



The season of Lent (from the Latin meaning “*lengthen*”) is the time of spiritual preparation for the celebration of Easter. This year the season begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021 and concludes at sundown on Holy Thursday, April 2, 2021. Through our Lenten journey we accompany Noah and his family in the ark for forty days, the Israelites as they wandered in the desert for forty years and Jesus in his time of fasting and prayer for forty days before embarking on his public ministry. As daylight incrementally lengthens, so does our spiritual focus.

When Lent traditions are lived and understood, they can bring us closer to Christ and transform the hearts of those who participate in them. As you make plans for your own journey through these forty days, live spiritual practices like prayer, devotion, fasting, learning and generosity with intentionality and Lenten focus.

Creating a Prayer Space for Lent

Set up a special focal point for prayer time during the Lenten Season. Use the color purple, a sign of reflection and conversion, on a table or shelf or as a backdrop. Include a simple cross or crucifix (a cross bearing the crucified Jesus) and a Bible. Create a simple crown of thorns or acquire a small cactus or succulent. A small bowl of ashes or a bowl of sand with a candle are also icons of Lent. For more ideas, [click here](#) & [click here](#). Offer this blessing prayer once the space is prepared:



Blessed are you, O God of mercy and compassion.
Though we are but dust and ashes,
in baptism we die and rise with Christ.
As we ponder our lives and seek freedom from our sins,
assure us of your forgiveness and grace.
Nourish and sustain us on our Lenten journey,
that marked with the sign of the cross,
we may be arrive at Easter with hearts renewed.
Bless our prayer space and guide our prayer life
as we journey through these Lenten days.
We make this prayer in the name of Jesus
who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

The Lenten Practice of Fasting

The Lenten practice of fasting is modeled on Jesus' forty days of fasting in the desert, the Gospel story always proclaimed on the First Sunday of Lent. Like Jesus, we fast during Lent as a reminder of our dependence on God. Through fasting, we also align ourselves more closely with the needs of the hungry throughout our world. The tradition of abstaining from meat on Lenten Fridays allows us to walk in the shoes of the poor who can seldom afford meat for meals. As a gesture of solidarity, plan very simple, home cooked meals and set aside the money normally spent for food and drink on Fridays to give to a local food pantry or [Operation Rice Bowl](#), sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. For creative suggestions for Lenten fasting, [click here](#).

Repent and Be Faithful to the Gospel

Every Lent, all of the members of the Body of Christ are called to repentance. In Hebrew, repentance means to turn around, retrace our steps, change direction. In Greek, “*metanoia*,” it means to radically change one's mind, outlook, and behaviors. At its core, repentance implies a complete change of heart and requires a conscious decision to be open to such change in all facets of our lives. The first step to *metanoia* is an open and honest inventory of what needs to change. In response to Jesus' call to repentance and as an outward sign of *metanoia*, celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in these Lenten days of preparation for Easter.

The Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary

Pray the rosary during the season of Lent. By meditating on the [Sorrowful Mysteries](#) of the Rosary, we accompany Jesus through his final twenty-four hours leading to his death on the cross. We suffer with him through sorrowful prayer, the agony of scourge and mockery, the physical exhaustion of carrying his cross and the gasp of his final breath.

The Sorrowful Mysteries:

1. **The Agony in the Garden:** Jesus prays sorrowfully in the Garden of Gethsemane.
2. **The Scourging at the Pillar:** Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged.
3. **The Crowning with Thorns:** The soldiers mock Jesus and crown his head with thorns.
4. **The Carrying of the Cross:** Jesus carries his cross to the place of crucifixion.
5. **The Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord on the Cross:** Jesus is crucified on the cross.

Lent Saints

Many feast days of saints occur during Lent. Remember saints on their feast days and prayerfully consider how each saint served as a faithful disciple.

February 22: The Chair of Saint Peter

February 23: Saint Polycarp

March 3: Saint Katharine Drexel

March 4: Saint Casimir

March 8: Saint John of God.

March 9: Saint Frances of Rome

March 17: Saint Patrick – for creative ideas, [click here](#).

March 18: Cyril of Jerusalem

March 19: Saint Joseph

March 23: Saint Turibius

Laetare Sunday

Laetare Sunday marks the midpoint of Lent: this year landing on March 14, 2021. Laetare means “*rejoice*” in Latin. The liturgical colors change from violet to rose for one day and flowers are placed in front of the altar as a sign of hope in the midst of the Lenten journey. Plan to make Laetare Sunday special, looking with hope to the coming celebration of Easter.

The Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross invite us to use all our senses as we reflect prayerfully and walk intentionally with Jesus through his suffering, death on the cross and resurrection. Include the devotion of The Stations of the Cross into your Lenten plans this year.

