

# Lent: It's more than that stuff in your bellybutton

This year I have had more people ask me about Lent than ever before. So, I thought you might want to get a quick refresher on the season.

Lent is a season of soul-searching and repentance. It is a season for reflection and taking stock. It originated in the very earliest days of the Church as a time of preparation for Easter, when the faithful rededicated themselves and when converts were instructed in the faith and prepared for baptism.

By observing the 40 days of Lent, the individual Christian imitates Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for 40 days. The early church of the New Testament observed Lent, believing it to be a commandment from the apostles.

Let me give you some other history. I begin with a celebration many of you enjoyed, Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras (also known as Carnival in some countries) is usually a period of celebration. It was originally a festival before the fasting during the season of Lent.

Mardi Gras or Carnival, comes from a Latin phrase meaning "removal of meat," is the three-day period preceding the beginning of Lent, the Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday immediately before Ash Wednesday, which is the first day

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of the Lenten Season. The same three days are also known as Shrovetide ("shrove" is an Old English word meaning "to repent").

Shrove Tuesday is more popularly known by the French term Mardi Gras, meaning "Fat Tuesday," it contrasts the fasting during Lent by emphasizing the need to fill up before fasting. Many churches now observe Mardi Gras with a church pancake meal, eating together as a community before the symbolic fasting of Lent begins.

Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter Sunday, is the first day of the Season of Lent. The name comes from the ancient practice of placing ashes on worshippers' heads or foreheads as a sign of humility before God, a symbol of mourning and sorrow at the death that sin brings into the world. It not only prefigures the mourning at the death of Jesus, but also places us on the cross in Jesus' place. We realize that He was the innocent and we are the guilty, yet grace has saved us from sin and death.

Thus, Lent begins in ashes and

it journeys through darkness to the foot of the cross. It is a spiritual pilgrimage that lasts for 40 days (except Sundays). We pray and fast and think about all Jesus did for us. I have heard the passage in 2 Chronicles 7:14 quoted a lot: "... if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Finally Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday as Jesus enters into the city of Jerusalem. The Lenten Season ends with Maundy Thursday (the Last Supper with the disciples), Good Friday (the day of Jesus' crucifixion), and Holy Saturday (the day Jesus rested in the tomb). Forty days to contemplate the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... the one God who gives us joy, love, life, laughter, and salvation. Forty days to remember that we deserved the cross, not Him. Forty days to praise God and thank God for the radical love that is still with us now. Death has no sting, because God has claimed you as His own. Just so you know! Until next time, Blessings!

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