

Pastor's Corner

Mardi Gras and Ash Wednesday

Mardi Gras is almost here. Mardi Gras is connected to Carnival. The word, “Carnival,” comes from the Latin words *caro* (a piece of flesh) and *levare* (to remove). Carnival literally means “to remove flesh,” or more colloquially, “Farewell to Flesh.” Mardi Gras is French for “Fat Tuesday” and embodies the same concept as Carnival – a farewell to the flesh on the last Tuesday of Ordinary Time before the start of the penitential season of Lent.

According to historians, the celebration of Carnival is embedded in the tradition of the Catholic faith. Its origin is annual pagan festivals in ancient Rome which involved feasting, drinking and carnal behavior. With the rise of Christianity, Christian morals took root in Rome and there was need to blend traditional Roman practices with the mores of the Catholic faith. The concept of Carnival began as the Church's way to compress all the carnal celebrating into a single time period before Lent.

As Christianity spread through Europe, different countries celebrated Carnival according to their own cultural expression. In France, the holiday became a day to finish off meat, eggs and milk before Ash Wednesday. That is how the term Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday originated – a day to slaughter the fattened calf and feast before the great 40-day fast.

When French immigrants came to America, they brought the tradition of Mardi Gras with them. Over time, the celebration of Mardi Gras became more and more elaborate and more and more secular. In New Orleans, grand celebrations became common place with masked balls and parades. Non-Catholics joined the party.

So, Mardi Gras is a Catholic tradition intended to condense the celebration of the flesh into the final days of Ordinary Time preceding Lent – so that people are ready spiritually to enter into the penitential character of Lent. In these final days of the Mardi Gras season, may we enjoy ourselves within reason so we can hit the ground running with the prayer, repentance, sacrifice and conversion that Lent calls us to engage.

Enclosed in this bulletin is a flyer with Ash Wednesday Mass times. We mark ourselves with ashes as a sign of our mortality and need to turn from sin. May Lent 2020 help us focus on the brevity of earthly life and the call to live for the life that never ends.

Happy Mardi Gras, and God bless,

Fr. Joe