

OUR LADY OF PEACE AND
BLESSED DOMINIC BARBERI

CATHOLIC
TEACHING

What is the purpose of this folder?

- *To provide some information about basic Catholic Teaching (the information has been compiled by the parish Liturgy Group)*
- *To share that teaching with anyone who is seeking knowledge of the Catholic faith*
- *To encourage us to think about our own faith – what does our faith mean to us and how do we live our faith in our daily life*
- *To encourage each of us to share our Catholic faith with others*
- *To encourage parish groups and individuals to add to this folder*
- *To make available related articles/magazines*

What would we (the Liturgy Group) like you to do?

- *Feel free to browse this folder*
- *If you visit our church, feel welcome to borrow the folder or a relevant page, to read and reflect on*
- *If you wish to take anything home, please ask first*
- *Feedback any comments (eg. things you like or dislike); questions (eg. Why can't we? Why do we do?)*
- *Join the Liturgy Group if you want to*

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Catholic Teaching

Summary of Christian Doctrine

Reference to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which is an “organic presentation of the Catholic faith in its entirety”, can enrich this brief summary.

1. We believe that the existence of God can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason. God revealed himself to us as a personal and loving God. We believe that God is one God in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God the Son, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, was made man, died upon the Cross to save us and rose triumphantly from the dead. We believe that the human person is created body and soul with free will. God wills every person to be saved for eternal life in the Kingdom of heaven. Through sin, it is possible for us to reject God and be separated from him forever in hell.
2. We believe all that is contained in the Creed. The Creed is divided into three parts: “the first part speaks of the divine Person and the wonderful work of creation; the next speaks of the second divine Person and the mystery of his redemption of people; the final part speaks of the third divine Person, the origin and source of our sanctification”. (*Catechism 190*)
3. Jesus Christ founded the Church to continue his teaching and sanctifying work on earth until the end of time. “In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the Apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her a share in his own infallibility”. (*Catechism 889*). Mindful of the words of Christ “he who hears you hears me” (*Luke 10:16*), we believe what the Church teaches us in matters of faith and morals.

The Ten Commandments of God

The Ten Commandments are a privileged expression of the natural law. This law is made known to us by divine revelation and by human reason. (*Catechism 2070*)

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.
4. Honour your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

The Seven Sacraments

The seven Sacraments are outward signs of inward grace, given by Jesus Christ. "Celebrated worthily in faith, the Sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ is himself at work". (*Catechism 1127*)

1. *Baptism*: by which we are made Christians, children of God, members of his holy Church, and heirs of heaven.
2. *Confirmation*: by which we receive the Holy Spirit, to make us strong and perfect Christians, and soldiers of Christ.
3. *The Holy Eucharist*: which is really and truly and substantially the Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity, of Jesus Christ, under the appearance of bread and wine.

The Holy Eucharist is not only a Sacrament, in which we receive our divine Lord for the food and nourishment of our souls, and in which he is really present to be adored upon the altar; it is also a Sacrifice, the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass, in which, at the time of consecration, the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and in which he is offered up for us to his eternal Father.

4. *Reconciliation*: by which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven

5. *Anointing of the Sick*: which, in dangerous illnesses, and in preparation for death, comforts the soul, remits sins, and restores health if God sees this to be expedient.

6. *Holy Orders*: by which Bishops, Priests, and Deacons receive power and grace to perform their sacred duties.

7. *Matrimony*: which is the Sacrament of Christian marriage.

The Six Commandment of the Church

1. To keep the Sundays and holy days of Obligation holy, by hearing Mass and resting from servile works.

2. To keep the days of Fasting and Abstinence appointed by the Church.

3. To go to Confession when we are conscious of having sinned gravely.

4. To receive the Blessed Sacrament at least once a year, at Easter or thereabouts.

5. To contribute to the support of our pastors.
6. Not to marry within certain degrees of kindred without dispensation.

The Three Theological Virtues

- Faith
- Hope
- Charity.

The Four Cardinal Virtues

- Prudence
- Justice
- Fortitude
- Temperance.

