENEWAL

“By the solemn forty days of Lent, the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.” (CCC 540)

Lent mirrors Christ's 40 days in the desert, calling the faithful to spiritual renewal.

A CALL TO PENANCE & REPENTANCE

“Jesus' call to conversion and penance... does not aim first at outward works, ‘sackcloth and ashes,’ fasting and mortification, but at the conversion of the heart.”

(CCC 1430)

Lent emphasises interior transformation over mere external practices.

A TIME OF FASTING, ALMSGIVING & PRAYER

“The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year... help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart.” (CCC 2043)

These three traditional practices deepen spiritual discipline and detachment from sin.

A TIME OF PREPARATION OF EASTER

“The Lenten season is a preparation for the celebration of Easter.” (CCC 1095)

It recalls salvation history and invites the faithful to renew their baptismal promises.

A CALL TO SHARE IN CHRIST'S SUFFERING

“Following in Christ's steps... the faithful should strive to accept the sufferings of this present time in a spirit of faith.” (CCC 618)

Lent invites believers to unite their sufferings with Christ for their sanctification. When we enter into Christ's suffering, he enters into our own suffering, bringing strength and hope.

Lent is ultimately a time of deep spiritual growth, focusing on conversion, penance, and preparation for the joy of Easter.

LENT IN THE 'RED'

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DIRECTORY

Desert to garden: *“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day” (1 Cor 15:3). In this branch, pupils will study the season of Lent and its culmination in the events of Holy Week. They will learn about the Paschal Triduum at the heart of the Catholic Church's Liturgy and life. The title of this branch points both to the liturgical journey from the desert of Lent to the garden of Resurrection, but also to the Paschal journey from darkness to light, barrenness to fruitfulness, death to life.*

(To Know You More Clearly: RED p. 62)

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED END OF AGE-PHASE OUTCOMES IN THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM DIRECTORY RELATED TO LENT?

AGES 5-7

U1.4.1

U1.4.2

U1.4.6

U2.4.2

AGES 7-9

U4.4.6

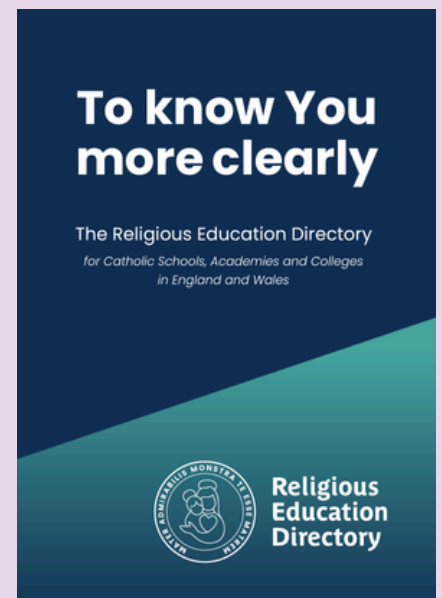
AGES 9-11

U5.4.2

AGES 11-14

U8.4.6

U8.4.7





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PRAYER IN LENT

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

The *Stations of the Cross* is a way of praying through the events of Jesus' suffering, execution and death. The Catholic Stations of the Cross divide these events of Good Friday into 14 separate stations:

1. Jesus is condemned to death.
2. Jesus is made to carry his cross.
3. Jesus falls the first time.
4. Jesus meets his mother.
5. Simon of Cyrene is made to carry the cross.
6. Veronica wipes Jesus' face.
7. Jesus falls the second time.
8. The women of Jerusalem weep over Jesus.
9. Jesus falls the third time.
10. Jesus is stripped of his garments.
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross.
12. Jesus dies on the cross.
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross.
14. Jesus is placed in the tomb.

The Stations of the Cross can often be seen as pictures or statues around the walls of a church and can be prayed by walking from station to station. Most parishes have liturgies on Fridays in Lent where communities can pray the Stations of the Cross together.



READING SCRIPTURE

Catholics are encouraged to spend more time reading scripture during Lent. This might include reading the daily Gospels from the Mass of each day, or reading one of the Gospels in daily instalments.



THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

During Lent a special emphasis of praying the rosary whilst meditating on the Sorrowful Mysteries. A MYSTERY is a profound moment from the life of Jesus or Mary that contains spiritual benefits when meditated upon. When praying the rosary, a mystery is thought about whilst each DECADE of the rosary is prayed. A decade contains one *Our Father*, ten *Hail Marys*, and one *Glory Be* prayers. There are five decades in each rosary. The five sorrowful mysteries are:

1. The Agony in the Garden.
2. The Scourging at the Pillar.
3. The Crowning with Thorns.
4. The Carrying of the Cross.
5. The Crucifixion and Death.



THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Many Catholics take the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent. In this Sacrament, Catholics confess their sins to a priest. When we sin we don't just hurt ourselves spiritually - we increase the sin in the world which affects everyone. Instead of confessing our sins to everyone, Catholics are only required to confess them to a priest. Through the authority of his priesthood, and grace of God, the priest confers the forgiveness of God and ABSOLVES the penitent of their sin. To absolve means to completely remove all guilt for the sins.

Many parishes host reconciliation services during Lent and have increased times when the Sacrament of Reconciliation is available.



MEDITATION

Many of the prayers promoted in Lent are opportunities for MEDITATION. Meditation simply means to think deeply. In the Stations of the Cross and the Sorrowful Mysteries, we are encouraged to think deeply about Christ's suffering and death. When we think and pray about Jesus' PASSION we enter into Christ's suffering in a profound way. When we do this, we invite Jesus into our own suffering, to which he brings grace and healing. Many faithful Catholics also pray these prayers at times of severe illness and near to death.

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OTHER KEY WORDS & PHRASES

PENANCE

Penance is an act of good or prayer that is said to help with the healing of sin. If we were to break something, we could be forgiven by the owner, but it is still good to clear up the mess - even if we can't replace the item. Penance is a spiritual way of doing what we can to clear up the mess we make when we sin. We cannot undo our sins, but penance is a way in which we help the healing.

ABSTINENCE

Abstinence is often mistaken for fasting. Fasting is going without, or with very little food. Not eating meat on a Friday, or chocolate during Lent is *NOT* fasting, it is abstaining. We can also abstain from other things like drinking alcohol, playing games consoles, social media or any other behaviour. We are only called to abstain from good things as we shouldn't be doing bad things anyway. Abstinence is a good way to keep indulgences in check or create good habits. Abstinence and fasting can both be used as an act of PENANCE.

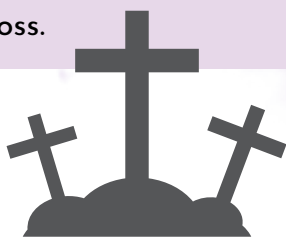
PASSION



The word 'passion' simply means suffering. Our passions are the things we are willing to suffer for. When we are truly passionate about something, we are prepared to suffer for it. Jesus suffered during his execution so it is called the *Passion of the Christ*. It's also important to remember that we are his passion too, as it was for us that he suffered.

WAY OF THE CROSS/VIA DOLOROSA

The Way of the Cross and Via Dolorosa (Way of Sorrow) are other names for Jesus' Passion. They can also be used to describe the Stations of the Cross.



PASCHAL MYSTERY

The Paschal Mystery is the term used to include Jesus' LIFE, DEATH, RESURRECTION & ASCENSION. Lent and Easter present a full journey through the Paschal Mystery from the start of Jesus' ministry to his ascension to heaven. The term *mystery* is used for concepts that contain deep truths that we will never fully comprehend but are beneficial to reflect, meditate and pray about. The Paschal Mystery contains the hope that all Christians hold that we too will die but rise again with Christ.

ASH WEDNESDAY

The first day of Lent. Called Ash Wednesday as Christians receive a mark of ashes on their forehead as an act of penance.

HOLY WEEK

The last week of Lent. Holy week begins on PALM SUNDAY which remembers Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It is also called PASSION SUNDAY as the main Gospel reading is the Passion of the Christ. MAUNDY THURSDAY remembers the LAST SUPPER and Jesus' arrest. GOOD FRIDAY recounts Jesus' trial, torture, execution, death and burial. HOLY SATURDAY remembers Jesus in the tomb. Holy Week will be explored more in its own resource.

