

LENTEN SUNDAYS

The gospel readings for Lent follow a definite and historic pattern.

- I The Lord's Temptations.
- II The Transfiguration.
- III, IV and V The readings of cycle A are historically related to Christian initiation. They are always used when the Elect are present and may be used in the other years as well.
- III The Samaritan woman
- IV The man born blind
- V The raising of Lazarus

In the other cycles the texts concerns Jesus' future glorification (year B) and Luke on conversion (year C).

The first (Old Testament) reading presents the principal elements in the story (history) of salvation. The second reading reflects either the first or gospel reading.

LENTEN WEEKDAYS

The gospel and Old Testament readings have a mutual relationship and reflect the major themes of the season. The first days of Lent, for example, speak of the practices of the season (prayer and fasting) and of the spirit with which we are to fulfill them (to the benefit of others).

The "Prayer over the People", a prayer that is an extended final blessing, is an ancient aspect of the weekday Mass texts.

*We worship your Cross, O Lord;
we recall your glorious passion.
By your holy Cross
you have redeemed the world.*

PASSIONTIDE

The last two weeks of Lent were previously called "Passiontide". The terminology is no longer commonly used, but these days intensify the Lenten message. A special preface and the semi-continuous reading of John (from the Monday after Lent IV) and the optional veiling of images (sometimes connected with the gospel passage previously assigned to the Sunday) mark the season.

HOLY WEEK

During Holy Week the Church celebrates the paschal mystery: the events of our salvation accomplished by Christ in the last days of his life on earth. The week begins with Passion (Palm) Sunday – the commemoration of Jesus' messianic entry into Jerusalem. The liturgies of these days have precedence over all others. Even important feasts are rescheduled for celebration after Easter week. A special preface and readings (the "Servant Songs" and the events of Jesus' last days) mark the week. Red vestments on Palm Sunday look ahead to the Good Friday liturgy.

TRIDUUM

The Paschal or Easter Triduum, when we celebrate the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord, is the high point of the liturgical year. The "three" days – from Holy Thursday evening through Easter Sunday night are the reason and climax of Lenten preparation and penance. The Triduum is to the whole year what Sunday is to the week.

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CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF LENT

... walking in the steps of Christ

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During Lent, the Church prepares to celebrate the dying and rising of the Lord Jesus. It is also the time for preparation for Baptism: for those who will be baptized at Easter and for all who will renew their baptismal promises at the Vigil and on Easter Day.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues until Holy Thursday afternoon when we begin the great Triduum. The “40 days” (not including Sundays) of fasting, prayer, and penitence before Easter reflect Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness. They also echo the forty day fast of Moses on Mount Sinai, the journey of the prophet Elijah to Mount Horeb (where he has a vision of God’s presence) and even the forty years of Israel’s journey through the desert toward the Promised Land.

The days of Lent (traditionally linked to the pastoral and liturgical preparation of catechumens for baptism at the Easter Vigil) have been an aspect of the life of the Church since the Council of Nicaea in 325.

PENANCE

The historical roots of Lent also included the reconciliation of penitents: individuals dressed in sackcloth and sprinkled with ashes who dedicated themselves to penance for the season, a practice that was constant, severe and public. They were formally reconciled with the church by the bishop on Holy Thursday morning so that they could celebrate the Triduum with the community. After the disappearance of the public penitence with the distribution of ashes to penitents at the beginning of Lent, Pope Urban II, in 1091, recommended it to all Christians. Since then, all receive ashes on the first day of Lent (Ash Wednesday).

Our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving are ways for us to revisit our relationship with God, with ourselves and with our neighbour. With the celebration of Reconciliation (in sacrament and in Penance celebrations), they allow us to be closer to Christ and to improve our life.

The national collection for Development and Peace is usually taken up on the fifth Sunday in Lent.

BAPTISM

Central to the celebration and even to the understanding of Lent is the role of baptism and the place of the “elect” – those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. The most important rituals that mark points in their journey of faith are celebrated in the parish Sunday liturgy.

First Sunday: The Rite of Election (calling of the catechumens to final preparation for Baptism).

Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays: The *Scrutinies* (prayers for the elect by the community).

One feature of the Sunday celebration that often catches people off guard is the “dismissal” of the elect after the homily. They leave the assembly since by ancient rule only the baptized remain in for the Eucharist. They will pray with the assembly for the first time when they join in the Prayer of the Faithful at the Easter Vigil.

These events are supplemented by other celebrations as well as by prayers and rituals for those preparing for Reception into Full Communion (their calling to Lenten renewal takes place the last Sunday in Ordinary Time before Lent).

*This time of fasting
opens the gates of heaven to us.
Let us welcome it and pray
that when Easter comes
we may share the joy of the risen Lord.*

(Lenten responsory)

ASPECTS OF THE SEASON

Violet vestments. The use of purple vestments indicates the time of penance. Sometimes the Lenten vestments use a red hued purple (called “Roman” purple) that anticipates the red vestments of Palm Sunday and Good Friday.

Decoration. The season is marked by a stark character; flowers are expressly forbidden in the altar area. That same character should be reflected in all aspects of “decoration” throughout the season.

Some places retain the custom of covering the cross, statues and other images for the last two weeks of Lent (a period that used to be called “Passiontide”).

Music reflects the decoration, as the organ and other musical instruments are used only to accompany vocal song. One of the ancient practices of Lent is the exclusion of the “*Alleluia*” not only at the gospel Acclamation but from any use including hymns. The Glory to God (and in the Office, the Te Deum hymn) is omitted except on important feasts.

During Lent, the focus is always on the prayers and readings of the season. The calendar is kept deliberately clear of any but the most important celebrations of the saints; during Holy Week, even a major feast will be transferred until after Easter.

Lent encourages emphasis on the celebration of Reconciliation (Confession), often in celebrations that include a common preparation and reflection before individual confession.

Lent reminds us of the long tradition of Confession and of receiving Holy Communion at least once during the period of Lent and Eastertide.

Lent invites time for heightened reflection, especially on the Passion of the Lord, and personal prayer. Traditional practices include the Way of the Cross and devotions to Mary, Mother of Sorrows. Often these are included as parish community activities.