The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

- Wisdom
- Understanding
- Right Judgement
- Courage
- Knowledge
- Reverence
- Spirit of Wonder and Awe in the presence of God

The Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit

- Charity
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Goodness
- Kindness
- Long-suffering
- Mildness
- Faith
- Modesty
- Self-control
- Chastity

The Seven Corporal Works of Mercy

- To feed the hungry
- To give drink to the thirsty
- To clothe the naked
- To harbour the harbourless
- To visit the sick
- To visit the imprisoned
- To bury the dead

The Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy

- To counsel the doubtful
- To instruct the ignorant
- To admonish sinners
- To comfort the afflicted
- To forgive offences
- To bear wrongs patiently
- To pray for the living and the dead

The Seven Deadly Sins and the Opposite Virtues

Pride

Avarice

Lust

Anger

Gluttony

Envy

Sloth

Humility

Liberality

Chastity

Meekness

Temperance

Brotherly love

Diligence

Simple Rule of Christian Life

Christians believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and his permanent victory over death and the new life that he offers. Perhaps the best known instruction of Jesus on Christian life is in the *Sermon on the Mount* (*Matthew 5-7*). Called to be 'light to the nations', Christians, with God's grace, are helped to live lives of virtue, justice and charity, to love God and neighbour, fulfil the commandments, forgive their enemies, not to judge or resist evil; and like Jesus, to embrace their daily cross with loving trust. Christians learn to engage in the everyday struggle of faith through prayer (*also in secret and at night*), almsgiving and fasting, as necessary. The *Sermon* describes these elements of a Christian way of life.

The Beatitudes

How happy are the poor in spirit;
Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy the gentle;
They shall have the earth for their heritage.
Happy those who mourn;
They shall be comforted.
Happy those who hunger for what is right;
They shall be satisfied.
Happy the merciful;
They shall have mercy shown to them.
Happy the pure in heart;
They shall see God.
Happy the peacemakers;
They shall be called sons of God.
Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right;
Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven;
this is how they persecute the prophets before you.

(Matthew 5:1-12)

As Catholics, we should pray every day, take part in Mass every Sunday and Holy days of Obligation, receive the Sacraments and live a life of Christian charity towards our fellow man.

Christ invites us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

Christian Prayer

Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God. There are many ways of praying. We can use the words of a familiar prayer such as the 'Our Father' and say them slowly, stopping to think and pray each phrase carefully. We may take a passage of scripture and reflect on it, considering how it applies to our lives, praising and thanking God and asking him for the graces we need. We may simply talk to Jesus in our own words – St Theresa said that prayer is a "conversation with Christ". We may simply sit in silence and contemplate the presence of God without any words at all. St John Vianney asked a man in his church what he did when he prayed. He answered "I just look at him and he just looks at me".

The Mass Simply Explained

At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection; a Sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet “in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of future glory is given to us” (*Catechism 1323*).

First we come together in one place to celebrate the Eucharist in communion with the whole Church. At our head is Christ, the High Priest. The Bishop or priest acts in the person of Christ.

The Word of God in the inspired scriptures is proclaimed. The homily encourages us to accept this Word and put it into practice. In the intercessions, we pray for the Church, for the world, for those in need and for local needs.

The offerings of bread and wine are placed upon the altar and offered by the priest in the name of Christ. The Creator’s gifts are placed into the hands of Christ who, in his sacrifice perfects all human attempts to offer sacrifice.

The Eucharistic Prayer is the heart and summit of the whole celebration. The priest gives thanks to God in the preface and we praise him in union with the angels and saints. The priest asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine so that they truly become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. His one, eternal sacrifice offered for us upon the Cross is made present. The Church calls to mind the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, which are made present in the Eucharist. The prayer reminds us that we offer the Eucharist in communion with the Bishop of Rome, the local Bishop and the whole Church throughout the world.

In Holy Communion, we share in the sacred and heavenly banquet and receive the Body and Blood of Christ as the “bread of heaven” and the “chalice of salvation”, the food and life of our souls (*Catechism 1346*)

Who may receive Holy Communion?

To receive Holy Communion, we must be “in communion” with the Church: we should be in a state of grace, keep the fast of one hour (not required for the elderly or sick), and we should prepare devoutly to receive the Sacrament. The Church encourages those who are properly disposed to receive Holy Communion whenever they participate in the Mass.