1. **Jesus Is Condemned to Death:** Pontius Pilate condemns Jesus to death.
2. **Jesus Takes Up His Cross:** Jesus willingly accepts and patiently bears his cross.
3. **Jesus Falls the First Time:** Weakened by torments and by loss of blood, Jesus falls beneath his cross.
4. **Jesus Meets His Sorrowful Mother:** Jesus meets his mother, Mary, who is filled with grief.
5. **Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross:** Soldiers force Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross.
6. **Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus:** Veronica steps through the crowd to wipe the face of Jesus.
7. **Jesus Falls a Second Time:** Jesus falls beneath the weight of the cross a second time.
8. **Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem:** Jesus tells the women to weep not for him but for themselves and for their children.
9. **Jesus Falls the Third Time:** Weakened almost to the point of death, Jesus falls a third time.
10. **Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments:** The soldiers strip Jesus of his garments, treating him as a common criminal.
11. **Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross:** Jesus' hands and feet are nailed to the cross.
12. **Jesus Dies on the Cross:** After suffering greatly on the cross, Jesus bows his head and dies.
13. **Jesus Is Taken Down From the Cross:** The lifeless body of Jesus is tenderly placed in the arms of Mary, his mother.
14. **Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb:** Jesus' disciples place his body in the tomb.
15. **Jesus Rises from the Dead:** The discovery of the empty tomb and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Lent Almsgiving

The Lent practice of almsgiving calls us to a renewed commitment to charitable giving. The Lenten scriptures (Friday after Ash Wednesday Gospel) draw a direct line between fasting and the Works of Mercy. Anytime we offer help to anyone, we are offering help to Christ. The need for food, winter clothing, household supplies and more is greater than ever this year due to the pandemic. Prayerfully consider ways you can safely and generously give this Lent.

Lent Compassion

Jesus responds to the death of his friend, Lazarus, with tears filled with grief. It is comforting to know that Jesus can sit alongside us and truly empathize when we experience loss. The comfort of a minister, friend or loved one during times of sadness is immeasurable. Reflect back upon times of loss from your own life. Who has shown the compassion of Jesus to you during these periods? Offer a gesture of thanks for those who have been there for you. Visit (virtually or in person) someone you know who is confined because of old age, illness or depression.

Cultivate the Habit of Expressing Gratitude

Lent invites us to be outwardly focused. One powerful and easy way to do this is by looking for opportunities to thank others in our daily walk of life. We may need to stay socially distant but we can still say the simple words, "thank you" to maintenance workers, gas station attendants, grocery store clerks, garbage collectors, postal workers, delivery men & women, church staff, cleaning crews, crossing guards, bus drivers, bank tellers, medical workers and more.

Lenten Pretzels



The pretzel developed in the fifth century when Christians fasted from meat, dairy, fats and sweets. The first pretzels were shaped like arms crossed in prayer, because many Christians at that time prayed by crossing their arms over their breasts. Thus the pretzel is a sign of prayer and the cross. To this day we bake pretzels during Lent. They are a visual symbol of our prayerful fasting and make great Lenten gift for friends, neighbors and the homebound. Try these recipes: [click here](#) or [click here](#).

Decorate Eggs

Christians see eggs as a sign of Christ's death and resurrection: when the hard, tomb-like shell is cracked open, the Easter colors of bright yellow and white spill forth. Plan a special time to decorate eggs for Easter and use the opportunity to anticipate the mystery of the resurrection. For starter ideas, [click here](#) or [click here](#) or [click here](#).

Make a (Spiritual) Pilgrimage

The ancient practice of making a spiritual pilgrimage is a natural way to “lengthen” our spiritual focus during Lent. A pilgrimage is a journey to some sacred place as an act of spiritual devotion. A pilgrim is more than a tourist and a pilgrimage is more than a journey. A pilgrim travels with a spiritual purpose, to grow closer to God. Pilgrimage often leads us to conversion, the call to each of us during the season of Lent. For those unable to travel due to physical or other constraints, a “pilgrimage of the heart” is possible. Settle in a quiet place, “unplug” from distractions, and pray to be aware of God's presence. Using a mental image of making a pilgrimage, we ask for God's assistance in moving through the challenges that we face in life. Offering prayers for those who are on pilgrimage is another way of spiritually connecting with a pilgrimage site. Here are some ideas for pilgrimage in the time of pandemic:

- To an statue, garden, prayer path on the grounds of our local parish, shrine or retreat center
- To the outdoor labyrinth or Stations of the Cross at Holy Family Retreat Center
- To the beach or lake front
- Taking a high
- To the Holy Land (Waterbury)
- To Lourdes in Litchfield to pray the outdoor Stations of the Cross
- To your birthplace, a former neighborhood, the Church where you were baptized
- To the cemetery where your loved ones are buried

Spiritual Reading and Growing

Reading and learning can be a spiritual practice, making us more attentive to the movement of God in our life and in the world. It can help us to grow in love for God and for our neighbors. Dedicate some energy this Lent to “lengthening” your intellectual spirit. Learn more, [click here](#).

- Join a Lenten Bible Study
- Commit to a Lenten Daily Reflection Book
- Read the Bible
- Savor Christian writings, poetry, fiction
- Reflect on Pope Francis' Lenten Message, [click here](#).