

An introduction to Lent

Lent is a period of fasting and reflection for Christians that precedes Easter. It is a time to reflect on our lives and commit ourselves to our deepest purpose. During Lent, we strive to become better individuals by practicing something that challenges us but is still achievable, enabling us to grow in faith and become a better version of ourselves. Here are some suggestions:

- Try to be more positive and give up complaining and negative thoughts to improve your mindset.
- Commit to exercising or taking a daily walk to improve your physical health.
- Perform random acts of kindness such as giving a sincere compliment or helping others with homework.
- Write a letter to someone who has made a positive impact on your life to show your gratitude.
- Participate in a fundraiser for Jesuit Mission, Project Compassion, or another organization you care about.
- Volunteer with a community group or at a local charity. Ask your mentor or class teacher for ideas about service opportunities.
- Donate some of your clothes or toys to Vinnies or another agency.
- See if you can assist a relative or neighbour with gardening or shopping.
- Give up sweets or junk food to demonstrate some self-discipline and improve your health.
- Give up soft drinks to be healthier and reduce your sugar intake.
- Limit your screen time or social media use to create more time for other activities.
- Stop playing video games or other forms of entertainment for a set amount of time each day or week to focus on other things.

Lent provides us with an opportunity to rid ourselves of those things that distract us from our true calling and renew our commitment to the Gospel. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we can strengthen our relationship with God, each other and our self. Lent is often thought to last for 40 days, but it is actually 46 days long. The 40 days of Lent refer to the time between Ash Wednesday and the day before Easter Sunday, known as Holy Saturday. Although Lent is 46 days long, we get six Sundays off from fasting and reflection, giving us a total of 40 days to practice self-discipline and reflect on our faith.

Catholics are encouraged to fast or abstain from food during Lent. From the age of 18 until 60, Catholics should fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Fasting refers to reducing the amount of food consumed in a day. From the age of 14, Catholics should abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Fridays during Lent, and Good Friday. Abstinence refers to refraining from eating meat. These guidelines are intended to help individuals grow in their spiritual lives. They are not meant to be rigid, and individuals who are unable to fast or abstain due to health reasons or other circumstances are dispensed from these obligations. The Catholic Church recognizes that deepening one's relationship with God is not limited to Lenten fasting and abstinence and encourages individuals to engage in good spiritual practices and service of others throughout the year.