Those who are living together as husband and wife but who are not married, or who are married outside the Church without permission may not receive Holy Communion.

If we are conscious of having committed a mortal sin, we should make a Sacramental confession before receiving Holy Communion.

The Sunday Obligation

The first commandment of the Church binds all Catholics to attend Mass on all Sundays and Holy days of Obligation.

This is a grave obligation on our conscience, unless some really serious cause prevents us. To come in late, wilfully or through carelessness, when Mass has begun is, at least, a venial sin. To miss Mass when you cannot help it, or when it would be very difficult for you to attend Mass, is not a sin.

If you were to miss Mass because you were ill, or because you had to stay at home to mind a sick person or children, or because you were a very long way from church, or if for some other reason you could not go, it would not be a sin.

When you cannot go to Mass, say the Mass prayers yourself at home, if possible.

Fasting and Abstinence

The age at which abstinence becomes binding is fourteen. The obligation of fasting is restricted to those who have completed their eighteenth year and it continues until they have begun their sixtieth.

Fasting and Abstinence are binding throughout the Church on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday only.

In England, Wales and Scotland whilst abstinence is not an obligation on the other Fridays in the year, these are days when self-denial should be practised. The form of self-denial, to be offered in union with our Lord's suffering and death on the Cross, is left to the free choice of each individual.

The Eucharistic Fast

- Water (and medicine) may be taken at any time.
- Solid foods and drinks may be taken up to one hour before Holy Communion.
- Those who are advanced in age or who suffer from an infirmity, as well as those who take care of them, can receive Holy Communion even if they have taken something during the previous hour.

Holy Days of Obligation in England

- The Epiphany 6th January
- Ascension Day (forty days after Easter Sunday)
- Corpus Christi (the Thursday after Trinity Sunday)
- Saints Peter & Paul 29th June
- The Assumption 15th August
- All Saints 1st November
- Christmas Day 25th December

Basic Prayers

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee:
Blessed are thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning,
is now,
and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

My soul glorifies the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God, my saviour.
He looks on his servant in her lowliness;
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.
The Almighty works marvels for me
Holy his name!
His mercy is from age to age,
on those who fear him.
He puts forth his arm in strength
and scatters the proud-hearted.
He casts the mighty from their thrones
and raises the lowly.
He fills the starving with good things,
sends the rich away empty.
He protects Israel, his servant,
remembering his mercy,
the mercy promised to our fathers,
to Abraham and his sons forever.
Amen.

For the Faithfully Departed

V. Eternal rest grant them, O Lord

R. And let perpetual light shine on them

V. May they rest in peace

R. Amen

Mea Culpa

I confess to Almighty God,
to Blessed Mary, ever Virgin,
to Blessed Michael the Archangel,
to Blessed John the Baptist,
to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul,
to all the Saints,
and to you, Father,
that I have sinned exceedingly,
in thought, word, and deed,
through my own fault
through my own fault
through my most grievous fault.
Therefore I beseech the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin,
Blessed Michael the Archangel,
Blessed John the Baptist,
the holy Apostles Peter and Paul,
all the Saints,
and you, Father,
to pray to the Lord our God for me.
Amen.

Prayer to St Michael

St Michael, the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle; be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray and do you, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the other evil spirits who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls.

Amen.

The Holy Rosary

The Holy Rosary is composed of twenty ‘decades’, each decade consisting of the Our Father, ten Hail Marys and the Glory be. Each decade is recited in honour of some mystery in the life of Our Lord or of his Blessed Mother, when we pray that we may learn to practise the virtue specially taught us by that mystery.

I. The Five Joyful Mysteries (Monday, Saturdays)

1. The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38)
2. The Visitation (Luke 1:39-45)
3. The Nativity (Luke 2:1-7)
4. The Presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:22-35)
5. The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52)

II. The Five Mysteries of Light (Thursdays)

1. The Baptism of the Lord (Matt 3:13-17)
2. The Marriage at Cana (John 2:1-12)
3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom and call to conversion (Mark 1:14-15; 2:3-12)
4. The Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36)
5. The Institution of the Eucharist (Matt 26:26-29)

