**LENT:**
**WHAT IS IT REALLY ABOUT AND HOW CAN MY FAMILY PARTICIPATE IN THIS SEASON?**

**LENT**
Since the first week of January, the presence of colourful eggs and chocolate bunnies in supermarkets has steadily been increasing. People like to buy them early in preparation for their Easter celebrations. However, for us as Catholics, our preparation for Easter goes much deeper than that.

The Season of Lent is a time in which we reflect on our relationship with God and the way we are living our lives. It is the season in which we prepare for the mystery of Easter with minds and hearts renewed. Through repentance and renewal we can live more fully, our Baptismal call to live as disciples of Jesus.

The following information may help you and your family understand the meaning, customs and traditions of Lent more fully, resulting in a deeper preparation for the coming Easter Season.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
- The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes before the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday.
- Lent is a forty-day liturgical season that prepares us for the most sacred part of the Christian year, the Triduum – the days we recall the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ.
- Sundays are not included in the forty-day count because every Sunday is a joyful celebration of our Lord's Resurrection.
- The name Lent, comes from the Old English word for Spring which was lencten. The Latin word for Lent is quadragesima which means forty days.
- During Lent we renew our hearts and mind through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, in preparation for the joyful mystery of Easter.
- Ash Wednesday is a day of fasting and abstinence. This means we only have one main meal during the day (fasting) and we do not eat meat (abstinence). Abstinence applies to people from the age of 14. Fasting applies to those who have attained their majority, until their 60th year.
- The traditional colour of Lent is purple.

**Pancake Tuesday/ Shrove Tuesday**
- Shrove Tuesday is not part of the Season of Lent. The word ‘Shrove comes from the word ‘Shrive’ which means to confess. People were encouraged to say sorry to God before the beginning of Lent itself.
- Shrove Tuesday originated during the Middle ages. Food items like meats, fats, eggs, and milk were regarded as restricted during Lent. To keep such food from being wasted, many families would have big feasts on Shrove Tuesday in order to consume those items that would inevitably become spoiled during the next forty days.
- Making pancakes on Shrove Tuesday came about as a way to use as much milk, fats, and eggs as possible before Ash Wednesday - the beginning of Lent. Hence the term ‘Pancake Tuesday.’
ASH WEDNESDAY... DID YOU KNOW

- Ash Wednesday is the start of the 40 days of Lent.
- The 40 days represent the time Jesus went into the desert to prepare for His mission.
- During Ash Wednesday masses and liturgies, a small cross is placed on our foreheads using the ashes.
- The Ashes used come from burning the Palms used in Palm Sunday celebrations from the previous year.
- The ashes are a symbol of repentance and a desire for renewal. This is why the priest may say, “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel” as he places the ashes on our forehead.

You might like to view this simple two minute video about Ash Wednesday with your child. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3L3c23MfC0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3L3c23MfC0)
Looking at Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving: How is it relevant to me?

- Lent is an annual opportunity to grow in our faith, which means it’s about much more than giving up unhealthy foods or treats, as we may have done when we were children.
- It is about abstaining from whatever is unhealthy in our lives—gossip, laziness and lack of social conscience and most importantly, *taking concrete steps to do something that has a positive influence on yourself and others.*

*Instead of chocolate, alcohol or ice-cream, what if we thought of fasting, prayer and almsgiving in a broader context?*

- What if those disciplines involved practices like:
  - ♥ reducing our dependence on electronic devices, such as iPads, iPods, TV, Playbox, etc, for twenty four hours *(fast)*;
  - ♥ contemplating the 1.6 billion people in the world who have no access to electricity for a few moments *(pray)*
  - ♥ spending the extra time we saved not using the electronic devices, on personal interaction with someone we love *(give)*.
- Or what if we:
  - ♥ reduced our carbon footprint for a day by using less energy –being more aware of the electricity we waste through lights or TVs being left on *(fast)*
  - ♥ then reflected for two minutes on the magnificent gift of our natural environment – God’s creation *(pray)*
  - ♥ and finally donate some money to be given away to a favourite charity—perhaps one that plants trees *(give)*.

The Lenten practices of Praying, Fasting and Almsgiving have been a part of our Catholic tradition for centuries and they are still very relevant in our faith journey today.

*Lent: A Time For Repenting*

One of the major Lenten themes is *Repentance*. When Jesus asks us to repent, he is not simply asking us to do something religious, rather he is asking us to *dare to see differently*, to look at God, the world and ourselves through a different lens.

The time to repent is the time to *let go of ONE way* of viewing things, in order to embrace the risk of *seeing and thinking differently*. This in turn will allow us to *LIVE* differently.

The word *repentance* literally means, *change of thinking*. This Lent, before you make a judgement or comment about something or someone, look again through *Christ’s lens* and see how differently you see things.
WHAT CAN WE DO AS A FAMILY OR PERSONALLY, TO SHARE IN THIS SEASON OF LENT?

ON-LINE LENTEN CALENDAR – Similar to the traditional Advent Calendar, these online calendars give you prayer, fasting and giving ideas for each day of Lent. http://www.bustedhalo.com/features/fast-pray-give

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS – On slips of paper, have each family member write random acts of kindness, such as give a compliment, make a phone call to an old friend, carry someone’s heavy load, let someone in front of you on the tuckshop line, etc. Present each family member with a slip of paper as he or she leaves in the morning. Invite each family member to perform the kindness without seeking recognition. That evening, talk together about what happened. Try to make a commitment that your kindnesses will be passed on throughout Lent and beyond.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS – Talk to your child about what they know about the Stations of the Cross. Discuss the events of Christ’s last day represented in each station. The site http://www.ajinglkiss.com/stations4kids/ gives simple explanations of what happened at each station and prayers to be said together. Also, this site, http://www.loyolapress.com/images/stations-of-the-cross-for-children.pdf is appropriate for Younger children.

VISIT THE CHURCH – Get up 10 minutes earlier and drive your child/children to school. Once you are there, pay a visit to the church and pray, alone and/or together, with your child/children. Children learn from your actions and attitudes - show them the importance of making more time for prayer in our lives.

WEEKDAY MASS – Promise yourself to go to at least one morning Mass during Lent - time for just you and God. Celebrating and receiving the Eucharist is a great way to strengthen your relationship with God... and a great way to start the day!

PRAYING AT WORK OR HOME DURING YOUR DAY – Take a three minute prayer break! Yes, just three minutes to reflect on God’s presence in your life. Try it! What have you got to lose? (Best to try it in your lunch break if you’re at work or you might lose your job!) http://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer.htm

LENTEN CRAFT – To make Lent more meaningful for your child, provide opportunities for them to participate in Lenten craft activities. Ideas: http://thetuckerbunch.typepad.com/just_another_day_in_parad/2007/02/celebrating_len.html

LENT GRATITUDE – Choose a time each day where each family member shares three things for which to be grateful. This could be done at meal-times or before bed. You may even like to write them down in a Family Gratitude Journal. Giving thanks is our response to the goodness of God.

PRAY TOGETHER – Make family prayer a focus during Lent. Read the Sunday Gospel for each week of Lent from a children’s bible, say traditional prayers at bed time, pray in the car together on the way to school, chat to God in an informal way about the things for which you want to ask or give thanks.

GOOD DEAD BEADS – Make some good deed beads with your child/children. Make a promise to do 10 good deeds each day. Share the good deeds together as a family over dinner each night. http://thelittleways.com/how-to-make-sacrifice-beads

THINKING OF YOU CARDS – Make ‘Thinking of You’ cards and send them to know who might need a little extra love and care during Lent.