

This year Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 6 March, and will conclude on Holy Saturday, 20 April, the day before Easter.

Lent is the primary penitential season in the Church's liturgical year, reflecting the forty days Jesus spent in the desert in fasting and prayer. The liturgical season of forty days which begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with the celebration of the Paschal Mystery (Easter Triduum). All Sundays during the Lenten Season are excluded from fasting since every Sunday is celebrated as the Lord's Day on which we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord. The celebration of the Triduum marks the end of the Lenten season, and leads to the Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord at the Easter Vigil. The Easter Triduum lasts from the evening of Holy Thursday to the evening of Easter Sunday. During these three days, we celebrate the paschal mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Easter Triduum consists of:

- Mass of the Lord's Supper
- Good Friday of the Lord's Passion
- Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord

In Lent, all the baptized in the Catholic Church are called to renew their baptismal commitment. Lent is a period of learning and discernment for individuals who have declared their desire to become Catholics either by baptism through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults or being received into it through the Profession of Faith.

This year Pope Francis' Lenten message is based on the scripture passage: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Rm 8: 19). In his message, Pope Francis reminds us of three important things:

- 1) The redemption of creation. The grace of Jesus' paschal mystery leads us to the redemption of our human body itself. Our redemption is always threatened by the negative power of sin and death. Pope Francis says: "When we live as children of God, redeemed, led by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 8:14) and capable of acknowledging and obeying God's law, beginning with the law written on our hearts and in nature, we also benefit creation by cooperating in its redemption. That is why Saint Paul says that creation eagerly longs for the revelation of the children of God; in other words, that all those who enjoy the grace of Jesus' paschal mystery may experience its fulfillment in the redemption of the human body itself."
- 2) The destructive power of sin. Pope Francis reminds us that the root of all evil is sin, which disrupts our communion with God, with others and with creation itself. Pope says, "Sin leads man to consider himself the god of creation, to see himself as its absolute master and to use it, not for the purpose willed by the Creator but for his own interests, to the detriment of other creatures. Once God's law, the law of love, is forsaken, then the law of the strong over the weak takes over. The sin that lurks in the human heart (cf. Mk 7:20-23) takes the shape of greed and unbridled pursuit of comfort, lack of concern for the good of others and even of oneself. It leads to the exploitation of creation, both persons and the environment, due to that insatiable covetousness which sees every desire as a right and sooner or later destroys all those in its grip."
- 3) The healing power of repentance and forgiveness. The Lenten season, which is the path to Easter, demands that we renew our faces and hearts as Christians through repentance, conversion and forgiveness, so as to live fully the abundant grace of the paschal mystery. Pope Francis talks about the three pillars of lent (fasting, prayer and almsgiving). He says, "Fasting that is, learning to change our attitude towards others and all of creation, turning away from the temptation to "devour" everything to satisfy our voracity and being ready to suffer for love, which can fill the emptiness of our hearts. Prayer, which teaches us to abandon idolatry and the self-sufficiency of

our ego, and to acknowledge our need of the Lord and his mercy. Almsgiving, whereby we escape from the insanity of hoarding everything for ourselves in the illusory belief that we can secure a future that does not belong to us. And thus to rediscover the joy of God's plan for creation and for each of us, which is to love him, our brothers and sisters, and the entire world, and to find in this love our true happiness."

Inspired by the Lenten message of Pope Francis, let us remember that we are called not just to abstain from sin during Lent, but to true conversion of our hearts and minds as followers of Christ.

These following activities of Penance are highly recommended during this season of lent:

- + retreats
- + penitential liturgies that lead to the Sacrament of Confession
- + pilgrimages as signs of penance
- + fasting - voluntary self-denial
- + almsgiving - voluntary self-denial
- + charitable works - fraternal sharing
- + missionary works - fraternal sharing

Regarding the days of penance, the Church teaches the following:

"Canon 1250: The penitential days and times in the universal Church are every Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.

Canon 1251: Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Canon 1252: The law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year. The law of fasting binds those who have attained their majority, until the beginning of their sixtieth year. Pastors of souls and parents are to ensure that even those who by reason of their age are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence, are taught the true meaning of penance."

I wish you all A Fruitful and Grace-filled Lenten Season. Let us try to live this Season of Lent with great joy.

Rev. Nelson Libera, JCD