III. The Five Sorrowful Mysteries (Tuesdays, Fridays)

1. The Prayer and Agony in the Garden (Mark 14:32-42)
2. The Scourging at the Pillar (Matt 27: 15-26)
3. The Crowning with Thorns (Matt 27:27-31)
4. The Carrying of the Cross (John 19:15-17; Luke 23:27-32)
5. The Crucifixion and Death of our Lord (Luke 23:33-38, 44-46)

IV. The Five Glorious Mysteries (Wednesdays, Sundays)

1. The Resurrection (Matt 28:1-8)
2. The Ascension of Christ into Heaven (Acts 1:6-11)
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles (Acts 2:1-12)
4. The Assumption (1 Thess 4:13-19)
5. The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Heaven and the Glory of all Saints (Rev 12:1; 14:1-5; Isaiah 6:1-3)

Then is said:

The Hail Holy Queen

Hail, holy Queen, mother of mercy;
our life, our sweetness, and our hope!
To you do we cry,
poor banished children of Eve;
To you do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate,
your eyes of mercy towards us;
and after this our exile,
show to us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving,
O sweet Virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us , O holy Mother of God

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ

Let us pray:

O God, whose only-begotten Son, by his life, death and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life; grant, we beseech you, that meditating on these Mysteries of the most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may both imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord. **R. Amen**

The Way of The Cross

The Way of the Cross is a devotion to the Sacred Passion in which we accompany, in spirit, our Blessed Lord in his sorrowful journey from the house of Pilate to Calvary, and recall, with sorrow and love, all that took place from the time when he was condemned to death to his being laid in the tomb. We meditate devoutly on the Passion and Death of our Lord as we move around the Stations in the church.

Often, when made publicly (eg. during Lent), the following response is said at each Station as we genuflect (kneel):

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you

R. Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world

The following act of contrition may be used at each Station:

I love you, Jesus, my love above all things. I repent with my whole heart of having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always and then do with me what you will. (*Our Father; Hail Mary; Glory be ...*)

I. Jesus is condemned to death

Consider how Jesus, after having been scourged and crowned with thorns, was unjustly condemned by Pilate to die on the Cross.

II. Jesus receives the Cross

Consider how Jesus, in making this journey with the Cross on his shoulders, thought of us, and offered for us to his father the death he was about to undergo.

III. Jesus falls the first time

Consider the first fall of Jesus under his Cross. His flesh was torn by the scourges, his head was crowned with thorns; he had lost a great quantity of blood. So weakened he could scarcely walk, he yet had to carry this great load upon his shoulders. The soldiers struck him rudely, and he fell several times.

IV. Jesus is met by his Blessed Mother

Consider the meeting of the Son and the Mother, which took place on this journey. Their looks became like so many arrows to wound those hearts which loved each other so tenderly.

V. The Cross is laid upon Simon of Cyrene

Consider how his cruel tormentors, seeing that Jesus was on the point of expiring, and fearing he would die on the way, whereas they wished him to die the shameful death of the Cross, constrained Simon of Cyrene to carry the Cross behind our Lord.

VI. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Consider how the holy woman named Veronica, seeing Jesus so ill-used, and bathed in sweat and blood, wiped his face with a towel, on which was left the impression of his holy countenance.

VII. Jesus fall the second time

Consider the second fall of Jesus under the Cross; a fall which renews the pain of all the wounds in his head and members.

VIII. The women of Jerusalem mourn for our Lord

Consider how these women wept with compassion at seeing Jesus in such a pitiable state, streaming with blood, as he walked along. 'Daughters of Jerusalem' he said, 'weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children'.

IX. Jesus fall the third time

Consider the third fall of Jesus Christ. His weakness was extreme, and the cruelty of his executioners excessive, who tried to hasten his steps when he could scarcely move.

X. Jesus is stripped of his garments

Consider the violence with which Jesus is stripped by the executioners. His inner garments adhered to his torn flesh, and they dragged them off so roughly that the skin came with them. Take pity on your Saviour thus cruelly treated.

XI. Jesus is nailed to the Cross

Consider how Jesus, having been placed upon the Cross, extended his hands, and offered to his Eternal Father the sacrifice of his life for our salvations. Those barbarians fastened him with nails, and then, securing the Cross, allowed him to die with anguish on this infamous gibbet.

