Mardi Gras

Mardi Gras ("Fat Tuesday") is the day before Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent. In times of greater Lenten austerity in Catholic countries, Mardi Gras offered an opportunity for households to consume some foods they would not enjoy until Easter. In England, the day has been celebrated with pancakes (which use eggs, milk and sugar — items our ancestors would have foregone during Lent), while in some areas of Germany the Lenten discipline applied to strong drink as well, so the day before Ash Wednesday became a time for special revelry.

Some have drawn a connection between Mardi Gras and ancient pagan festivals to welcome spring. This may certainly be true, but Catholic liturgists identify another link — namely, a time to extend celebrations of the Christmas season until the beginning of Lent. Whatever the case, certain cities around the world (Venice, Rio de Janeiro, New Orleans) have become identified with elaborate civic festivities leading up to Mardi Gras. These are usually known as "Carnival" ("Farewell to Meat"), a name that conveys the celebration's religious, pre-Lenten character, although the events themselves (as in Venice) may commemorate military victories. In most places, however, Mardi Gras simply justifies an elaborate — often excessive — party.

Ash Wednesday's Significance

Among the beautiful, meaningful and solemn ceremonies of the Catholic Church is the gathering of the faithful on Ash Wednesday.

This special day begins our Lenten journey. It is the start of 40 days of prayer, penance and almsgiving as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. But why does Lent begin on a Wednesday, and what is the significance of ashes?

Ash Wednesday was added to the liturgical calendar well after the 40-day penitential season of Lent became the norm throughout the Latin Church. Lent, in turn, was universally established only after the early Church sorted out the date of Easter. The issue was clarified at the famous Council of Nicaea in 325 where "all the Churches agreed that Easter, the Christian Passover, should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon (14 Nisan) after the vernal equinox" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1170). The vernal (spring) equinox generally falls on March 21, thus the date of Easter in the Western Church can occur anytime between March 22 and April 25.

Lent in the Early Church

The word Lent is from an Old English term meaning springtime, and by the second century the term was being used to describe the period of individual fasting, almsgiving and prayer in preparation for Easter. Among the Christians of the first three centuries, only those aspiring for baptism — the catechumens — observed a defined period of preparation, and that time lasted only two or three days. The idea of Lent being 40 days in length evolved over the next few centuries, and it is difficult to establish the precise time as to when it began. Among the canons issued by the Council of Nicaea, the Church leaders, in Canon Five, made reference to Lent: "and let these synods be held, the one before Lent that the pure gift may be offered to God after all bitterness has

been put away, and let the second be held about autumn." The language of this canon seems to validate that Lent, in some fashion, had by the fourth century been establishedand accepted by the Church. While the exact timing and extent of Lent both before and after the Nicaea council is unclear, what is clear from historical documents is that Christians did celebrate a season of Lent to prepare themselves for Resurrection Sundayand used a variety of ways to do so.

That Lent evolved into a period of 40 days in length is not surprising as there are numerous biblical events that also involved 40 days. Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving instructions from God for that number of days (see Ex 24:18); Noah and his entourage were on the Ark waiting for the rains to end for 40 days and 40 nights (Gn 7:4); and Elijah "walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb" (1 Kgs 19:8). Mostly, though, the 40 days of Lent identifies with the time our Lord Jesus spent in the desert fasting, praying and being tempted by the devil (Mt 4:1-11). "By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert" (Catechism, No. 540).

There is, therefore, evidence that by the end of the fourth century Christians were participating in a 40-day Lent before Easter. The dilemma now became how to count the 40 days. In the Latin Church, six weeks were used to identify the Lenten period, but you didn't fast on Sundays, so six Sundays were subtracted and there remained only 36 fasting days. In the early seventh century, St. Pope Gregory I the Great (r. 590-604) resolved this situation by adding as fast days the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday before the first Sunday of Lent. Thus the Lenten 40-day fast, or the Great Fast as it was known, would begin on a Wednesday.

Initially, people fasted all 40 days of Lent. They ate one meal a day and only an amount of food that would sustain survival. But the Church taught, and people believed (then as now), that fasting is not about what we eat, it is about changing hearts, interior conversion, reconciliation with God and others. It's about living in an austere way, giving from our abundance to the poor. St. John Chrysostom (347-409) explained it this way: "Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works!… If you see a poor man, take pity on him! If you see an enemy, be reconciled to him! If you see a friend gaining honour, envy

him not! If you see a handsome woman, pass her by!" (Homily on the Statutes, III.11).

Ashes

The Church has long used ashes as an outward sign of grief, a mark of humility, mourning, penance and morality. The Old Testament is filled with stories describing the use of ashes in such a manner. In the Book of Job, Job repented before God: "Therefore, I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6). Daniel "turned to the Lord God, to seek help, in prayer and petition, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" (Dn 9:3). Jonah preached conversion and repentance to the people of Nineveh: "When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in the ashes" (Jon 3:6). And the Maccabees army prepared for battle: "That day they fasted and wore sackcloth; they sprinkled ashes on their heads and tore their garments" (1 Mc 3:47).

Ashes were imposed on the early catechumens when they began their preparation time for baptism. Confessed sinners of that era were also marked with ashes as part of the public penitential process. Other baptized Christians began asking to receive ashes in a manner similar to catechumens and penitents. Christian men had ashes sprinkled on their heads while ashes were used to trace the cross on the forehead of women. Thus the use of ashes as the sign of penance, in readiness for Easter, was becoming a Churchwide practice. During the papacy of St. Gregory the Great, the practice was further expanded and is mentioned in the sixth-century Gregorian Sacramentary. Around the year 1000, Abbot Aelfric of the monastery of Eynsham, England, wrote: "We read in the books both in the Old Law and in the new that men who repented of their sins bestowed on themselves with ashes and clothed their bodies with sackcloth. Now let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent, that we strew ashes upon our heads, to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten feast" ("Aelfric's Lives of Saints," 1881, p. 263). This same rite of distributing ashes on the Wednesday that begins Lent was recommended for universal use by Pope Urban II at the Synod of Benevento in 1091.

