

# Lent

## What is Lent?

Lent is the time of preparation for Easter. It lasts from Ash Wednesday (this year, March 1) to the morning of Holy Thursday (this year, April 13).

For people who are going to be baptized at Easter, Lent is a very special time of preparation for this sacrament. For those of us who are already baptized, Lent is a time of living our faith more deeply. We turn away from sin and everything that takes us away from God. We turn towards God in prayer and by trying to live better, the way Jesus taught us.

We begin Lent by being marked on our foreheads with ashes. Where do the ashes come from? What do they mean?

The ashes are from palms from Palm Sunday last year. Last Palm Sunday (a week before Easter), we joyfully waved palm branches to welcome Jesus and follow him on the road. But since then, we have not always followed Jesus. The cross, made with ashes on our foreheads reminds us that we want to begin again to follow Jesus and be ready to welcome him.

## What Do Catholics Do for Lent?

Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are three special Lenten traditions for Catholics.

### Prayer

Of course, prayer is something for every day, not just for Lent. During Lent, we try to pray a little extra. With your family, pray the rosary or the Stations of the Cross. Your parish might have a Penance Service. Go with your family and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

On your own, you can spend some time reading the Bible. Pick one of the four Gospels and read a little each day, starting at the beginning. Try to stop in Church once in a while to talk to Jesus. Or choose a time and place at home to tell Jesus what's on your mind each day.

### Fasting

Fasting means to not eat—either nothing at all, or less than usual, or one thing in particular. You can skip the snacks before dinner and then eat what your parents

serve, including all your vegetables. You can fast from your favorite candy, or decide to drink water instead of soda. (You can also “fast” from TV, or chatting online, playing video games, etc.)

Catholics age 14 and over must fast from meat on Fridays of Lent. (Those 18 and over must also fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday by eating only one full meal, with two snacks that don’t add up to a full meal.)

Fasting is good because it helps us to be disciplined. To say no to ourselves when we want some chips can help us to say no when we are tempted to sin. Fasting also helps us remember that God is more important than anything else in our life. It reminds us that there are many people who don’t have enough to eat. (Some people donate the money they save from what they don’t eat, which leads us to the next thing, almsgiving.)

### **Almsgiving**

The word “alms” comes from the Greek word for compassion. To “give alms” usually means to give money or other things to the poor. But it can also mean volunteering your time to help others.

For Lent, you can decide to donate a certain amount of your allowance or babysitting money. Perhaps your school or parish is having a food or clothing drive. You can also spend some of your time for others: helping at home, writing letters to relatives, or doing other volunteer work.

So, what are YOU going to do for Lent?