EASTER

Easter is the season that Lent is preparing us for. It begins at the EASTER VIGIL on Saturday evening after Good Friday and before Easter Sunday.



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ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

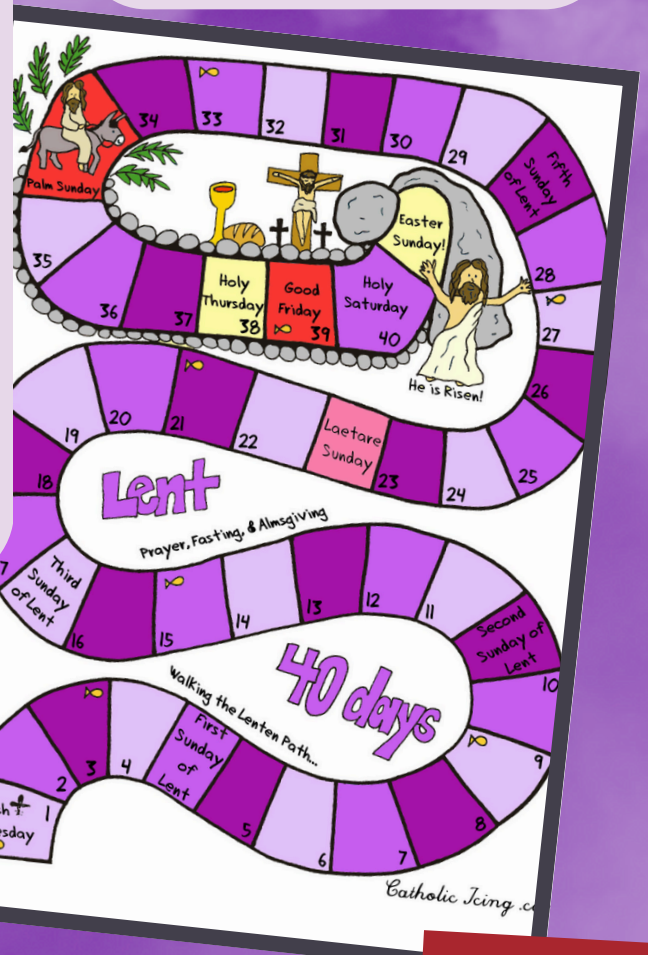
The best Lent activities will help the participants return back to the themes of Fasting, Giving & Prayer.

catholicicing.com is a great one-stop for lots of easy, crafty and simple ideas for school and home to enrich the season.

The top resources include the Lent Calendar (right) which resembles a path that we walk with Jesus. A favourite in my house is 'Pray, Fast, Give' challenges (below). Each a day child pulls a lent challenge from one of the pockets. A dice can be used to choose from which pocket the challenge comes from. Challenges can include: FAST from screen time, PRAY for a teacher, GIVE a complement to somebody in another class.

CATHOLICICING.COM

[/activities-for-families-throughout-lent/](http://activities-for-families-throughout-lent/)



PRAYER & LITURGY DIRECTORY

To love You more dearly

The Prayer & Liturgy Directory for Catholic Schools, Academies and Colleges in England and Wales

Prayer & Liturgy Directory

LITURGY

With an increase in prayer it is common that there are more opportunities for liturgy during Lent. Ash Wednesday may be celebrated with a simple liturgy or Mass where Ashes are distributed. During Lent the Gloria is not included, and Alleluias are removed from the texts most noticeable at the Gospel Acclamation.

A nice activity to do at the start of Lent or before the Easter holidays, is to bury a banner with ALLELUIA on. If you can't bury it in the ground, perhaps use a box or some other piece of furniture. Taking the banner out is like Jesus rising from the dead.

MUSIC

Lent is an opportunity to strip things back. Avoid songs that include Alleluia. Perhaps introduce pupils to chanting. TAIZE chants are a good place to start as well as the parts of the Mass.

The PRAYER & LITURGY DIRECTORY reminds us that it is more important to sing/chant the parts of the the Mass then to include hymns.