

The Journey of Lent: Through Discipline We Gain a New Appreciation

**by
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The word “lent” initially meant “spring”, from the German “lenz”, and the Dutch “lente”, and was derived from the Germanic root for *long*, because in the spring the days visibly lengthen, and it was adopted in Europe in the late Middle Ages, as sermons began to be given in the vernacular instead of the traditional Latin, and of course Easter is at the beginning of Spring in the European countries.

In the Christian tradition, Lent is the period of the liturgical year leading up to Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday, and lasting for 40 days. These forty days represent the forty days Christ spent in the desert before the beginning of His public ministry, where He was continuously tempted by Satan. Each of the six Sundays during this period represent a “mini-Easter”, a celebration of Jesus’ victory over sin and death, and therefore is not included in the forty day count.

The number “forty” has many Biblical references: the forty days Moses spent on Mount Sinai with God, the forty days and nights Elijah spent walking to Mount Horeb, the forty days and nights God sent rain in the great flood of Noah, the forty years the Hebrew people wandered in the desert while travelling to the Promised Land, and the forty days Jonah in his prophecy of judgement gave the city of Nineveh in which to repent.

Just before Jesus began his public ministry, He retreated into the wilderness, where he fasted for forty days, and was tempted by the devil many times. He overcame all three of Satan’s temptations by citing scripture to the devil, at which point the devil left Him, angels ministered to Jesus, and He began his ministry. Jesus further said that His disciples should fast “when the bridegroom shall be taken from them” (Matthew 9:15), a reference to His Passion. And since the Apostles fasted as they mourned the “death” of Jesus, Christians have traditionally fasted during the annual commemoration of His burial.

The last two weeks of Lent are known as Passiontide. It begins on the fifth Sunday of Lent, when all statues in the church are traditionally veiled in purple. This is seen to be in accordance with the Gospel of that Sunday (John 8: 46 – 59), in which Jesus “hid Himself” from the people. The veils are removed at the singing of the Gloria during the Easter Vigil.

The various holy days within the season of Lent are:

- Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent
- Mothering Sunday, which is the fourth Lenten Sunday, and which marks the halfway point between Ash Wednesday and Easter. The origin is the sixteenth century celebration of the Mother Church.
- The fifth Lenten Sunday, also known as Passion Sunday (however, that term is also applied to Palm Sunday) marks the beginning of Passiontide.
- The sixth Lenten Sunday, commonly called Palm Sunday, marks the beginning of Holy Week, the final week of Lent immediately preceding Easter.
- Wednesday of Holy Week is sometimes referred to as Spy Wednesday to commemorate the days on which Judas spied on Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane before betraying Him.
- Thursday of Holy Week is known as Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday, and is a day Christians commemorate the Last Supper shared by Christ with His disciples.
- Good Friday follows the next day, on which Christians remember Jesus’ crucifixion and burial.

Our parish offers us the opportunity each year to engage this Lenten season through its many activities e.g. Shrove Tuesday, and the Imposition of Ashes service on Ash Wednesday, amongst others. And a most important opportunity is offered in the form of the Lenten course, the theme this year being “Growing the Church – Lessons from the Acts of the Apostles and the Contemporary World Church”. This is the perfect opportunity to learn, to grow, to better our personal spirituality, and to grow closer to God, which is the ultimate goal of this time.

And during this Lenten journey, with all its rich symbolism and challenges, perhaps there’s no better time in the liturgical year for us within our families to refocus on many of the things we take for granted. As much as Lent gives us the opportunity every year to re-examine our spiritual lives (through prayer, penance, sacrifice and good works, it being a time of introspection and discipline), so my challenge to all of us is that we similarly re-examine our family lives and relationships, building on what is positive and good, and brutally getting rid of attitudes and habits that are not. Our families are the most important aspect of our daily lives, next to our Godliness, and it is ultimately our interpersonal relationships that define us, mould us, and create in us either a sense of peace, love and harmony, or a soul filled with bitterness and anger. Our loved ones should be exactly that.....loved. And what better way to show that love than to sacrifice our old habits and attitudes, and to create within us a renewed appreciation for our loved ones, and a desire to love our families above ourselves, above our selfish desires and activities, even above the universal syndrome of “busyness”, to make time for our children, our spouses, our parents, and to treat them with an attitude of grace, love, kindness, respect and compassion. Why? Because.....Family Matters!

Love,
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