

A Primer on Lent

- The word Lent is derived from old English (lenten), German (lenz) and Dutch (lente) words which mean “spring”.
- Lent is approximately 40 days. For Catholics it starts on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday, the Thursday before Easter Sunday.
- In the Church’s liturgical calendar it is a time of prayer, penance and almsgiving. It is true that these things should be practiced year round in the life of the Christian. However it is human nature for people to let their spiritual lives slip. During Lent the Church calls on her flock to a spiritual spring cleaning through works of charity; an extended retreat to charge the batteries.
- Christ fasted 40 days in the desert before beginning his public ministry. The Church participates in the life of Christ by setting aside 40 days to imitate him. In the liturgical calendar the Church will participate in other events of Christ’s ministry including Advent, Christmas and the Easter season.
- When the Church speaks of the liturgical calendar or liturgy it simply means the way Catholics publically worship. Liturgy includes participating in the sacraments, feast days, fast days, the order of the Mass, chanting, liturgical music, etc.
- Lent includes required fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Additionally, no meat is to be eaten on Friday’s during Lent. Christ gave the Church binding authority (i.e. “whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven”). This binding authority was practiced in Acts 15 when the Church required abstaining from types of meat. This was a temporary discipline, not a permanent doctrine. The Council of Florence declared the ban no longer binding. The decree was mandated even though Christ had previously declared all foods clean. Similar requirements by Judiazers and Gnostics were judged by Paul as compromising the Gospel (see Galatians) and doctrines of demons (see Colossians). No Apostle, church or Angel of Light has the authority to contradict the Gospel. However the meat ban was legitimate in the eyes of God! It was proclaimed within the Church’s God given authority and is the New Testament precedent for Church directed fasting. The Catholic Church behaves today as she did in Acts.
- Christians can freely choose to add works of charity or introduce additional fasting. Each Christian should consider his or her worldly attachments and choose an act accordingly. These practices are not meant to earn our way to heaven (we cannot) but to reform our lives.
- After the spiritual spring cleaning Lent provides we are better prepared to celebrate the Pasch (Easter) of Christ’s resurrection and to live our faith more fully.