So when we go to that early Mass on Ash Wednesday morning and receive the blessed ashes on our forehead, we are repeating a somber, pious act that Catholics have been undergoing for over 1,500 years. As “The Liturgical Year, Septuagesima,” by Abbot Gueranger, O.S.B., written in the middle decades of the 1800s, puts it: “We are entering, today, upon a long campaign of the warfare spoke of by the apostles: forty days of battle, forty days of penance. We shall not turn cowards, if our souls can but be impressed with the conviction that the battle and the penance must be gone through. Let us listen to the eloquence of the solemn rite which opens our Lent. Let us go whither our mother leads us, that is, to the scene of the fall.”

Like all those before us, we unhesitatingly embrace this invitation to sanctity, this time to turn away from sin. We are part of that great cloud of witnesses who through all the ages have donned the ashes, publicly acknowledging that we are Christians, Christians who have sinned and seek to repent. We acknowledge that “we are dust and to dust we shall return.”

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What Do Ashes Signify?

When God drove our first parents from the Garden, he reminded Adam, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gn 3:19). We hear these words each year on Ash Wednesday, when the priest places ashes on our foreheads, a reminder of our mortality and the seriousness of the Lenten pilgrimage we are about to begin.

Throughout the Old Testament ashes signify sorrow and repentance. Jeremiah commands Israel to mourn its impending doom when he says, "dress in on sackcloth, roll in ashes" (Jer 6:26). When Job emerges from his harrowing face-to-face encounter with God, he says, "I have spoken but did not understand.... Therefore I ... repent in dust and ashes" (Jb 42:3-6). Jesus employs similar imagery when he criticizes his listeners' hardness of heart: "Woe to you ... if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes" (Mt 11:21).

Ashes and dust amount to the same thing. Neither is particularly pleasant, and both remind us God used some pretty unattractive material when he created us. Lent reminds us how much Christ took on through the Incarnation and what he offered up to us on the cross.

Lent's Liturgical Somberness

Just as we are called to fast and abstain from certain rich foods in Lent — in a spirit of penance and self-discipline — so, too, we "give up" for a time some of the more glorious and joyful aspects of the Liturgy: not only the Gloria — the joyous hymn the angels sang the night our Savior was born — but also the Alleluia (what could be more exhilarating than Handel's Alleluia chorus from the Messiah?). Moreover, we also omit floral decorations and instrumental music in our churches during those 40 days (see General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Nos. 53, 62, 305, 313). Why? Because all of those elements are external and exuberant expressions of joy; Lent is not a "joyful" season, it is a "penitential" season. While it is true that we should always rejoice (Phil 4:4), during Lent we are soberly and penitentially preparing for the passion and resurrection of Christ.

You ask, "What does removing them do to make the Mass more solemn?" The removal of the Gloria, Alleluia, flowers and instrumental music makes the more sober and austere, more somber. And that sobriety, that frugality of spirit, helps to purify the soul and focus the mind.

The 40 days of Lent offer us an opportunity to imitate what Jesus did in the desert for 40 days: He prayed and fasted in preparation for His public ministry. The Church asks the faithful to perform works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving during the Lenten season in imitation of Christ and for the good of our souls. This "spiritual spring training" makes us stronger if we embrace these practices with mindfulness and generosity.

An essential aspect of the life of the Christian is to worship God at Mass. The Liturgy uses signs and symbols to teach and inspire us, and to help us along the way toward Christ. There are many elements to the Liturgy: sacraments and sacramentals, readings and hymns, gestures and actions, vestments and vessels, art and architecture, priest and people, and so forth. The selection, combination and arrangement of these various elements keeps the Liturgy fresh and engaging. As we read in the Book of Ecclesiastes (see 3:4), so we worship in the Liturgy: There is a time for weeping, and a time for rejoicing.

Purple Cloth Coverings

Catholics of a certain age recall crosses and statues draped in purple throughout Lent, an unmistakable sign of the penitential season the Church had entered and invited us to embrace. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “By waiting and by calm you shall be saved, / in quiet and in trust shall be your strength” (30:15). Removing distractions from church interiors was one way to focus our minds on God’s call to a deeper interior life with his Son.

Things have changed somewhat today, but covering images remains an option, and the rubrics in the Missal for the Fifth Sunday of Lent state: “In the Dioceses of the United States, the practice of covering crosses and images throughout the church from this Sunday may be observed. Crosses remain covered until the end of the Celebration of the Lord’s Passion on Good Friday, but images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.”

Massgoers will notice subtle — but important — changes in the liturgical texts beginning the Fifth Sunday of Lent: a new Preface, and prayers calling us to pay closer attention to Jesus’ passion. Covering statues on this Sunday underscores a deeper step we take with Christ on his Lenten journey.

Fasting and abstinence: More than laws of the Church

The penitential season of Lent is upon us, and we Catholics, like Christians everywhere, begin preparing to commemorate the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just a few short weeks ago, we celebrated his birth, and now the Church begins our preparation to join him on his journey to Calvary. The church scene becomes somber, more intense, and such terms as contrition, conversion, penance, almsgiving, fasting and abstinence dominate the liturgy.

Benedictine Father Dom Prosper Gueranger wrote about Lent in "The Liturgical Year" (1887): "Lent, then, is a time consecrated, in a special manner, to penance, and this penance is mainly practiced by fasting. Fasting is an abstinence, which man voluntarily imposes upon himself, as expiation for sin, and which, during Lent, is practiced in obedience to the general laws of the Church."

Why fast and abstain?

Pope Clement XIII in 1759 said that "penance also demands that we satisfy divine justice with fasting, almsgiving and prayer and other works of the spiritual." The purpose of our fast is to not become physically weak or lose weight but to create a hunger, a spiritual void that only Christ can fill; in fasting from the heart, we express our love of God and acknowledge our sinfulness. Though unworthy, we pray our sacrifices will be acceptable to the one who suffered and gave his life blood for us.

Every Ash Wednesday we hear from the prophet Joel (2:12-14): “Yet even now — oracle of the Lord — return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God.” It is not our clothes but our hearts we need to rend in reflecting our sorrow. Our fast is not for man but for God.

Fasting and abstinence

Fasting and abstinence are Church-imposed penitential practices that deny us food and drink during certain seasons and on certain days. These acts of self-denial dispose us to free ourselves from worldly distractions, to express our longing for Jesus, to somehow imitate his suffering.

Abstinence traditionally has meant not eating meat and, for centuries but no longer, included meat by-products. Many may recall the calendar hanging in the kitchen that included a fish symbol on each Friday of the month. Catholics never have been compelled to eat fish on days of abstinence, but rather, to avoid meat. While abstinence refers to the kind or quality of food we eat, fasting refers to the amount or quantity of food consumed. It is contrary to the spirit of abstinence and fasting if we avoid steak but pile our plate high with fish.

