



What is Lent?

First of all, Lent is a time of preparation for baptism. Most of us were probably baptised soon after birth. In the early centuries of the Church, only adults were admitted to baptism, usually at the Great Vigil of Easter. To get ready for it, they followed a preparation course known as the Catechumenate. For several months, or even years, the 'Catechchumens' were taken through a strenuous course of Christian teaching and learned the demands of Christian living.

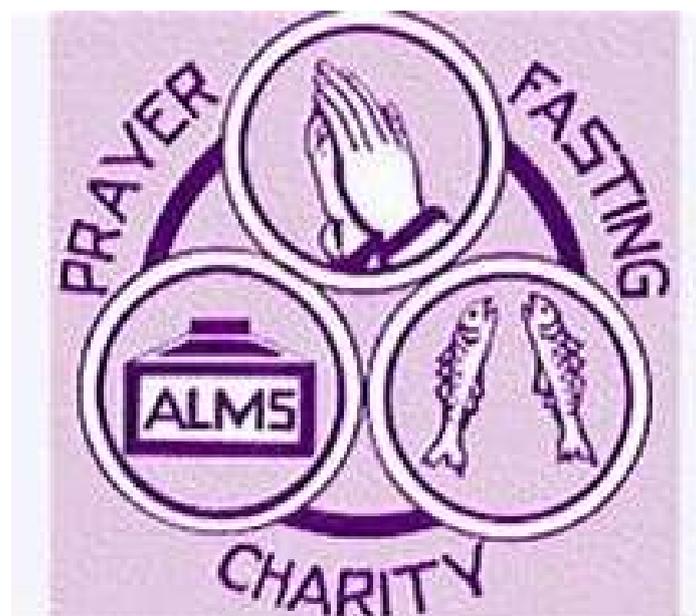
If they decided to go through with it (becoming a Catholic), the final stage of their preparation began on the First Sunday of Lent when their names were enrolled as "the Elect," in other words, those chosen for baptism. During the rest of Lent, they were introduced fully into the Christian way of life. They learned the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and they were given the Gospels. The Catechumenate of this kind has been restored since the Second Vatican Council, and Lent has become a time of intense preparation, not just for the prospective new members, but also for the whole parish that will receive them. As part of that preparation, we are reminded of the importance of those time-tested disciplines of prayer, fasting and alms-giving.

The Catechumenate has left a particularly strong impression on the Lenten readings. The Gospels of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent in Year 1, especially. They are taken from the Gospel of John; they introduce us to some of the great stories that shed light on the journey of the catechumen to baptism.

Lent culminates in the celebration of the mysteries of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection in the **Great Three Days** at the end of **Holy Week**.

Lent coincides with spring (The word 'Lent' refers to the lengthening of the springtime days). It reminds us how deeply the rhythms of life and death are embedded in our world. New life can only come into being because the old life has passed away. One of the great messages of Lent is that we can only find new life when we let go of the dead parts of ourselves that hold us back from growing. Just as a rose bush or an apple tree has got to be pruned if it is to produce well-shaped roses or juicy fruit, so we need to allow ourselves to be pruned and freed from the old growth of selfishness.

Lent, as a liturgical season, lasts forty days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and concluding at sunset on Holy Thursday. The official liturgical colour for the season of Lent is violet/purple. Throughout history, Catholics have found **prayer**, **fasting**, and **alms-giving** to be an important part of repentance and renewal. Rather than giving up something, a lot of Catholics address personal habits that need to be changed, or perform some outreach to other people in need.



Ash Wednesday and **Good Friday** are obligatory days of universal fast and abstinence. **Fasting** allows us to eat one full meal a day and

is mandatory for everyone who has completed their 18th year and have not yet reached their 60th year. Two smaller meals may be taken, which are not to equal one full meal. On these days, **Abstinence** (from meat) is required of everyone who have reached their 14th year. Older and younger people can take part in the fast as they see fit. Drinking of ordinary liquids does not break the fast. **Fasting**, or giving-up things, is the most visible sign of Lent, but we should not neglect more **Prayer** and more generous **Alms-giving**.

LENT

Pray + Fast + Give

Lent culminates in “**The Sacred Triduum**” (The Holy Three Days). **Maundy Thursday** and **Good Friday** are not part of Lent but linked with **Easter Sunday** – the great Solemnity of the Resurrection!