

WHY IS LENT SO IMPORTANT?

As Lent starts soon, it's time to evaluate the deeper meaning of Lent. Maybe we embrace Lent because we intuitively realize these rhythms of spiritual life are part of giving our lives in worship—they have been in the Church for ages.

Maybe we do it because everyone else is doing it. So what is Lent and why should we observe it?

Many of us think of Lent as a period where we give something up for God in order to honor the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the Cross, which we commemorate on Easter. While this is partially true, it's not exactly how the early Church saw Lent. It's more about anticipating the full impact of Easter for the time we're in now and when Christ returns.

When we talk about "giving something up for Lent," let's be honest: we usually mean "I'm going to throw God a bone." But the time between Ash Wednesday (the day after Shrove Tuesday and the beginning of Lent) and Easter Sunday is meant to be a time where we take ourselves out of time and out of the business of our world to spend time dying to ourselves. It's not just our way of giving Jesus a pat on the back, but it's about recentring our will to His and secondly living that out in the world.

The word "lent" comes from the old English word for spring and was meant to mirror the Jewish passover. Lent consists of 40 days. The 40 day period mirrors the 40 days Moses spent on Mt. Sinai and the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness. The Church recognized the need for shadowing these times as they showed in Scripture in order to remember the divine narrative leading up to the Cross. By the time Palm Sunday comes around, we are celebrants of the coming Christ. And then on Easter, the love story of God is completed with an empty grave. It's a living memory, and in celebrating Lent, we're living through it ourselves in a way.

Every fast and feast in the Church for the past 2,000 odd years has been given to the whole body to remind us that Christ's actions effect us, even now. They are spiritual seasons, reminding us that our sins are forgiven, death is abolished and Christ is risen, even now. They're for our encouragement, so that when we stand in worship on Easter Sunday.

It's also important to remember in times of fasting, such as Lent, that we're not just "giving something up," but we're "giving something over" and the less we take, the more we can give. Christians always saw this time as giving to the poor and needy. So, when we think of Lent, we think of service and pouring out into the streets so that the world can know the riches of the love of God. As we do all these things, the love of God becomes clearer in our hearts.