Fasting in Scripture

In the Old Testament, God told Adam and Eve not to eat (abstain) from the Tree of Knowledge (Gn 2:17). Queen Esther (Est 4: 15), in a successful attempt to save the Jews, ordered a three-day fast for herself and her court. The Book of Jonah describes how the people of Nineveh fasted and were saved from God’s wrath (3:4-10).

Jesus set the example for our fasting when he went into the desert and fasted for 40 days and 40 nights (Mt 4:1-11). His entire life involved suffering and self-denial. In Mark 2:18-20, Jesus responds to the Pharisees’ accusation that his disciples do not fast: “As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come

when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day." Once Jesus was not with them, the Apostles did fast and advocated fasting to new Christians as evidenced in the books of Acts and the Epistles.

Evolution of practice

By the second century, fasting was integrated into Christian worship. Jews had long fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, but the Christians chose to fast on Wednesdays, because that was the day of Christ's betrayal, and Fridays, the day he was crucified. By the fourth century, Saturday had replaced Wednesday as a day of fasting, and over the centuries every-Saturday fasting was dropped.

Fasting before Easter was practiced in those first centuries, but the times and extent varied. Until the ninth century, fasting meant one meal a day and then only enough food to sustain life. Those keeping a fast often would give the food not eaten to others in need.

St. John wrote in 1 Jn 3:17, "If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?" The philosopher Aristides, around the year 128, explaining how Christians lived, noted, "And if there is among them a man that is poor or needy … they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food" (Apologia, XV).

Hermes, a writer in the first and second centuries, said, "and having reckoned up the price of the dishes of that day which you intended to have eaten, you will give it to the widow or the orphan."

Later, St. Augustine said, "What you deprive yourself by fasting, add to your almsgiving" ("Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons: Fathers of the Church," 1959). Today we are often encouraged to calculate the funds not spent for food during Lent and put that amount in the "poor box."

By the Middle Ages, the number of fast days during the liturgical year had increased and at times included 70 days. Sundays and solemnities have never been days of fast. Through the mid-20th century, Catholic missals identified fasting on weekdays of Lent, ember days, the vigils of Pentecost, All Saints, Immaculate Conception and Christmas. Abstinence was required on all Fridays, Ash Wednesday, the vigils of the Assumption and Christmas. This all would change.

In 1966, Blessed Pope Paul VI significantly amended the laws of fasting through his apostolic constitution *Paenitemini,* in which he affirmed some practices and gave certain authority to national conferences of bishops around the world. The changes by Pope Paul were incorporated into the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

Abstinence and fasting are required on both Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On those days, one full meal is allowed along with two other smaller meals. Catholics bound by the law of abstinence include everyone age 14 and over; the law of fasting includes individuals age 18 through the beginning of their 60th year.

Canon Law, the Catechism, precepts of the Church and U.S. bishops' document "Penitential Practices for Today's Catholic" explain our fasting obligations. Before Lent, most every Catholic parish emphasizes the rules and rewards of fasting and abstinence. A one-hour fast is always required before receiving Communion.

In addition to Friday abstinence during Lent, every Friday is a day of penance (Canon Law, No. 1250). According to Canon 1253, the conference of bishops in each nation may "substitute other forms of penance … for abstinence and fast." U.S. bishops have maintained the obligation to fast and abstain on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and abstain on the Fridays of Lent. They have granted U.S. Catholics the option of doing another form of penance on Fridays outside Lent rather than abstaining from meat. The bishops focus us on Friday self-denial, along with works of charity and mercy while recalling Christ's passion.

Who is Required to Fast?

Fasting is required of adult Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59. The required days of fasting are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Abstinence, which is refraining from the consumption of meat, is obliged for Catholics 14 and older. Catholics are obliged to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent, including Good Friday. Universal Church law requires abstinence on all Fridays of the year, but in the United States, Catholics may perform another penance if they choose.

Some exceptions apply in particular circumstances. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops indicates the following exceptions on its website: "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."

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What almsgiving really means

Giving alms has always been an important part of Lent. For many people, it means giving money to Catholic charities or some other good cause. But the concept of almsgiving goes much deeper. It is our response to the teachings of Jesus that encourage us to reach out to people in need—not just with our money—but with our time and our talents. Today we might call it 'stewardship'.

Lent gives us the opportunity to cultivate a spirit of generosity. It gives us a chance to share what we have and who we are with other people. It puts us in communion with others and helps us understand that we are all members of the Body of Christ. Think carefully about how you will share your time, your talents and your treasure during Lent. Keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

10 Tips for Making the Lenten Season More Meaningful

Slow Down – Set aside 10 minutes a day for silent prayer or meditation. It will revitalize your body and your spirit.

Read a good book – You could choose the life of a saint, a spiritual how-to, an inspirational book or one of the pope's new books.

Be kind – Go out of your way to do something nice for someone else every day.

Get involved – Attend a Lenten lecture or spiritual program.

Volunteer at your parish – Whether it's the parish fish fry, cleaning the church or helping with the food drive, it will give you a chance to help others.

Reach out – Invite an inactive Catholic to come with you to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday, or come to Stations of the Cross, Confession or Mass with you anytime during Lent.

Pray – Especially for people you don't like and for people who don't like you.

Tune out – Turn off the television and spend quality time talking with family members or friends.

Clean out closets – Donate gently used items to the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Donate – Pick a Catholic mission and decide how you can help by sending money, clothing or supplies.

A Simple Plan for Lent

Here's a helpful acronym to help you stay focused during Lent: Keep • It • Simple • Sinner.

The best Lent is one in which we enter the season wholeheartedly. All too often, people either take on too much or don't take on enough. The solution is to simplify our disciplines, focus our intentions and concentrate more clearly on our spiritual goals.

To keep it simple this Lent, try the "1-1-1 Plan": one sin, one add-in, one give-up. Concentrate or focus on one sin or fault that is getting in the way of your relationship with God and with others. Add one positive activity that will deepen your prayer and spiritual life (especially if you think you are too busy to put anything more into an impossibly busy schedule!). Deny yourself something you really like or are attached to.

One sin

Most of us, if we are honest, know at least one area of sin to focus on during Lent. If you aren't sure, or are having trouble narrowing it down, use the traditional seven deadly sins as a guide here.