XII. Jesus dies on the Cross

All genuflect (kneel) when saying this Station

Consider how Jesus, being consumed with anguish after three hours of agony on the Cross, abandoned himself to the weight of his body, bowed his head and died. (*Pause before rising*)

XIII. Jesus is taken down from the Cross

Consider how, after our Lord had expired, two of his disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus, took him down from the Cross and placed him in the arms of his afflicted Mother, who received him with unutterable tenderness, and pressed him to her bosom.

XIV. Jesus is placed in the sepulchre

Consider how the disciples, accompanied by his holy Mother, carried the body of Jesus to bury it. They closed the tomb, and all came sorrowfully away.

At the completion of the 14 Stations, the Our Father, Hail Mary and the Glory be are said for the intentions of the Pope

The Season of Lent

Structure of Lent, Triduum and Easter

Easter Day (Easter Sunday) is the key date which fixes the dates for Lent and for Pentecost Sunday. We all know that Lent lasts for forty days and traditionally the forty days of Lent begin with the first Sunday after Ash Wednesday. So, in fact Ash Wednesday and the following three days are not actually in Lent but rather they are a sort of 'preview', prelude or preparation period ie. Ash Wednesday is the start of the penitential period and the First Sunday is the beginning of 'the forty days'. Ash Wednesday is calculated as being forty-six days before Easter Sunday.

The Tuesday immediately before Ash Wednesday has many names - Mardi Gras, Shrove Tuesday, Fat Tuesday, Carnival - the day is traditionally the last day before abstinence and fasting begin and regarded by many as the opportunity to have a bit of a 'fling' before penance begins (assuming that pancakes can be regarded as such!!).

The forty days from the First Sunday in Lent take us up to Holy Thursday (also known by many as Maundy Thursday). The three days leading up to Easter are known as the Triduum and this begins at sundown in the evening of Holy Thursday

Traditionally, Easter is Easter Sunday and also the fifty days feast through to Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost is also the fifty day period and the final day of celebration. This may seem rather confusing but this is rooted in our religious history and there is seemingly no immediate desire to clarify or change tradition.

How is the Date for Easter Day Calculated?

- Easter falls on the first Sunday following the Paschal full moon
- The Paschal full moon is the first ecclesiastical full moon that occurs on or after the day of the vernal equinox
- The vernal equinox (we also know this as the first day of Spring) is fixed as 21st March
- So, Easter can never occur before 22nd March or later than 25th April

Fortunately, we do not have to calculate these dates as there are look-up tables which provide all the necessary information

The rationale behind a moveable Easter celebration is to maintain accuracy with the time of the Feast of the Passover and Jesus' death and resurrection.

Ash Wednesday

The liturgical use of ashes originates in Old Testament times. Ashes symbolise mourning, mortality and penance.

Ashes are a traditional symbol of penance made sacramental by the blessing of the Church, and they help us to develop a spirit of humility and sacrifice. Ash Wednesday was first introduced around 900AD and came from a ceremony where the Bishop sprinkled ashes over Christians who had committed grave sin and were seeking to be re-admitted to the Church through public penance. The Bishop also blessed the hairshirts of the public penitents (the hair shirts were to be worn for forty days as one of the signs of repentance). There is an obvious connection with sackcloth and ashes which is often described in the Bible as a sign of repentance. Later all Christians, whether public or secret penitents, came to receive ashes out of devotion.

The ashes are made from the blessed palms used in the Palm Sunday celebration of the previous year. The ashes are christened with Holy Water and are scented by exposure to incense. The significance of using the ashes of last year's palms is to remind us that Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph on Palm Sunday yet at the same time he knew he would soon have to die for our sins. While the ashes are a symbol of penance and contrition they also remind us of God's mercy to those who call on Him with repentant hearts.

When the priest marks our forehead with ashes to humble our hearts we are reminded that life passes away on Earth as we are told 'Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you will return' or 'Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel'.

Symbolism of the Forty Days of Lent

Forty is a 'popular' number in biblical history eg. The Ninevites were given forty days to repent their sins; Moses stayed on the Mountain of God for forty days; forty years wandering in the wilderness.

