

Faith Tidbits..

*a little food for thought
and some knowledge*

*about your
Catholic faith*

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This monthly series will answer questions you always wondered about or questions you never even thought to ask... all about our Catholic Faith.

If you have a question you want answered, call Diane Hardick at 633-3672.

How and when did “Lent” start?

As early as the second century, Christians prepared for the annual *Pascha*, or Easter, by fasting for two days. This was a natural thing to do as they prepared for the holiest of times. Lent itself eventually evolved around baptism. During the first centuries those preparing for baptism spent at least three years being instructed and tested. Those last few days of intense preparation and prayer before Easter and their initiation into the Church were the beginnings of what we now know as Lent. Eventually it became popular for those already baptized to participate in the tradition of fasting. When the Catechumenate was discontinued in the early Middle Ages, due to the wide-spread custom of infant baptism, Christians then continued the custom of fasting for forty days in preparation for Easter. During this time, fasting became universally popular with an emphasis on personal sin. This penitential and more somber theme of Lent gave rise to the liturgical penitential color purple and to the dropping of the joyful acclamations of Alleluia and Glory to God during this season. In some places an elaborate “funeral” was held to “bury” the Alleluia.

Why did we cover the statues and crucifixes in our churches during Lent?

This was known as the Lenten veil, and it was done as a sign of sadness and mourning. This practice has been largely discontinued, although some churches still maintain the custom.

Why is Lent forty days?

Early in Christianity the discipline of fasting became associated with the number forty. Fasting was done by Christians in imitation of Jesus’ forty-day fasting in the desert, Moses’ forty days on Mt. Sinai, Elijah’s forty day fast on his journey to Mount Horeb, and the forty years the Israelites spent in the desert. To this day the church’s official title for Lent, *Quadragesima*, is Latin for “forty.”

When did the Lenten devotion of the Stations of the Cross begin?

During the time of the crusades (1095-1270), it became popular for pilgrims to the Holy Land to walk in the footsteps of Jesus to Calvary. In the next two centuries after the Moslems recaptured the Holy Land, pilgrimages were too dangerous. A substitute pilgrimage, the Stations of the Cross, became popular as an outdoor devotion throughout Europe during the middle Ages. They represented critical events from Scripture or tradition of Jesus’ journey to Calvary and varied in number from five to twenty. In the 18th century Pope Clement XII fixed the number of stations at fourteen. In the mid 18th century, Stations were allowed inside churches. In the 1960’s it became popular to add a fifteen station representing the end of the journey: resurrection.

What is the difference between fasting and abstinence?

Fasting and abstinence are often linked together but are two different disciplines. Fasting has to do with the quantity of food eaten on particular days. Abstinence refers to the kind of food denied oneself; for example, meat. Fasting has always been a popular religious practice. Fasting promotes self-discipline, prepares us for a feast, and cleanses oneself of previous abuses and sin. Fasting originally was very strict and enforced by church law—only one meal a day was allowed. In the 14th century, a light meal was permitted in the evening. This severe Lenten discipline of fasting and abstinence remained in force until 1966.