In fact, some of the other deadly sins are even deadlier, especially pride, or self-love, which St. Thomas Aquinas called, "the cause of every sin."

If you need help in identifying which sin to concentrate on this year, ask God in prayer to reveal it to you. If you still aren't sure, ask your family or close friends. Just be sure you are willing to listen to them and accept their assessment.

One add-in

The next step in 1-1-1 Lent is to add one thing of God to your routine that you haven't been doing. Because we are all so busy, it's a good idea to not just pick an add-in, but to schedule a regular time when you put it on your calendar so you don't "forget."

Ideas for add-ins are pretty much endless, but some include:

- Go to Mass in the middle of the week
- Attend the Stations of the Cross as a family
- Read a Gospel
- Volunteer at a social ministry
- Get up early to pray

One give up

Giving up something for Lent has been part of the Church almost since the beginning. While giving up sweets and alcohol are time-honored, consider giving up one thing that you really like or enjoy. Just make sure it is something that lets you feel the deprivation and is at least a little bit challenging. Make it difficult but doable.

- Fast from fault finding and nagging, and fast from a critical tongue or a closed mind.
- Give up impulse purchases.
- Give up an unhealthy habit, like smoking.
- Limit the time you watch television or surf the Web.
- Give up eating out and donate the money you save.

Fully Entering Into the Triduum

During the Sacred Triduum — the days of Holy Thursday through Easter Sunday — the strangest thing will occur. Millions of Christians throughout the world will gather to honor the humiliation, torture and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In a global culture that usually celebrates power, strength and beauty, this public veneration of something so horrible is always a little shocking. Could it be that what people find so absolutely compelling about the Passion narrative is the vulnerability of God?

In the Christ event, God leaves the safety and glory of heaven, in a certain sense, and embraces the limitations of our human condition, coming to know in the flesh both the glory and tragedy of our nature without ever having sinned. In the last week of his life, Jesus completely hands himself over to us. In the foot washing and the Eucharist, in the scourging and the crucifixion, the Son of God loves us completely without restrictions, conditions or limits. Whether we accept, reject or ignore this Divine Love, Jesus never changes his fundamental stance toward us.

In Roman and Greek mythology, the gods are always conspiring to manipulate humanity to serve their often-selfish ends and egotistical schemes. In Christ, we encounter the surprising subversion of this oppressive game. God serves us! In absolute humility, availability, vulnerability and mercy, God has come to love, pardon and save us.

The weakness of the cross, the simplicity of the Eucharist, the tenderness of the foot washing, the love that seeks to embrace a traitor, a thief and a coward is so beyond the grasp of power politics, the swirl of social hubris and the world of earthly grasping that it takes our breath away. No wonder that kings would stand speechless in the presence of the Suffering Servant, as Isaiah proclaims.

If God could become that poor, humble and vulnerable to love me, how can I ever stand on my own self-importance? This week, we celebrate the strangest things: weakness becomes strength, love conquers fear, miserable despair transforms into resurrected hope and perpetual death gives way to eternal life, and it’s all because a naked criminal

was thrown down on a cross 2,000 years ago, and he embraced it as if it were his marriage bed.

We should let the Lord love us during Holy Week. The palm we held on Palm Sunday should be a symbol of our praise, reverence and love for the humble Master who has saved and set us free. The Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening is an opportunity to taste the surprising grace of the Eucharist and surrender to the consolation of the foot washing. Listening to the Passion and venerating the cross on Good Friday gives us the opportunity to embrace the cross in our own lives, no matter what form it may take. Know that the mystery of suffering in our lives is the sacred ladder by which we will ascend to the beauty of the Kingdom of heaven.

Holy Saturday is a sacred time of rest and silence, as the Lord sleeps in the tomb and all of creation awaits a salvation it does not yet understand. A beautiful ancient text from the early Church pictures Jesus roaming the abode of the dead on this day, unchaining Adam and Eve and all of the other souls who had been waiting for redemption since the foundation of the world. Ask the Lord to set you free from the fear, sin and self-seeking that keeps you bound.

Gathering around the Easter fire at the Vigil, we call to mind how we began the Lenten journey marked with the ashes of sin, failure and defeat, but now you have become filled with fire — the mighty force of the risen Christ and the courageous strength of the Holy Spirit. As we proclaim the resurrection of Christ as the beautiful truth and transformative meaning of human history, know that the Lord walks with you, loves you and is leading you to the fullness of joy and peace.

The shocking, strange and powerful events of Holy Week should lead us to tears and laughter, gratitude and praise, humble awareness of our weakness and joyful acclamation of God's victory. The Triduum is a time for God to break open our hearts, sothat the gracious torrent of Divine Mercy that flows from the side of the crucified Christ will wash us clean, forgive our sins and fashion us ever more deeply in the new creation of the Lord's saving death and resurrection.

Giving Something Up?

Lent is considered a “penitential time” within the Church. Penitential days are every Friday of the year and the entire season of Lent (see Canon 1250 of the Code of Canon Law). We observe Fridays as days of penance in memory of the passion and death of the Lord — the act of our salvation. The U.S. bishops have strongly urged that Catholics abstain from eating meat on every Friday of the year, along with prayer and self-denial, for the sake of world peace (see the 1983 pastoral statement “The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response”). The liturgical season of Lent signifies our path of conversion and promotes our continuing walk along that path. The three traditional pillars of Lenten discipline — prayer, fasting, almsgiving — help to reinforce our conversion to Christ and our dependence on God’s grace.

Each of the three touches upon an element of life that is important to us as human beings: our use of time, our use of material resources, and our attention to our own selves and needs. The disciplines of Lent help us to remember that all of these things have their origin in God’s gracious love, and all are given to us for service to that love.

The Church obligates Catholics to certain minimal requirements during Lent as a means of guiding us along the path of conversion. People 14 years of age or older are bound to abstain from meat on all Fridays of Lent, and those from ages 18 to 59 are bound to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Fasting means partaking in no more than one full meal and two light meals as needed to maintain health or strength. Consumption of solid foods between meals is prohibited, but liquids may be consumed at any time (see the Apostolic Constitution Paenitemini, on fast and abstinence, by Pope Paul VI). Of course, individuals with medical conditions prohibiting these dietary restrictions are not bound by them, but are asked to substitute other penitential practices. There is no

Church requirement to “give up” anything other than what is described as fast and abstinence, but it has become part of the culture of Lent for many Catholics.

