

RCIA: SESSION EIGHTEEN

LENT

Week: 13/02/23-19/02/23

What is Lent?

Lent is an annual period of approximately forty days beginning on Ash Wednesday and finishing with the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. It is a period "which is set aside for penance, fasting and almsgiving in preparation for the coming celebration of Easter. It is modelled in part on the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert prior to beginning his public ministry. The penance, fasting and almsgiving are meant to help the believer to ongoing conversion and a deeper faith in the Lord who redeemed us."¹ The penance, fasting and almsgiving should be accompanied by prayer.

Key Words used above

Ash Wednesday:

It is the first day of Lent and a day of prayer and fasting. On this day many Christians receive ash on their foreheads. Ash Wednesday derives its name from this practice, which is accompanied by the words, "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" or "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The ashes are prepared by burning palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday celebrations.

Penance:

This is an act/acts of punishment inflicted on oneself as an outward sign of sorrow for sin.

Fasting:

Fasting is refraining from food or drink to some extent. In Ireland the Canon Law concerning fasting covers those between the ages of eighteen and sixty. Fasting is to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In practice, in Ireland, fasting means that one full meatless meal can be eaten in the day. Two other meatless meals may be taken to maintain strength but together they should not exceed one full meal. Liquids, including milk and fruit juice, may be taken between meals.

¹ Irish Episcopal Conference, *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 559-560.

Abstinence:

Abstinence is refraining from eating meat. "The law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year."² In the past, Irish Catholics were required to abstain from meat every Friday. While still not a requirement, the Irish Bishops' Conference has suggested it as a form of Friday Penance during Lent. However, "abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday."³

Almsgiving:

"Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."⁴ "The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead."⁵

Prayer/Fasting/Almsgiving:

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving, have always been considered the three marks of genuine religion and are known as the three pillars of Lent. Any one of these without the other two is in some way deficient. "There are three things, my brethren, by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy (almsgiving). Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other.

Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them; they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others you open God's ear to yourself.

When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery.

² The *Code of Canon Law*, Can. 1252.

³ *Ibid.* Can. 1251.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2462.

⁵ *Ibid.* No. 2447.

Let this be the pattern for all when they practice mercy: show mercy to others in the same way, with the same generosity, with the same promptness, as you want others to show mercy to you.

Therefore, let prayer, mercy and fasting be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defence, a threefold united prayer in our favour.”⁶

Gospel Reflection Sunday 19th February is the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (Mt. 5:38-48).

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute’s silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion. The following questions may be helpful: What does this mean to me? How does it make me feel? Do I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing? What images of God emerge for me? What do I think that God is saying in this text? What impact does this have on my life?

⁶ Saint Peter Chrysologus, bishop. Quoted in the *Office of Readings*, Tuesday, week 3 of Lent.

GOSPEL READING

Reader: The Lord be with you.

Response: And with your spirit.

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Response: Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.'

'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

Response: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.