

LENT

*“Two roads diverged
into a wood, and I-
I took the one less travelled by
and that has made all the difference”*

Robert Frost

Lent is an invitation to grow, to recognize that when all is said and done we are spiritual people and that we need to pay attention to that. What it means to be spiritual is beautifully summed up by the prophet Micah when he reminded people that God only asks three things of us

“... act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)

So if we want something to do for Lent there we have it:

Act justly – reflect on the injustice around us and do something to change it

Love tenderly – forget myself and reach out to those in need

Walk humbly – talk time to pray, make a space for God and the Good News in our busy lives.

In our schools we can make lots of opportunities to turn the season of Lent into a time of vibrant growth: Lenten fasts, prayer times during lunch or before class, local campaigns to assist our communities and better our environment. What better way could there be to prepare for Easter and the triumph of love!

Resources with ideas for Lent focusing on both prayer and action

www.pray-as-you-go.org

www.taize.fr

www.imu.ie/index.php/mission-alive

www.trocaire.org

Thought for the Season

“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.” — [Ernest Hemingway](#)

One night I dreamed a dream.

I was walking along the beach with my Lord. Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord.

When the last scene of my life shot before me I looked back at the footprints in the sand. There was only one set of footprints. I realized that this was at the lowest and saddest times of my life. This always bothered me and I questioned the Lord about my dilemma.

"Lord, You told me when I decided to follow You, You would walk and talk with me all the way. But I'm aware that during the most troublesome times of my life there is only one set of footprints. I just don't understand why, when I need You most, You leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you, never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you."



The Meaning of Lent

**"Insanity is defined as
doing the same thing over, and over again,
expecting different results."** Albert Einstein - Lent - a time to change!

The English word 'Lent' comes from the Anglo-Saxon word Lencten, meaning 'Spring'. In other languages the word comes from the Latin, Quadragesima – a period of 40 days. In the Christian tradition the forty days is understood to refer to a time of intense prayer and preparation; we remember the biblical stories of Noah and the flood of 40 days, the forty years the Israelites spent wandering in the wilderness and Christ's forty day fast in the desert in preparation for his earthly ministry.

Daily Lenten Prayer

Today Lord, I choose life,
I choose your love and the challenge to live it and share it,
I choose hope, even in moments of darkness,
I choose faith, accepting you as Lord and God,
I choose to let go of some part of my burdens,
day by day handing them over to you,
I choose to take hold of your strength and power ever more deeply in my life.
May this truly be for me a time of new life, of change, challenge and growth.
May I come to Easter with a heart open to dying with you
and rising to your new life, day by day.

Amen

This year, Trócaire's Lenten campaign highlighted how communities in developing countries are struggling to survive in the face of extreme changes in their weather systems. Hundreds of millions of people rely on agriculture for their daily survival. But unreliable rainfall, storms and floods are making it increasingly difficult to grow crops. With your support and solidarity, Trócaire is working with affected communities to adapt and cope with the unpredictability of the changing climate. This includes finding alternative water supplies, diversifying crops, sustainable land management and being prepared for extreme weather events when they happen.



Definitions of common words we might not have thought about: Ash Wednesday: a day of [fasting](#), is the first day of [Lent](#) in [Western Christianity](#). It occurs 46 days (40 fasting days, if the 6 Sundays, which are not days of fast, are excluded) before [Easter](#) and can fall as early as 4 February or as late as 10 March. Ash Wednesday is [observed](#) by many [Western Christians](#), including [Anglicans](#), [Lutherans](#), [Methodists](#), [Presbyterians](#), and [Roman Catholics](#).¹

Religion

Definitions of common words we might not have thought about: Religion: “particular system of faith and worship.”



