

Palm Sunday

This Sunday before Easter is the last Sunday in Lent. The day commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem with a blessing of palms and a procession in which the whole congregation carries palms. The day is also marked by reading the story of Jesus' passion (the word used to describe Jesus' death comes from "suffering," which is one old meaning of passion). Some churches observe the tradition of keeping Palm Sunday palms and use them to make the Ash Wednesday ashes for the next year.

Maundy Thursday

This is the Thursday in Holy Week (the week leading up to Easter). The day is a time for remembering The Last Supper. The name comes from the Latin word "Maundatum" for "commandment," as Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment; that you love one another." There is a foot washing ceremony in remembrance of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples followed by an Agapé meal. At the conclusion of this service, the altar is stripped of any ornamentation and crosses are removed or veiled to mark the solemnness of the occasion.

Good Friday

The Friday in Holy Week is a time for remembering Jesus' death. Traditionally there is a Good Friday service at noon recognizing that Jesus hung on the cross from noon until 3 pm. This is the second day of special observance for which fasting is recommended. One should use discretion in deciding how best to observe this day. There is no celebration of Communion. However, it is customary in many churches to distribute the elements of communion that were blessed during the Maundy Thursday service.



Keeping a Holy Lent



What is Lent?

Lent is a season of preparation leading up to Easter. It is the forty days plus the six Sundays before Easter. For centuries, it has been observed as a special time of self examination and penitence. Lent is a time for concentration on fundamental values and priorities, and is not a time for self punishment.

Throughout Lent, the worship services of the church take on a simpler tone, appropriate to this season. Banners are removed from the church. Crosses showing the risen Christ are veiled. The word “Alleluia” is not used in the words of the liturgy or hymns. These practices help the worshipping community to mark this season of renewal as a special time in the church year.

Observing Lent

The custom is to mark the season of Lent by giving up some things and taking on others. Both can serve to mark the season as a holy time of preparation. Some examples of things people give up for Lent include sweets, meat for all or some meals, and alcohol. In most cases, giving up something for Lent can be made more meaningful by using the money or time for another purpose. For example, meal times on fast days could be spent in prayer. Another example is that if you give up meat during Lent, the extra money that would go to meat dishes can be given to a group, such as World Vision, which works to end hunger worldwide. Some things added during Lent are daily Bible reading, fasting on Fridays, times of prayer, taking a course of study related in some way to spirituality. Note that the season of Lent is forty days plus the six Sundays. This is because Sundays are celebrations of Jesus' resurrection and are always an appropriate day to lessen the restrictions of Lent. So that if you have, for example, given up chocolate for Lent, you could indulge in a weekly candy bar on Sunday.

Lent is also an especially appropriate time for the sacrament of confession. While confession to a priest is not required to receive God's forgiveness, it can be a meaningful rite of reconciliation to God.

Special Days and Services

Shrove Tuesday

This is actually the day before Lent begins. The day is named for the “shriving” or confessing that was traditional on this day before beginning Lent. This day is also known as Mardi Gras, or “Fat Tuesday,” because it was a time for eating the things from which one would abstain during Lent. Pancake suppers are a traditional way of using up some of these ingredients we may abstain from during Lent.

Ash Wednesday

The first day of Lent is marked with a special liturgy. The theme for the day, though not for all of Lent, is that we stand as sinners condemned to die, but for God's grace. This is symbolized by the imposition of ashes on the forehead, with the words, “You are dust and to dust you shall return.” In the Old Testament, ashes were a sign of penitence (feeling regretful at offenses) and mourning.

Ash Wednesday is one of two days of special observance (the other being Good Friday) for which fasting is recommended. While this usually refers going without food for the entire day, this practice is not practical for all persons, including, but not limited to, diabetics. Use your own discretion in determining how you can best observe this day.

Stations of the Cross

These are depictions of 14 incidents in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death, from the trial before Pilate to burial in the tomb. The service called the *Way of the Cross*, visits each station in turn with a brief reading, response, and collect prayer. This is particularly appropriate for Good Friday and all Fridays in Lent.

Refreshment Sunday

The fourth Sunday of Lent has long been observed as a day for completely relaxing the disciplines of Lent. It is also known as Mothering Sunday as this was the first Mother's Day and a traditional time for remembering your mother.