In “giving up” something during Lent, whether that something is food or drink, a form of entertainment or something else pleasurable to us, we turn away from our selfishness and recognize that God alone will ultimately satisfy our needs and wants and cravings. For the briefest of time — just 40 days — we acknowledge that we do not and cannot fully provide for ourselves. Everything comes from God.

Along with Jesus in the desert, we acknowledge in the face of temptation that we do not “live by bread alone, / but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). As Jesus found strength and virtue in facing temptation in the desert, so the disciplines of Lent aid us in strengthening our will and our ability to say no to sin.

St. Augustine famously prayed, “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You” (“Confessions”). By giving up something during Lent we face our inner restlessness by removing the things or actions we often use to cover up our neediness and give us comfort. We acknowledge that only God will ultimately satisfy us in both body and soul, and at least for 40 days we can place our hope in God alone, trusting that our wants and dreams will be fulfilled in heaven by the providence of God.

At the end of our lives we will leave the gifts of time, treasure and our bodies in the grave until the Resurrection. Lent affords us the opportunity and challenge to live now as children of our heavenly Father, reliant on His grace and providence and eager to find our hopes fulfilled in God alone.

Ideas for Celebrating Lent and Easter atHome

Say the word “Easter” and most people will think of chocolate eggs, which is a pity, because it means so much more than that — in its glorious celebration of our redemption through Christ’s death and resurrection, and in giving meaning to every Sunday throughout the year.

To understand Lent and Easter, we have to understand the greatness of God’s love for us. From the very beginning, He loved us so much that He sent His only Son to be one with us, to share our humanity and to bring every human being into a full and joyful friendship with God. Because of man’s sin, when the Son came to be with us, it meant a sharing in man’s suffering and death — even death on a cross — but in a mysterious sense this only served to reveal the hugeness of that Divine Love, and to draw us even more closely to God. And that is what Lent and Easter are all about.

Lent is 40 days long — echoing the 40 years the Israelites spent in the desert while journeying to the Promised Land and Christ’s 40 days in the desert fasting and praying. Count up the days on a calendar: from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday is 40 days — omitting Sundays because every Sunday is a “little Easter” and doesn’t exactly count as Lent.

The days before Lent are traditionally a time of feasting — carnival — to enjoy all the tasty things that we will deny ourselves during the time of penance. The word “carnival” comes from the Latin carnis, meaning meat, and vale, meaning goodbye: it was “goodbye to meat” once Lent began. The name Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, echoes the same theme of eating lots of rich food! Eastern Catholics typically give up meat all of Lent, not just on Fridays.

A British tradition is pancakes on Shrove Tuesday (the day before Ash Wednesday), served with brown sugar and wedges of lemon. The word “shrove” derives from the Saxon word for going to confession: we are “shriven” of our sins. Slavic peoples, particularly the Polish, serve paczki — a doughnutlike pastry that was made in order to use up all the lard, sugar and eggs to be given up during Lent.

Part of the carnival tradition is the harlequin clown with the teardrop — a reminder that carnival comes to an end with Lent. Some Catholic groups hold a carnival party with pancakes, wine and plenty of good food — and then stop at the stroke of midnight and do all the cleaning up in silence to recognize Lent has started.

Ashes are an ancient symbol of penance and mourning, since ash is what is left when something is consumed by fire. On Ash Wednesday, we receive ashes on our foreheads and are reminded to repent and believe in the Gospel. The ashes are customarily made from the palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday. Some parishes invite everyone to bring along last year's palms to be burned.

Fasting

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are required days of fasting for Catholics between the ages 18 to 59 — meaning one main meal and two other light meals as needed to maintain health. Abstinence from meat is also required on those two days as well as on the Fridays of Lent.

"Giving up something" is a standard form of penance today during the penitential season of Lent. Renouncing chocolate, alcohol, television, coffee or some specific favorite food are all standard penances. Money saved should go to charity as Lenten alms.

At one time it was standard for all Christians to renounce all meat and dairy products during Lent, which included no cheese, eggs or milk. This is still practiced by Eastern-rite Christians. Hence the tradition that eggs were stored and then were in plentiful supply by Easter. Eggs can be kept from going bad by sealing them — so that no air can get in through the shell — with something sticky such as water glass (sodium silicate). In modern life, it is unrealistic to live with the diet of former ages, but penitential sacrifice is still a non-negotiable part of Lent. Some families institute a specific fasting meal each Friday: a simple supper with no trimmings. Parishes often organize bread-and-soup lunches, with funds raised going to a charity.

Part of the Catholic tradition of fasting is that you are not meant to brag about it: no showing off about how pious you are, or how much you are suffering through your self-imposed penances! In fact, the best way to experience Lent is to see it as a time of genuine spiritual renewal — it's a time for small but specific acts of love. Picking up some litter in the street and putting it in a bin? Making one random act of kindness every day? (It can actually be quite fun working out how to do that: a seat offered to a stranger on the bus, an angry remark left unsaid, a pleasant greeting to a colleague at work, and/or a decision to do something that you have been meaning to do for ages, such as visiting that home for the elderly and getting a group of friends to go and sing there, etc.).

But it does have to be said that Lent's 40 days can still seem horribly long! Which is why the Church gives us a mid-Lent Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent. Its traditional name is Laetare Sunday, from the Latin word for "rejoice." Look up the Mass prayers for that day and you will find them full of messages about hope and joy. It is sometimes called "let up" Sunday — you let up on your fasting and penance for the day.

Holy Week

And so to the great events of Holy Week. It begins with Palm Sunday, when we carry palms in procession at church, honoring the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. A donkey carried the pregnant Mary on the way to Bethlehem, too. Incidentally, did you know every donkey has a cross on its back? (Next time you visit a zoo or a farm, check and see — you will find that it is so: a clear cross marked down the animal's spine and across itsshoulders. Christians have seen this as a mark of favor, because a donkey carried Christlong ago).

We bring our blessed palms home and are encouraged to put them around the house, up behind the kitchen clock or behind a crucifix on the wall.

In Holy Week, there is a sense of drama: Wednesday is known as Spy Wednesday because of the betrayal of Christ by one of His own followers.

Holy Thursday is sometimes known as Maundy Thursday, from the Latin mandatum, which gives us the word “command.” We are meant to remember the command that Christ gave us on the night before He died, the one we all forget — that we should love one another.

