

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LENT

It is a time where people give stuff up for 40 days. But have you ever asked why and what the purpose of this Lent time is? This is to help you understand why and what this 40-day period is about.

Shrove Tuesday:

'Shrove' comes from the Old English word *scrifan* meaning 'impose as a penance'. It also stems from **the word *shrive* meaning confess and receive absolution**. Shrove Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday – the first day of Lent: **the period of fasting**. The reason why Shrove Tuesday is the day before Lent is **to cleanse oneself of sin, bad habits/ appetites, and enter into a state of willing to self-sacrifice**.

The origin of Shrove Tuesday is also known as Fat Tuesday. The purpose for this is because people would eat all the food before they entered into complete fasting so nothing would be spoiled. This would happen during the Mardi Gras **carnival; carnival translated from Latin means "to take away flesh."** Therefore, **Shrove Tuesday is a day where one should confess their sins, cleanse themselves from bad habits, and strip away their flesh, so one is able to enter into the Lenten season with the Holy Spirit. It is important to receive confession and absolution before entering into fasting; in addition to modest feast and rejoicing.**

Ash Wednesday:

When receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday the priest says **"you are dust, and unto dust you shall return."** (Genesis 3:19)

But why do we receive ashes? It is a symbol that marks the 40 days of penance stemming from an ancient rite that converted sinners into penance. When ashes are placed on our foreheads it symbolizes our **fragility and mortality and that we need to be redeemed by God's mercy**.

While it relates back to the Scripture in Genesis, it **reminds us of our humanity. Adam was made from the dust of the earth**. During Lent we have to humble ourselves; humility comes from the Latin word *humos* meaning earth, being humble means down to earth. This is a period of time where we have to humble ourselves, be as down to earth as possible and remember to lead ourselves through heaven through something during the period of Lent.

Lent Season:

The word Lent derives from the word "**lengthening**" because it is the period of time where the darkness of night decreases and the light in the day increases. It symbolizes us giving up something where we feel in a period of darkness but as time goes on, we experience more light and freedom from the things that bind us.

The number of days in Lent, 40 days, relate to the Old Testament: Noah was on the ark for 40 days (Genesis 8:6), Moses on Mount Sinai receiving the 10 commandments in 40 days (Exodus 34:28), and the Israelites wandering the dessert for 40 days (Joshua 5:6). Now why 40 days? It takes 40 weeks for a woman to carry a developing baby before a new birth takes place. So, the symbolism of 40 days represents a new birth. When Jesus was in the dessert for 40 days during Lent, to show us we can be reconciled by God and governed by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus spent 40 days in the dessert before exposing a lot of His ministry. Why? Because Jesus, Himself, understood that in quite God's voice is heard. In the midst of our dry periods in life, we can feel temptation but also hear the voice of God. Things we fast from in Lent may tempt us at times but we need to be prudent to God and listen for His voice. When we feel too weak and temptation seems to be 'winning' over us, remember that Lent is a period that strips away the flesh. The things of world that our flesh desires can be overcome through prayer and allow us to walk in the Spirit. During our fasting and prayer, it is important to give alms, meaning thanks.

Fasting:

The reason we give stuff up in Lent is a form of fasting. Something that may give us pleasure, we offer up that sacrifice for God; giving up things that prevent us from being with God. **It is a period of time where we grow in understanding of God's sacrifice** and give things up - anything that may prevent us from prayer time, any sin that stands in the way of God, our habits that make us not walk the Christian path way, or dietary changes.

During our period of fasting we can also take out a negative thing in our lives and do something that helps us with holiness. With our fasting, in the time we may be doing the things that we are fasted from we can add on more time to grow in holiness: read more scripture (daily Bible quote and daily Gospel readings), read the catechism, read reflections from Saints, research saints and martyrs, attend Mass or Adoration, pray a rosary, pray a chaplet, prayer journal, intention journal, etc. Love is a giving experience. So during Lent may we cut something negative and unneeded out of our lives and give our lives solely to God and grow in holiness. Praying for you all!