

The Season of Lent

Our word, "Lent" comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word, "Lencten," and refers to the lengthening time of day as winter subsides and more light is coming into the world.

An old Lenten tradition holds that we use purple because it is the color of the sky just before dawn; between the darkness of night and the light of the rising sun. It is a quiet time before the day begins when the sky takes on a majestic hue and invites reflection on how the day will be spent. For a few weeks in the spring, just before the rising of the Son at Easter, we spend time in quiet reflection on how we should spend our life. It is a time of personal reflection on our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Lent started as a prayerful retreat for those about to be baptized. They would spend forty days praying and reflecting on their call to follow Jesus. No one wants to make a promise they cannot keep so they prepared well during Lent. Those already baptized noticed the good effects of their experience so the custom spread to the whole church. It is a time for all of us to think about our commitment to faith and how serious we are about following the Lord. Honest and thoughtful reflection may surface awareness of habits that we should change. We grow in knowledge of ourselves and those sinful habits by self-examination of our conscience and our behavior. We may have not realized how these habits may be contributing to our own unhappiness. Repentance simply means making those changes.

The ashes placed on our heads on Ash Wednesday recall Genesis 3:19 "*You are dust and into dust you will return.*" It is a powerful message of hope that

reminds us we don't have all the time in the world to get our life in order. One day, it will come to an end, *so let us use our time well!* Each day is an opportunity to look at our self, reflect, on our faith, see what needs to change, and do so. Each day brings time to grow in knowledge, love, and wisdom. Ashes remind us to take our faith seriously and to live it authentically.

Early baptism candidates also wanted to test themselves and their ability to make an authentic commitment to the Lord and gauge how well they could resist temptation. They would *voluntarily* give up those habits. People today still practice "*giving something up for Lent,*" for the same reason. It is a way to determine who or what is in control of our life; Jesus or this or that habit. Some will give up favorite things as a small way of sharing in the sacrifice of Jesus on Good Friday. (It is still our practice to give something up on the Fridays throughout the year.) When practiced with good judgment, sacrifice can increase our *compassion* for others, our *courage* to face challenges, and help keep all our own possessions in proper *perspective*. We do not eat any meat on Ash Wednesday or the Fridays of Lent, and on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, we eat even a smaller total amount of food. However, this practice of fasting is only for those for whom there is no health risk as well as only for those between 18 and 59 years of age.

The passion of Jesus led to His resurrection at Easter. Let the passion

of Jesus lead us also to new life. Let us use our Lenten time of longer days for reflection, education, repentance, and prayer.

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