

LENT

Lent. A forty-day period of penitence and prayer which begins on Ash Wednesday and prepares for the feast of Easter. It is a form of retreat for Christians preparing to celebrate the paschal mystery. It became a forty-day retreat during the seventh century to coincide with the forty days spent by Christ in the desert; before this Lent usually lasted only a week. Every Friday of Lent is a day of abstinence. Fasting probably originated from the custom of fasting by those who were expecting to be baptized after being catechumens. The third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent refer to the process of preparing for baptism. Penitential works are very important during Lent. These include not only abstinence and fasting but also prayers and charitable works. Ash Wednesday is one of the greatest days of penitence. Vatican Council II in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy describes how penitence will lead one closer to God. People should not become overly involved in the penitence itself, however, but realize that the penitence is in preparation for celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians seek a change of heart during Lent in their relationship to God.

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