

Questions and Answers About Lent

What is the Lenten season, and why is it set apart?

It is a period of six weeks preceding the anniversary of the Saviour's death, and is set apart as a special season of fasting, penitence, and prayer.

Why is it called Lent?

Because it always comes in the spring of the year, and the old Saxon word *lent* means "spring."

With what remarkable event in Jesus' life does the Lenten season correspond?

The forty days which he spent fasting in the wilderness.

Why is the first day of Lent called Ash Wednesday?

It is called so from the custom that prevailed in the early church of sprinkling ashes on the heads of penitents the first day of Lent in token of humiliation and sorrow for sin.

Are there any examples of this custom mentioned in the Bible?

Yes, the example of Daniel and of David and the people of Nineveh, to which our Lord himself refers in Matthew 11:21.

If Lent is only forty days' duration, why does it begin forty-six days before Easter?

There are six Sundays in Lent, and as all Sundays are feast days in honour of the Resurrection, they are taken out. To make up for these, six days are added to the beginning of the season

How should the Lenten season be observed by Christians?

As a special season for drawing near to God by extraordinary acts of penitence, charity, and religious devotion, and by fasting and abstinence from all things that tend to draw the heart from God.

What is the object of keeping Lent?

To deepen the religious life, to purify the heart from sin, and to unite us more closely to the Saviour.

Why does the church encourage us to observe the Lenten fast?

1. Because repentance and humiliation are essential to growth in grace.
2. Because these duties are apt to be neglected and forgotten unless some special time is set apart for their observance.

What objection do people sometimes raise against the observance of the Lenten fast?

They say that it is a useless and superstitious custom, and that Christ nowhere commanded his disciples to fast.

How do we answer this objection?

1. Fasting was a common practice not only among God's chosen people (Exod. 34:38; 2 Sam. 12:16; 1 Kings 19:8; Ps. 35:13; Joel 1:14; Jon. 3:5).
2. Jesus fasted and so did his disciples. He did not command his followers to fast; he assumed that they would and gave directions on how to fast (Matt. 6:17). Fasting has the highest divine authority.
3. A few persons who accept the principle of Lent complain that the season is so long that people weary of its observance relax its discipline. But it is intentionally made long so that it must be kept by ordered rule and rational self-control, instead of impulsive actions and emotions.