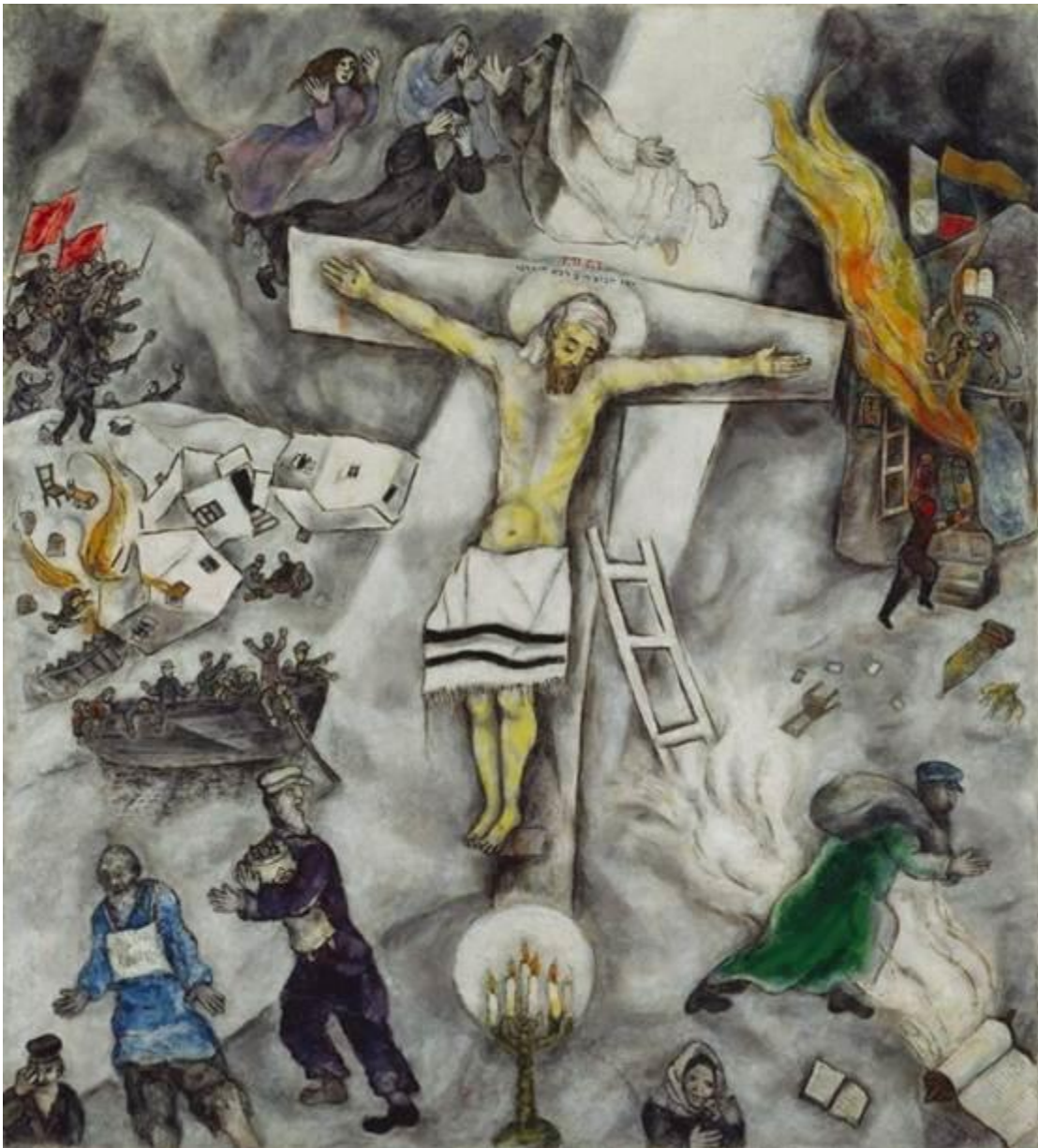
What does it mean to "fast" and to

“abstain” in Lent? To fast is to do without food. Its purpose is to experience the effects of not eating. It also serves to be a penance or a sacrifice - for the purpose of strengthening us. When we don't eat, for even a little while, we get hungry. When we get hungry, we have a heightened sense of awareness. If, when we eat too much, we have a sluggish feeling, when we fast, we have a feeling of alertness. Fasting is a wonderful exercise whenever we want to sincerely ask for an important grace from God. It is not that our fasting "earns" God's attention, but by fasting, we clarify our thinking and our feeling. It is purifying and prepares us to pray more deeply.

