

Lent 2017

“LET TODAY BE
THE DAY YOU
GIVE UP WHO
YOU’VE BEEN
FOR WHO YOU
CAN BECOME.”

Today we are 60 days into the new year. So, how are you doing with your New Year’s Resolutions? Have you read that book? lost those pounds? quite smoking? stopped leaving the lid up? That’s ok, we Catholics have Lent to get us back on the path. And just whose idea was Lent in the first place?

The English word “*Lent*” is a shortened form of the Old English/Teutonic word “*len(c)ten*,” meaning "spring season." This event is observed in the Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, and Roman Catholic Churches. In the Roman Rite, the definition of Lent varies according to different documents.

While the official document on the Lenten season, *Paschales Solemnitatis*, says that "the first Sunday of Lent marks the beginning of the annual Lenten observance", the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* says, "The forty days of Lent run from Ash Wednesday up to but excluding the Mass of the Lord's Supper exclusive." The first source represents a period of 40 days and the second a period of 44 days, because both sources agree that the end of Lent comes the evening of Holy Thursday, before the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Though some sources try to reconcile this with the phrase "forty days" by excluding Sundays and extending Lent through Holy Saturday no official documents support this interpretation.

Some of the Fathers as early as the fifth century supported the view that this forty days' fast was of Apostolic institution. For example, St. Leo (d. 461) exhorts his hearers to abstain that they may "fulfill with their fasts the Apostolic institution of the forty days". But the best modern scholars are almost unanimous in rejecting this view, for in the existing remains of the first three centuries we find both considerable diversity of practice regarding the fast before Easter and also a gradual process of development in the matter of its duration.

So what do we tell our non-Catholic brethren of our ritual? During Lent, when your friends or co-workers express curiosity about Catholic customs and symbolism, use those moments as opportunities to evangelize! Following are six common questions Catholics hear during Lent. What are your thoughts?

Ash Wednesday: What's with that dirt on your head?

“Ashes to ashes ...”

“Remember man that dust thou art ...”

Abstinence: So why aren't you eating sausage pizza on Friday?

External Sacrifice: So why exactly are you not eating candy for the next month?

This is a very popular penance during Lent, and the questions about it are just as popular. Heaven forbid you should avoid the cake at the birthday party! You LOVE cake! But it's Lent – a time for penance and sacrifice. It's not just avoiding sweets. It's glorifying God by growing in his Love.

If you feel an urge to quote scriptures, you could mention:

Christ has said, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Giving up something we enjoy strengthens our love for Christ and our resilience against temptation.

As Pope Benedict XVI said in his Lenten address of 2009, “Through fasting and praying, we allow [Christ] to come and satisfy the deepest hunger that we experience in the depths of our being: the hunger and thirst for God.” It unites us with Christ's own sacrifices and gives us a deeper appreciation of the blessings in our lives.

External Sacrifice or Internal Conversion: I don't get it. All you do is give up candy?

External sacrifice is a manifestation of interior conversion: "...interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance" (CCC no. 1430).

Interior conversion is where prayer and almsgiving come into play. In almsgiving, we show mercy and generosity to others, giving them a chance to experience the blessings we have. In prayer, we are communicating with God, asking him to bless and perfect our fasting and almsgiving: "... prayer is the living relationship of the children of

God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit" (CCC no. 2565).

Palm Sunday and Symbolism: Why are you carrying around tree branches?

Observing Good Friday vs. Opening Day: So, why can't you go to a baseball opener on Friday? (Actually it's the Friday before Good Friday - Padres vs Giants, Friday April 7 @ 3:40 PM. They're in Atlanta Good Fri-Easter Mon)

To wrap this up, I'd like to suggest a few spiritual solutions that each of us could easily adopt for this Lent, as opposed to those New Year resolutions that we abandoned before the NFL Playoffs.

- * Subscribe to any Daily Reflection. Bishop Robert Baron has a special Lenten series ready to email to your InBox. Of course, you can easily find many others on Google.

- * Download the Laudete app to your Android, iPad or iPhone. In addition to the daily scripture readings, it has audio reflections, a complete Bible, and many other links.

- * Visit the Prayer Chapel. The Blessed Sacrament is exposed every Thursday. Bring your Rosary. You'd be surprised what an hour of prayer and meditation does.

- * Go to one more Mass each week than you do now.

- * Attend the Parish Lenten Mission on March 20 - 22.

And in closing, Brothers, let us not forget to model Lenten abstinence. As good Catholic Knights we should be an example to the rest of the Parish by eating fish every Friday this Lent.