

Meditations for the First Week of Lent

WE THIRST FOR YOU, O LORD



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Before Jesus began his ministry, the Spirit “drove him out into the desert.” After forty days he emerged to announce that the kingdom of God was at hand and to encourage the people to “repent, and believe in the gospel.” As we begin the season of Lent, we, too, enter into our own desert.

Repent and Believe

Mark 1:12-15

Today's Gospel contains two important aspects to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We are told that he went out into the desert for forty days, where he was tempted by Satan and ministered to by angels. Next Mark says that,

after the death of John the Baptist, Jesus announced that the “time of fulfilment” was at hand and began his preaching and teaching.

What lesson lies here for us? While Lent is a time of service to others, it must also be a time of preparation and renewal of self. We cannot give what we do not have. Just as Jesus had to spend time in the desert, so we, too, need to take time this season to allow God to show us where we need to change and give us the courage and conviction to act on those changes. This give and take is part of the flow of life and one of the great lessons of Lent.

FOR REFLECTION

- › What will I do this Lent as an outward sign of my repentance?
- › How might I deepen my relationship with God this holy season?
- › How do I overcome temptation?

Lenten Prayer

Unto to you, I cry, my God!

“You are dust, and to dust you shall return.” — Genesis 3:19

*Lord, help us see today
and all of its stresses
in the light of your eternal love.*

Catechism CONNECTION

“By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.” — *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 540





OUR FAITH

Forty Days in the Desert

Why did Jesus spend forty days in the desert before beginning his ministry? The number forty has a special meaning in Scripture and is symbolic of preparation before a major life change. Moses spent forty days fasting and praying on Mount Zion when he received the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:28). An Israelite patrol spent forty days spying on the land of Canaan before reporting back to Moses and Aaron (Nm 13:25). And the entire Israelite people spent forty years wandering in the desert before gaining access to the promised land (Nm 14:34). Jesus likewise spent forty days before leaving his old life as the son of the carpenter to bring new life to the entire world.

Fasting and Abstinence



- Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of both abstinence and fasting.
- Fridays during Lent are days of abstinence (abstaining from meat).
- Ash Wednesday is forty-six days before Easter, but Lent is considered forty days long, because Sundays are not counted as days of Lent.

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Family Calvary Stones

The days of Lent have traditionally been used as a spiritual pilgrimage, during which we symbolically travel with Jesus to his death on the cross. To help emphasize the idea of Lent as a journey, collect forty small stones, one for each day of the season. (These are sometimes available at craft stores.) Each night at dinner, pray for one person and write his or her name with a marker on one of the pebbles. Collect the stones in a small bowl, and during Holy Week use them to make a “mound” of prayer that holds up a crucifix.



SIGNS OF THE SEASON

Lent

The word “Lent” has a specific religious connotation today, but originally it was used to mean “spring.”

The Color Purple

The deep purple color that fills the Church during Lent symbolizes Christ’s suffering and death but, because purple is also the color of royalty, it foreshadows Christ’s kingship and resurrection.



Designpics

Ash Wednesday

On this first day of Lent, we receive ashes in the form of a cross on our forehead and are reminded to “turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.” In receiving ashes, we embrace Jesus’ journey: the cross of suffering and the promise of resurrection. We are marked as believers, as sinners, and as people in need of Christ’s forgiveness and salvation.