The forty days of Lent can appropriately be related to the forty days Jesus' spent in the desert being tempted by Satan; and also to the forty hours Jesus was in the tomb before his resurrection.

History of Lent

The history of the forty days of Lent is not absolutely clear. What we do know is that early Christians wanted to witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus by acts of penance - originally for one or two days prior to the anniversary of Jesus' crucifixion. Somewhere around the 4th and 5th Centuries the one to two days gradually extended to forty days.

The intention of Lent at this time was based on three celebrations:

- as a time to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus
- as a time for the final preparation of those who were to be newly baptised and a 're-conversion' for those already baptised
- as a time for those who were seeking re-introduction to the Church after having committed serious sin following their original baptism - these people were known as public penitents

Lent is also the old English term for 'spring'. Lent is also known by the Latin term Quadragesima or 'the forty days'.

Lent Today

Lent has two key themes:

- baptism and the renewal of our baptismal vows
- penance

The are linked through acts of abstinence, fasting and almsgiving. We individually choose how we will act and react according to our circumstances, our conscience and (through prayer) with guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Lent is also a time for forgiveness and reconciliation

Abstinence

Abstinence creates in many of us a series of negative thoughts ie. giving up something for Lent is seen as a form of self imposed hardship eg. giving up chocolate, giving up smoking, giving up alcohol, giving up watching television etc. However, abstinence is not intended to make our lives unbearable or extremely uncomfortable. Abstinence is an opportunity to face our true selves - do we really need these 'luxuries' when so many in the world do not even have the opportunity to choose to give up something for a short period of time (yet so many do!)? Do our 'luxuries' prevent us from being truly Christian in our words, thoughts and actions with those around us and with those we meet in our lives?

In religious terms we are asked to abstain from eating meat and meat-based products on certain days. During Lent these days are:

- Ash Wednesday (abstinence and fast)
- Every Friday during Lent (abstinence)
- Good Friday (abstinence and fast)

Abstinence and fasting are also appropriate for all other days during Lent, but this is a matter of free choice for each person

Many Catholics do not normally eat meat or meat-based products on Friday because this is one way in which we remind ourselves of Jesus' suffering on our behalf.

There are exceptions to abstaining from meat:

- where health depends on eating meat eg. during pregnancy
- where abstinence would create severe and real problems with guests

Choosing to eat lobster, for example, instead of meat on Friday is not the most suitable form of abstinence!

Abstinence is not only about giving up something, it is also about using the time or money saved for the good of others eg. giving up television to attend Mass more often

Fasting

Fasting was and is a form of abstinence. During Lent we are asked to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday by reducing the number of meals we eat on those days (eg. eating only one meal and two small snacks). The money saved may be put towards a charitable cause(s)

There are exceptions to fasting:

- for those under eighteen or over sixty
- for those whose medical condition requires a regular intake of food

Almsgiving

Almsgiving is a historical term for:

- doing charitable works
- helping others
- contributing more to the parish

In today's business terminology this might also be known as 'going the extra mile'.

We need only to remember the story of the Good Samaritan and take our lead from there. We can all do more to help others; we can all make the effort not to ignore the strangers in our society; we can make a positive difference to the lives of others; we all have God given gifts, skills and talents - why not make more use of them for the good of others; why not spend more time in prayer for healing, peaceful reconciliation and for all who need our prayers

‘Almsgiving’ in all its forms is the most positive way in which each of us can live the true spirit of Lent and our lives as a Christian people. Jesus suffered for us, what are we prepared to do in return?

Holy Water during Lent

Many people believe that Holy Water should be removed from the church at the beginning of Lent and not be returned until after the Easter Vigil. This belief is incorrect as shown in the following letter from the Vatican.

Prot. N. 569/00/L

March 14, 2000

Dear Father:

This Congregation for Divine Worship has received your letter sent by fax in which you ask whether it is in accord with liturgical law to remove the Holy Water from the fonts for the duration of the season of Lent.

This Dicastery is able to respond that the removing of Holy Water from the fonts during the season of Lent is not permitted, in particular, for two reasons:

1. The liturgical legislation in force does not foresee this innovation, which in addition to being praeter legem is contrary to a balanced

understanding of the season of Lent, which though truly being a season of penance, is also a season rich in the symbolism of water and baptism, constantly evoked in liturgical texts.

