



## A Journey Through Lent

The season of Lent extends this year from Ash Wednesday, February 22, to the Mass of the Lord's Supper, April 6, inclusive. For these Forty Days we are conscious of how we must sharpen our senses and focus

mind and heart on the Reign of God. We are, above all, aware of those waters in which we were baptized into Christ's death. We died to sin and evil and began a new life in Christ.

The Church asks us to give ourselves to prayer and to the reading of Scripture, to fasting and to giving alms. The fasting that all do together on Fridays is but a sign of the daily Lenten discipline of individuals and households: fasting for certain periods of time, fasting from certain foods, but also fasting from other things and activities. Likewise, the giving of alms is some effort to share this world equally – not only through the distribution of money, but through the sharing of our time and talents. – *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007*

1. Everyone 14 years of age or over is bound to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all Fridays of Lent.
2. Everyone 18 years of age and under 59 years of age is also bound to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
3. On these two days of fast and abstinence, only one full meatless meal is allowed. The other meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to one's needs, but altogether they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted on these two days, but liquids, including milk and fruit juices are allowed.
4. When health or ability to work would be seriously affected, the obligation of the law is modified. Those that are excused from fast and abstinence outside the age limits include the physically or mentally ill including individuals suffering from chronic illnesses such as diabetes. Also excluded are pregnant or nursing women. In all cases, common sense should prevail, and ill persons should not further jeopardize their health by fasting.
5. Because Lent is a special season for all Christians, we should not lightly excuse ourselves from these penitential practices.

### **Lent in our Parishes:**

**Ash Wednesday (February 22) Mass and Distribution of Ashes** 8:00am at St. Joseph-Olney; 12:00pm (Noon) at St. Joseph-Stringtown; 6:30pm at St. Lawrence-Lawrenceville and Holy Cross-Wendelin.

**Parish Mission:** with Dr. Mark Ginter “March 5 - Eucharistic Discipleship: Please, may I introduce you to my Friend, the Holy Spirit? 6:30pm at Holy Cross-Wendelin; March 6 - Eucharistic Discipleship: How did extraordinary faith at 16 help me to face my brother's sudden death? 6:30pm at St. Joseph-Stringtown; March 7 - Eucharistic Discipleship: What hope do I have that my children and I will remain Catholic until the end? 6:30pm at St. Lawrence-Lawrenceville; March 8 - Eucharistic Discipleship: How do I love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength? 6:30pm at St. Joseph-Olney

**Stations of the Cross:** 6:30pm on Fridays during Lent at St. Joseph-Stringtown and St. Lawrence-Lawrenceville and on Wednesdays at Holy Cross-Wendelin. Also Living Stations of the Cross at 2:00pm on Friday, March 24 and Friday March 31 at St. Joseph-Olney as well as 3:00pm on Friday, April 7 (Good Friday) at Holy Cross-Wendelin.

**Reconciliation:** Every Saturday at 3:15pm to 3:45pm at Holy Cross-Wendelin and 4:15pm to 4:45pm at St. Joseph-Olney. Parish Reconciliation will also be available with First Reconciliation at 6:30pm on Wednesday, March 1 at Holy Cross-Wendelin; Monday, March 13, at St. Joseph-Stringtown; Tuesday, March 14 at St. Lawrence-Lawrenceville. Reconciliation will be available immediately following the Mission talks on Sunday, March 5 through Wednesday, March 8, Reconciliation will also be available during and following the Stations of the Cross at the scheduled parish church.

**Adult Religious Formation:** The Eucharist: The real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Mass. Video discussion each Wednesday morning at 9:15am in the MPR room at St. Joseph Church.

## What are you fasting from this Lenten season?

Another Lenten season begins later this month, bringing with it another opportunity to turn our hearts and minds toward a deeper relationship with God. We slow down, take time, and examine our internal spiritual lives and the way we live out our faith in the world around us.

The 40 days of Lent traditionally focus on fasting, prayer, and compassion (almsgiving) — all for the purpose of letting go of what distracts us from drawing closer to the source of love.

But there's more to Lent than the internal work of fasting and praying. We are also called to put God's love into action. When we help others by showing compassion and generosity, we give people — and ourselves — a chance to experience God's blessings.

These acts of love are living expressions of the change we experience through our fasting and praying. It's not just about giving up chocolate; it's about growing in God's love by showing God's love.

Because fasting, prayer, and compassion all require some sacrifice on our part, it is often hard to get enthused about the Lenten season. But what if we purposefully shift our perspective on Lent? Rather than focusing on the sacrifices we are making, we can focus on the love that inspires it. Rather than focusing on what the sacrifices are, we can focus on who the sacrifices are for.

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote, "To love is to will the good of another." Love requires self-sacrifice, giving of ourselves. This instinct to put other people's needs ahead of our own, to sacrifice greatly for others, is the mark of a believer who embraces Jesus' command to "love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love" (John 15:12)."

We can all sacrifice more of our time or fearlessly give what we don't think we can afford to help someone in desperate need. What does that look like in your life?

In the First Letter of John, we are told that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Is it possible that by abiding in God's love, and coming to better know the person of Jesus, we could be helped with our own pain and learn to journey more intimately with those who are most vulnerable in our world? For some, that may seem, on the surface, a superficial and inadequate response. But where might it lead us? Perhaps to a deeper, more intentional response.

What if this Lent, we commit to practice our faith to make the world better: more loving, more kind, compassionate, truthful, and rejecting hate and evil? What if we show our faith to others in ways that make life better for them? What if we are a tangible blessing to others? Here is an idea of how we can observe Lent this year from Paul's Letter to the Romans: "Don't fake your love, be real. Run away from evil; cling to good. Be good friends who love deeply. If you see someone in need, do something about it. Don't be a cause for others to trip over but bless those even when they disagree with you. Laugh with your friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Discover beauty in everyone. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do, but be generous in your goodness to all people. And last, don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good (Romans 12:9-21)."

In this Scripture, Paul explains that Christian behavior is doing everything for all people's common good. He describes specific behaviors for loving others that Jesus himself modeled. Christian love is not just being nice to people; Christian love has a moral orientation toward the good of all. That is what Christian witness is, both during the Lenten season and throughout the year.

The love Jesus showed was not a candy hearts and Hallmark movies kind of love. It was revolutionary. It was a love that "believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). This was the love Jesus shared in his public ministry. Jesus met people where they were and invited them to come to him, "all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28)."

During the Lenten season, we remember that at the heart of the Gospel story is a message of God's deep, unwavering love for humanity. We remember the passion and death of Jesus, and that he loves us so much he was willing to suffer and die for us. We are called to love him in return by recognizing Christ in others. When we help those in need, we recall Jesus' own words: "Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me — you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

Ultimately, Lent is a season of love expressed through sacrifice. It is a time when we remember God's love for us in the person of Jesus the Christ, and we show our love for God in return through our own small sacrifices. May this Lenten season be a time for you to grow in your understanding of God's deep love for you, as well as a time for you to grow in your love of God back through loving others.