

Lenten Liturgy & Discipline

Fasting: Many contemporary physicians and dieticians encourage periodic fasting for general health, and many religions prescribe it for additional spiritual health. It frees us from attachments, redirects our hearts to eternal realities, and helps atone for sins. Christ Himself fasted from food for forty days when he retired into the desert after His Baptism in the Jordan. His forty days inspire our annual practice of Lent. This is why those 18 through 59 years of age - with the exception of medical necessity - must fast at least on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. This consists of one full meal and two smaller meals during the day, without snacks.

Abstinence From Meat: Celebrations in Scripture often included the consumption of meat and more expensive fare. While we always celebrate the goodness of the Lord, Lent is a time of mourning for our sins and restrained excess and luxury. All those 14 years of age and older are required to refrain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all the Fridays of Lent.

Less Instrumentation: The characteristic austerity and conversion associated with Lent are also reflected in the liturgical changes and directives during these forty days. For example, the Roman Missal reads: "During Lent ... the use of musical instruments is allowed only so as to support the singing. Nevertheless, *Laetare* Sunday (the Fourth Sunday of Lent), Solemnities (e.g., St. Joseph, Annunciation, etc.), and Feasts are exceptions to this rule" (#4).

You will encounter significantly less musical accompaniment during these forty days to emphasize the simplicity of Lent. This doesn't mean we'll do away with music or singing altogether: The liturgy is always meant to be beautiful and inspiring, and the human voice, the greatest instrument, will continue to carry us upon soaring melodies. As much as reasonably possible during Lent, we will limit the use of the piano, organ, and other instruments in any liturgies in the church, including weddings and funerals.

Omitted Words: With the exception of Solemnities and Feasts, we are prohibited from chanting or saying the *Gloria* at Masses during Lent. We are even forbidden from saying the word Alleluia at Masses and in conversation and prayer during this time. Both the *Gloria* and the Alleluia will return in their splendor during the Easter Vigil.

Less Flowers: In relation to floral flourishes, the Roman Missal also reads: "During Lent, it is not permitted to decorate the altar with flowers... Nevertheless, *Laetare* Sunday (the Fourth Sunday of Lent), Solemnities (e.g., St. Joseph, Annunciation, etc.), and Feasts are exceptions to this rule" (#4). This is why you may have noticed the sudden absence of the flowers even next to the tabernacle. The church will be filled with lilies and beautiful flowers come Easter but, until then, the entire sanctuary is left bare. This also means that, as much as possible, we refrain from having flowers in the sanctuary for weddings and funerals that occur in the church during this season.

Mystery of Faith: The *Mysterium Fidei*, as it is known in Latin, was added to our Mass after the reforms of Vatican II. It is a part of the Mass that is exclusively said or sung by you, the People of God. Sometimes priests start this prayer or say it with the congregation to lend support but it is properly belongs to the laity. It occurs immediately after the consecration of the wine into Christ's Blood. The priest announces, "The mystery of faith," and then the laity respond.

During Lent, we will use one of the three options:

Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection, you have set us free.



Notice the use of the imperative in this unique declaration. We are addressing the Lord directly: "Save us, Savior of the world." We are no longer just talking **about the Lord** but we are talking **to the Lord**. What a crucial difference in our approach and stance toward God and the Mass: It is a personal relationship!

Moreover, this simple statement inspires us to consider salvation and its concurrent freedom. We can ask ourselves: "Just how does Jesus' death and Resurrection free me? Where have I felt liberty in Christ? What does it mean to be saved, and from what?"

Tradition: Above Jesus' head on the Cross reads an inscription: "Jesus Christ, King of the Jews." The Bible tells us it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the three popular languages of the day. We are Latin Rite Catholics, which means our various liturgies developed out of the Latin culture and language dominant in the Roman Empire. Latin eventually evolved into Spanish, French, and Italian, and both Greek and Latin words have greatly shaped the English language.

Our Second Vatican Council decreed that "the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites," and that "steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them." Drawing upon our Latin Rite patrimony, during Lent we will pray the *Kyrie Eleison* (Lord, Have Mercy) in Greek and the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy) and *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) prayers in Latin.

Last Words: Every night the Liturgy of the Hours concludes with a traditional hymn in honor of Our Lady. In Lent, this ode is the *Ave Regina Caelorum* (Hail, Queen of Heaven). This will serve as our first or only recessional hymn during these forty days. Our Lady of Sorrows, pray and intercede for us this Lent!