2. The encouragement of the Church that the faithful avail themselves frequently of the [sic] of her sacraments and sacramentals is to be understood to apply also to the season of Lent. The "fast" and "abstinence" which the faithful embrace in this season does not extend to abstaining from the sacraments or sacramentals of the Church. The practice of the Church has been to empty the Holy Water fonts on the days of the Sacred Triduum in preparation of the blessing of the water at the Easter Vigil, and it corresponds to those days on which the Eucharist is not celebrated (i.e., Good Friday and Holy Saturday).

Hoping that this resolves the question and with every good wish and kind regard, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

[signed]

Mons. Mario Marini

Undersecretary

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Sacrament of Reconciliation

Remembering that the Sacrament is above all an act of God's love. The Sacrament is a personal moment to be lived in a relationship of love with God. The Sacrament is not routine, nor an ordeal to be gone through, but is very much part of the personal renewal which takes place in each person. You are invited, in the light of God's love, to recognise the sinfulness of your life, to have true sorrow for your sins, and affirm intention to avoid them in the future.

Essential Elements of a Good Confession

To make a good confession, the Church advises us to:

1. Pray first, asking God to help us.
2. Make a sincere examination of conscience to see how we have sinned since our last confession.
3. Confess our sins simply, with humility and honesty.
4. Make an act of contrition with heartfelt sorrow and a 'firm purpose of amendment', being determined that we will avoid the occasions of sin.
5. Devoutly carry out the penance prescribed and pray in thanksgiving for God's overflowing love and mercy.

Prayer Before Confession

Almighty and merciful God,
you have brought me here in the name of your Son
to receive your mercy and grace in my time of need.
Open my eyes to see the evil I have done.
Touch my heart and convert me to yourself.
Where sin has separated me from you,
may your love unite me to you again:
where sin has brought weakness,
may your power heal and strengthen;
where sin has brought death,
may your Spirit raise to new life.
Give me a new heart to love you,
so that my life may reflect the image of your Son.
May the world see the glory of Christ revealed in your Church,
and come to know that he is the one whom you have sent,
Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
Amen.

The Confiteor

I confess to almighty God that I have sinned through my own fault, in my thought and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do; and I ask Blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the saints, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

An Act of Contrition

O my God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins, and detest them above all things, because they deserve your dreadful punishments, because they have crucified my loving Saviour Jesus Christ, and, most of all, because they offend your infinite goodness; and I firmly resolve, by the help of your grace, never to offend you again, and carefully to avoid the occasions of sin.

Examination of Conscience

Careful preparation is vital in order to make the most of this encounter with our loving heavenly Father. Find some time to be alone and quiet to reflect on your life, your relationship with God and others. An examination of conscience provides us with what we are going to say in the confessional. Without time given to such an examination our confession is in danger of being incomplete. There are many ways: one is to use a gospel passage, especially one of the many healing miracles or occasions of forgiveness (eg. Luke 15:11-32; John 4:5-42; Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 18:9-14). Imagine you are the person being healed or forgiven by Jesus. Read the scripture passage, imagine you are in the scene and listen to the words of Jesus. He speaks to you! What do you say? Alternatively, Jesus summed up and extended the Ten Commandments by his two great commandments: Love God and your neighbour (Mark 12:28-42).

Mortal sin (murder, adultery, apostasy) is sin whose object is a grave matter and which is committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent (*Catechism 1857*). We must confess all mortal sin. We are not obliged to confess all venial ('lesser') sins.

We commit venial sin when, in a less serious matter, we do not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when we disobey the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without full consent (*Catechism 1862*).

Confession of venial sins is an act of devotion. We need not be unduly anxious to confess them all, but may rather choose to focus on areas of our life that are most in need of God's grace.

The following example of an examination of conscience can help us to measure our lives by the objective standard of Christ's teaching. We may also consider more generally, how we have failed in our lives to live fully as disciples of Christ.

Sins against God

Have I rejected my faith, refused to find out more about it?
Have I forgotten my daily prayers or said them badly?
Have I experimented with the occult or put my trust in fortune tellers or horoscopes?
Have I blasphemed against God or used bad language?
Have I shown disrespect for holy things, place or people?
Have I missed a Mass on Sundays or Holy Days through my own fault?
Have I let myself be distracted at Mass or distracted others?
Have I received Holy Communion without proper reverence, care or thanksgiving?