Love involves service: Christ washed the feet of His apostles, and on Maundy Thursday, all over the world, priests will re-enact that act of service by washing the feet of 12 of their parishioners.

During Holy Week, all the priests of a diocese gather with their bishop for the Chrism Mass. All walk, donned in white vestments, in procession. The Chrism Mass is often packed as people love to be there to see their own priest and to express their thanks for all that he does. At this Mass, the sacred oils that will be used for baptism, confirmation, anointing of the sick and ordination during the following year are blessed and consecrated by the bishop. The oil is preferably olive oil, and the prayers at the Chrism Mass remind us of the olive branch that the dove brought back after Noah sent it out to seek land as the flood subsided.

On the evening of Maundy Thursday, we celebrate the Mass of the Last Supper: listen carefully to the words of consecration. The priest says, “On the night before he suffered — that is, tonight … ” It is usual to have holy Communion offered under both forms — the Host and the Precious Blood — on this night.

We remember the Passover and think of the Jewish people and their allegiance to the one true God. We remember that they remained faithful to the Passover and still do. One day we will all be united, Jews and Christians together, when Christ returns to gather us at the end of time.

The Triduum

Holy Thursday evening through Easter Sunday evening is a liturgical season of its own called the Sacred Triduum — the three holiest of days. Good Friday is a solemn day: fasting, abstinence from meat, a day to think about all that Christ did for us. Hot cross buns are a traditional way of remembering. Originally, people ate dry bread rolls topped with a pastry cross — over the centuries currants and spices got added, and the cross is still there.

We will spend much of the day in church: perhaps the Stations of the Cross in the morning and then, of course, the solemn commemoration of Christ's passion, traditionally held at 3 p.m. It is always a powerfully moving sight to see the priest prostrated in prayer and mourning at the start, lying full-length on the floor. And we think of our sins and about how often we have failed Christ. It's the only day the Church does not celebrate the Mass.

Many towns and cities have a **Good Friday** Way of the Cross with Christians carrying a large cross through the streets. Each year the pope conducts a special celebration of this in the historic Roman Colosseum, a place Christians were once martyred. Praying the Stations of the Cross is a staple Lenten devotion, with roots dating back to the earliest Christians who literally would retrace the steps of Christ's passion and death — His journey from Pilate's praetorium to the tomb.

Holy Saturday is a time of preparation for Easter: decorating Easter eggs, organizing theupcoming Easter breakfast and Easter lunch. You can buy special packs with dye and stickers for decorating eggs, and it can be fun to experiment with natural dyes. Eastern Christians dye their eggs red to symbolize the blood of Christ outpoured on Good Friday, and the hard shell signifies His sealed tomb. Some Easter eggs are extraordinarily decorative — consider the beautiful products of the Ukrainian wax-resistant method.

Many in the United States, especially those of Polish descent, bring baskets to church with their Easter foods for the priest to bless. The traditional foods contained in the baskets have meaning: eggs, symbolic of life in the Resurrection; bread, symbolic of

Jesus' body; lamb, symbolic of Jesus' divinity; salt, representative of purification; horseradish, symbolizing Christ's passion; and ham, signifying the joy and abundance of the feast.

Holy Saturday night is the Easter Vigil. It begins with a magnificent fire symbolizing Christ, the Light of the World, who dissipates the darkness of sin and death as He passes over from death to life. There are usually seven Old Testament readings during the Easter Vigil Mass, which recall the story of salvation history. New Christians enter the Church that night, too, by receiving the Sacraments of Initiation (baptism, confirmation and Eucharist).

Easter's association with the Easter bunny comes from a revival of an old pagan fertility symbol — rabbits traditionally have large families. Hiding eggs around the house and garden is rooted in simple truth: free-ranging hens tend to lay eggs in all sorts of places. But hunting for eggs is also linked to Mary Magdalene's quest for Christ: "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him" (Jn 20:13). And she met him in a garden, and He called her by name.

Easter is a time for feasting and superabundance. All the things we have renounced in Lent can now be enjoyed with relish, including sumptuous foods — chocolate, wine, delicious cakes — and time for gathering family and friends and having long talkative meals. It's a time for decorating the table with Easter baskets filled with eggs — chocolate eggs, sugar eggs, real eggs dyed and decorated. Traditional dishes include roast lamb or ham.

At Mass we renew our baptismal promises, recalling our own participation in the Paschal Mystery. The tomb in the Easter garden has been open, and we celebrate for the next 50 days.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Laetare Sunday

Roman Catholicism's Fourth Sunday of Lent when the priests wear "pink".

The day's theme comes from the entrance antiphon reflecting on Isaiah 66:10-11: "Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exalt and be satisfied at her consoling breast."

Laetare is the first word — meaning "rejoice" — in the Latin text. On Laetare Sunday (as similarly with the Third Sunday of Advent's Gaudete Sunday) the Church expresses hope and joy in the midst of our Lenten fasts and penances. Call it pink — or, more fittingly, rose — this change in color indicates a glimpse of the joy that awaits us at Easter, just before we enter into the somber days of Passiontide.

The joy of Easter being around the corner is symbolized in a few other interesting liturgical possibilities. During Lent, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal forbids flowers adorning the altar. But on Laetare Sunday (as well as solemnities and feasts within the season), there's a temporary halt to these penitential observations!

At one time, marriages were generally forbidden during Lent, but Laetare Sunday was often associated as a day when marriages could be celebrated during the penitential season. While marriages are now only forbidden on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, Laetare Sunday is still a fitting day for those wishing to be married before Eastertide.

Laetare Sunday is the Church's way of giving us a "shot in the arm" as we approach the darkness and horror of the days through Good Friday and Holy Saturday. It's an opportunity to savor and keep in the back of our minds what awaits us on Easter Sunday — the reality that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and that our hearts will always be filled with joy!

Being aware of traditions and customs assists us in celebrating the beauty of our faith. As you can see, there is much associated with even a nondescript day like the Fourth Sunday of Lent — not to mention the rest of the season, or the 50 days of Easter and beyond. Take advantage of the richness of our Catholic traditions.

Understanding the 7 Deadly Sins

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also refers to these sins as “capital sins”. They are called “capital” because they engender other sins, other vices.

1. Pride: an excessive love of self or the desire to be better or more important than others. “Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbor (without exception) as “another self,” above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity’” (No. 1931).