Sins against myself and others

Have I been impatient, angry or jealous?
Have I brooded over injuries or refused to forgive?
Have I taken part in or encouraged abortion, the destruction of human embryos, euthanasia or any other means of taking human life?
Have I been verbally or physically violent to others?
Have I been racist in my thoughts, words or deeds?
Have I hurt anyone by speaking badly about them?
Have I betrayed confidences without good cause or revealed things simply to hurt others?
Have I judged others rashly?
Have I been drunk or used illegal drugs?
Have I driven dangerously or inconsiderately?
Have I spoken in an obscene way?
Have I looked at obscene pictures, films or books?
Have I been involved in any impure behaviour on my own or with someone else?
Have I been vain, proud, selfish or self-seeking?
Have I told lies to excuse myself, to hurt others or to make myself look more important?

Have I stolen anything?
Have I failed to contribute to the support of the Church in proportion to my means?
Have I been disobedient, rude or insolent to those in authority over me?
Have I been harsh, overbearing or sarcastic to those under my authority?
Have I cheated my employers or employees?
Have I misused or damaged the property of others?
Have I set my heart greedily on possessing things?
Have I given scandal or bad example?
Have I been lazy at my work, study or domestic duties?
Have I been jealous of others – of their looks, their popularity, their good work?
Have I encouraged others to do wrong in any way?

For spouses

Have I neglected to foster the warmth of my love and affection for my spouse?
Have I prolonged disagreements through resentment or failing to apologise when I have been in the wrong?
Have I mistreated my spouse verbally, emotionally or physically?
Have I used artificial means of birth control?
Have I been unfaithful to my spouse in any way?
Have I neglected to teach my children to pray?
Have I neglected the religious education of my children?
Have I failed to bring my children to Sunday Mass?
Have I argued with my spouse in front of my children?
Have I failed to exercise vigilance over what my children see on television or on the internet?
Have I been harsh or overbearing to my children?
Have I neglected my children's welfare in any way?

For young people

Have I been disobedient to my parents?

Have I been unhelpful at home?

Have I failed to try to understand my parents and talk to them?

Have I upset the peace of my home for selfish reasons?

Have I lost control when I have been angry?

Have I sulked or been sarcastic instead of asking for help?

Have I failed to work properly at school?

Have I treated teachers or other adults with disrespect?

Have I played unfairly at games or sports?

Have I taken part in fights?

Going to Confession

Reception

The priest welcomes the penitent warmly. The penitent and priest begin by making the sign of the cross, while saying: **+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.** The priest invites you to trust in God. You may indicate your state of life, and anything else which may help the priest as confessor.

The Word of God

The priest may invite you to reflect on a passage from Holy Scripture, speaking of God's mercy and call to conversion.

Reconciliation

Then you can speak in your own words or you can say: **Bless me Father for I have sinned. My last confession was ... ago** (*say roughly how long*) **and these are my sins.** Now tell your sins simply in your own words. When you have finished, let the priest know. You can use these words if you wish: **I am sorry for all these sins and for any that I cannot now remember.**

Listen carefully to the advice of the priest and ask the Holy Spirit to help him to say what is best to help you to grow in Christian life. You can ask him questions if you want. The priest may propose an Act of Penance, which should serve not only to make up for the past but also to help begin a new life and provide an antidote to weakness. This may take the form of prayer, self-denial, and especially of service to one's neighbour and works of mercy.

Then the priest invites you to say a prayer of sorrow (an Act of Contrition), such as:

O my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace I will not sin again.

Wait until the priest says the prayer of 'Absolution' (where Christ forgives you all your sins). Make the sign of the cross as the priest says: **I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father + and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.** The priest may say a few final words of encouragement to you as you leave.

After Confession

Take some time in the quiet of the church to reflect on the grace of the Sacrament and to thank God for his mercy and forgiveness. Here is a prayer of thanksgiving:

Father, in your love you have brought me from evil to good from misery to happiness. Through your blessings give me the courage of perseverance. Amen.