2. Lust: an intense desire, usually for sexual pleasure, but also for money, power or fame. “The God of promises always warned man against seduction by what from the beginning has seemed ‘good for food … a delight to the eyes … to be desired to make one wise’” (No. 2541).

3. Gluttony: overconsumption, usually of food or drink. “The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco or medicine” (No. 2290).

4. Greed: the desire for and love of possessions. “Sin … is a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods” (No. 1849).

5. Sloth (or Acedia): physical laziness, also disinterest in spiritual matters or neglecting spiritual growth. “Acedia or spiritual sloth goes so far as to refuse the joy that comes from God and to be repelled by divine goodness” (No. 2094).

6. Anger or wrath: uncontrolled feelings of hatred or rage. “Anger is a desire for revenge … The Lord says, ‘Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment’” (No. 2302).

7. Envy: sadness or desire for the possessions, happiness, talents or abilities of another “Envy can lead to the worst crimes. ‘Through the devil’s envy death entered the world’” (No. 2553).

What Palm Sunday Means

There is both great joy and terrible sorrow associated with this day, the Sunday that begins Holy Week, the Sunday that portends the crucifixion of Our Lord.

It is a time of despair, perplexity and contradiction. The very people who applaud Christ's entrance into Jerusalem that morning, shouting out "Hosanna" and words of adoration will, within a week, be crying, "Crucify Him." They will go from acclaiming Him as the new King of Israel to urging His life be traded in favor of a convicted criminal; they will first praise Him and then mock Him. Even friends entering Jerusalem at His side will desert Jesus. All this discord will take place during one week beginning on what we call Palm Sunday.

Exuberant Crowds

As we read in the Gospels, Jesus went to Jerusalem to join with throngs of other Jews to celebrate the Passover feast as had been prescribed in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. According to the Gospel of St. John, Jesus and many of his followers journeyed the less than two miles from Bethany on that Sunday, arriving outside Jerusalem. As was the custom, pilgrims that had already arrived in the city went out to greet newly arriving groups; some had never seen Jesus but had heard about the miracles attributed to Him and were caught up in the excitement.

Those arriving with and greeting Jesus were large in number as explained by John's Gospel: "When the great crowd … heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they took palm branches and went out to meet him, and cried out: 'Hosanna! / Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, [even] the king of Israel'" (12:12-13).

This adulation was not lost on the Pharisees who were present. They said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He said in reply, "I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out" (see Lk 19:39-40). The Pharisees reported the events back to the Jewish high council, the Sanhedrin, which regarded Jesus' ever growing popularity as a threat to their cozy relationship with the Romans. They were, in fact, planning to murder Him.

Previously, Our Lord had deliberately avoided popular acclaim, even fled, but this, upon entering Jerusalem, He accepts. Yet His actions are different than the people expected. He doesn't present himself as a rival to Caesar; He is not the political messiah or the warrior king the multitude had clamored for. Instead of entering Jerusalem on a war horse or chariot, he enters on a donkey, a sign of peace; and not just any donkey, but one on which no one had ever sat, the prerogative of a king. Seeing Him on the donkey, the Jews surging around Him recalled the words of the Prophet Zechariah 500 years earlier:

"Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! / Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! / Behold: your king is coming to you; /a just savior is he, / Humble, and riding on a donkey, / on a colt, the foal of a donkey. / He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim / and the horse from Jerusalem" (Zec 9:9-10).

Pope Benedict XVI explained these Old Testament words as they related to Jesus: "He is a king who destroys the weapons of war, a king of peace and a king of simplicity, a king of the poor…. Jesus is not building on violence; he is not instigating a military revolt against Rome" ("Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week," Ignatius Press, 2011, pp. 81-82).

Riding on the borrowed donkey, Jesus made His humble entrance into the city while the crowds were scattering their garments before Him and waving their palm branches. This joyful scene belies the traitorous acts, sorrow and agony that will soon follow, belies that this triumphant hero will be crucified like a criminal.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) offered a homily about Christ's entry into Jerusalem: "How different the cries, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him,' and then, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna, in the highest!' How different the cries are that now are calling him 'King of Israel' and then in a few days' time will be saying, 'We have no king but Caesar!' What a contrast between the green branches and the cross, between the flowers and the thorns! Before they were offering their own clothes for him to walk upon, and so soon afterwards they are stripping him of his, and casting lots upon them."

Implication of the Palms

Palms were symbols of life among the nomadic tribes, who, when crossing the desert, rejoiced at seeing the palm tree as it indicated an oasis with life-giving water was near. Palms have long been a sign of victory, success and glory. Victorious armies or leaders returning from the battlefield or a long military campaign were welcomed by the populace jubilantly waving palm branches. Despite Jesus' peaceful manner, when the Jews waved the palms at Him and spread their clothing over which He rode, they were affording Him the honors of a conquering hero and simultaneously defying the Roman occupiers.

On Palm Sunday, we still go out to meet Him, carry the blessed palms, joyfully sing out our hosanna and join in His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. But soon our joy turns to somberness as, clutching our palm, we hear the narrative of Christ's passion. We realize, once again, that His triumph, His true victory, will come through the cross. We know, as Jesus did, how Holy Week will end. We know that joy will turn to sorrow and back to joy. We know that through the horror of His suffering, followed by the glory of His resurrection, good will trump evil and life will trump death.

The palms we take home and put in a special place serve to remind us that Palm Sunday is not lost to the ages but that by Christ's victory we, too, can achieve everlasting life. "For us too, they [palms] must be symbols of triumph, indicative of the victory to be won in our battle against the evil in ourselves and against the evil which roams about

us. As we receive the blessed palm, let us renew our pledge to conquer with Jesus, but let us not forget that it was on the cross that He conquered" ("Divine Intimacy," Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., Tan Books, 1997, pp. 392-393).

Reenacting Palm Sunday

Soon after the Resurrection, Christians wanted to visit the sites of Christ's passion and even reenact the incidents that had taken place, such as His entry into Jerusalem. But such activity would not be possible until the fourth century when Constantine became emperor of the Roman Empire and ended all religious persecution. Later in that century, a Spanish pilgrim named Eigera visited Jerusalem. In her diary, she recorded how Christians re-created the events of Holy Week. She wrote that they gathered outside the city on the Sunday before Easter and listened to one of the Gospels telling of Christ's triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. Then they marched together through the city gates while carrying olive or palm branches. Our Palm Sunday processions are akin to what Eigera witnessed 17 centuries ago.

By the ninth century, the procession with blessed palms had expanded beyond Jerusalem and during the Middle Ages became widespread throughout Europe. In the 17th century Christians were not only processing into church with palms but, during Mass, holding the palms while the Passion was being read.

Through the centuries, Palm Sunday and the procession of people holding palms would be celebrated in a variety of ways. In some locations the Blessed Sacrament was part of the procession, in other places the congregation started in the parish cemetery and then went into the church. Palms were sometimes blessed in one church and the people, carrying the palms, marched to another church for Mass. Most typical was the blessing of the people and the palms at a place outside the church and then processing in. In 1955, the Church standardized and simplified the different entrances used on Palm Sunday: either an organized procession that begins somewhere outside the church, asolemn procession starting inside the church, or no procession at all. An entrance procession beginning at a location outside the church is used only once during the weekend Masses; it is not repeated at every Mass.

Your Guide To Holy Week

In the first century, the early Christians celebrated every Sunday in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus. By the second century, they established a particular day for the celebration of the resurrection, which was connected to the Jewish Passover.

Their observance began at sundown on Saturday evening. They called it the Night of the Great Vigil, a time of remembrance and expectation that lasted throughout the night so they could sing "Alleluia" at dawn on Easter morning. It was during the Night of the Great Vigil that new Christians were received into the Church.

By the fourth century, it became customary for people to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate what was called the "Great Week," which included Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. The diary of a woman named Egeria in 381 contains the first accounts of the special rites, prayers and devotions that took place in Jerusalem during the Great Week.

Over time, the practice of observing Holy Week spread throughout the Christian world, with prayers, historical re-enactments and special liturgies. During the Middle Ages, the celebration of the Easter Vigil gradually fell out of practice. The important days of the week were Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

In 1955, the Vatican re-established the Easter Vigil as an important part of Holy Week observances.

During the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the bishops called for the restoration of the early Christian rituals for receiving new Christians into the Church at the Easter Vigil. In 1988, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was issued.

Today, Easter Vigil with the Easter fire, the lighting of the paschal candle, the reading of salvation history, the celebration of the sacraments of initiation for catechumens and renewal of baptismal promises for the faithful is once again an integral part of Holy Week celebrations.

12 ways to make Holy Week more meaningful

1. **THINK PRAYER.** If you have to work or go to school during Holy Week, think about how you can incorporate prayer breaks into each day.
2. **MAKE AN ADDITIONAL SACRIFICE** by fasting and abstaining from meat on Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday in addition to Good Friday.
3. **DON'T WATCH TELEVISION** from sundown on Holy Thursday until Easter morning.
4. **GO** to confession.
5. **SET ASIDE** 10 minutes every day to read Passion accounts in the Gospels.
6. Make it a point to **FORGIVE** someone on Good Friday.
7. **PRAY** the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary.
8. **OFFER UP** any pain or difficulties you experience during Holy Week and unite your sufferings with the pain of Christ.
9. **PRAY** the Stations of the Cross.
10. **ATTEND** all of the Triduum liturgies.
11. **INVITE** family members, friends and neighbors — especially people who have strayed from the church — to come to church with you.
12. **VOLUNTEER** to help decorate your parish on Holy Saturday for Easter.

Holy Week customs

Palm crosses: From medieval times, people have believed that blessed palms formed into the shape of a cross would protect them from danger. The easiest way to make a cross from blessed palms is to cut two pieces of the palm, arrange in the shape of a cross, put a thumbtack in the middle, and attach the cross to a doorway or a bulletin board. Check Google for directions on how to braid or weave palms into more decorative crosses.

Housecleaning: In many cultures the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week

are designated as days for vigorous housecleaning in preparation for Easter. This custom probably evolved from the Jewish custom of ritual cleaning before Passover.

Visiting churches: The custom of visiting several churches to say a prayer on Holy Thursday was a tradition that evolved from the practice of making pilgrimages to holy places.

Coloring eggs: Decorating eggs was a pagan symbol of rebirth at springtime for the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Persians and even the Chinese. Christians adopted the colored egg as a symbol of new life which comes with the Resurrection.

Sweet breads: In many cultures, Holy Week was traditionally a time for baking sweet breads, cakes and pastries that would be served on Easter Sunday.

New clothes: From the time of the early Christians, the newly baptized wore white garments made from new linen. In medieval times, it became a tradition for people to wear new clothes on Easter Sunday, symbolizing the "new life" that comes with the Resurrection. In some places it was believed that bad luck would come to those who could afford new Easter clothes but refused to buy them.

Easter lilies: The tradition of buying Easter lilies during Holy Week for use as decorations in homes and churches came into practice in the 1800s. The white flower is a symbol of purity and new life that heralds the resurrection of Jesus.

Blessing of Easter baskets: In many cultures, families bring food that will be eaten on Easter Sunday to church in a basket for a special blessing on Holy Saturday.

Holy Water blessings: Some families bring holy water containers to Mass on Easter so they can bring home some Easter water, which is blessed during the Easter Vigil, to bless their homes.

The Sacred Triduum

The word “Triduum” comes from the Latin word meaning “three days,” and encompasses the three most sacred days in the Church year. It begins at sundown on Holy Thursday, reaches a high point at the Easter Vigil, and concludes with evening prayer at sundown on Easter Sunday. The liturgical celebrations during the Triduum onHoly Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday are rich with symbolismand flow from one to another in a seamless way. While it may appear as if these liturgies are separate and distinct, they are actually intended to be one continuous celebration that commemorates the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. For this reason, Catholics are encouraged to observe the entire Triduum by attending all of theliturgies.

The Chrism Mass

During Holy Week bishops bless sacred oils in the diocesan cathedral at a special liturgy known as the Chrism Mass. The oil of chrism is used during baptisms, confirmation, ordination and the consecration of altars. The oil of catechumens is used at the Easter Vigil. The oil of the sick is used to anoint people during the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The oils are then distributed to the parishes for sacramental celebrations throughout the year. As part of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, the renewal of priestly promises was incorporated into the Chrism Mass. The Chrism Mass is an ancient celebration that traditionally takes place on Holy Thursday morning. But in recent years, many dioceses celebrate the Chrism Mass on an evening earlier in Holy Week so that more people can attend.