Catholics, as a group, are required to fast on only two days of the year - Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On these days, fasting means something very specific and limited. It means that one eats only one full meal in a day, with no food in-between meals. It is understood that two other meals, if one eats three meals a day, should not total one full meal. One might fast in a more complete way, i.e., eating only a portion of a single meal.

Of course, anyone is free to fast at any time that it is helpful for their prayer and reflection. It is not recommended that anyone with impaired health should fast in any way. It is also important to note that everyone who fasts should drink enough fluids on a fast day.

To abstain is to not eat meat. Its purpose is to be an act of penance - an act of sacrifice that helps us grow in freedom to make much bigger sacrifices. Of course, it would not make sense to make the sacrifice of not eating meat, and then eat a wonderful meal I might enjoy even more. Many people eat a vegetarian diet, for a variety of reasons, and eating meat is not even an issue. It might be possible to abstain from a non-meal that I really like, on all the Fridays of Lent. It should be noted that many people in this world cannot afford to eat meat or do not have access to it. Part of our abstaining from meat can place us in solidarity with so many of our sisters and brothers around the world.



Marc Chagall – White Crucifixion: The 1938 painting *White Crucifixion* represents a critical turning point for the artist Marc Chagall: it was the first of an important series of compositions that feature the image of Christ as a Jewish martyr and dramatically call attention to the persecution and suffering of European Jews in the 1930s. In *White Crucifixion*, his first and largest work on the subject, Chagall stressed the Jewish identity of Jesus in several ways: he replaced his traditional loincloth with a prayer shawl, his crown of thorns with a headcloth, and the mourning angels that customarily surround him with three biblical patriarchs and a matriarch, clad in traditional Jewish garments. At either side of the cross, Chagall illustrated the devastation of pogroms: On the left, a village is pillaged and burned, forcing refugees to flee by boat and the three bearded figures below them—one of whom clutches the Torah—to escape on foot. On the right, a synagogue and its Torah ark go up in flames, while below a mother comforts her child. By linking the martyred Jesus with the persecuted Jews and the Crucifixion with contemporary events, Chagall's painting passionately identifies the Nazis with Christ's tormentors and warns of the moral implications of their actions. Art Institute of Chicago: Entry, *The Essential Guide*, 2013, p.277

Prayer for the sick

Loving and merciful Lord,
we ask today to be aware of Your Presence,
to feel your touch on our forehead and be comforted
for You are always here with us.

There is nowhere we can go where you are not.

Sometimes it seems we are all alone,
that no one understands how unrelenting
this pain, how it penetrates our very spirit.

It is easy to lose courage until we remember
many people suffer, not just us.

Help us then ask for the strength to endure what we are given.

Oh Lord,

it is not just the physical pain that makes us afraid and anxious.

Please help us with our mental pain as well—

the voice that tells us our mistakes cannot be forgiven,
that we are beyond hope.

Forgive us, Lord, our despair, our rage.

But even our most terrible thoughts are not terrible to you.

You made us and you know us.

That thought comes from You, Lord.

You speak to our hearts, and You bring us peace.

We thank you for silencing the voices of discord,
and filling our spirits with your loving kindness.

We may be broken, Oh Lord,

but in Your embrace we are made whole.

My Lord and my God. Amen (Mary Jo Balistreri)

Thought for the Season

“In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy. ... Opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. ... May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!” (*Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, 2015*)



Musings in Lent: There is something about starting over. A new page. A new year. A new week. That feeling that the past is the past. I like to think that people who have messed up in some way get a second chance, and that they learn from their mistakes.

That concept of starting over flows through today's readings. In the first reading from Isaiah, we hear "*Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new.*" And in the second reading, "*Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.*"

We have that second and third and infinite number of chances when we seek God's love. We stray off the path, but we can always find it again. That is so powerful and, I think, difficult for us to grasp. We feel we have to do something to earn love or that by our mistakes; we have made ourselves unworthy. We find it hard to let go of the past, our resentments and grudges. We feel unworthy because we are human and make mistakes; we give in to the temptations that surround us. When we turn to God, we can become that clean slate. We can ask forgiveness and be forgiven.

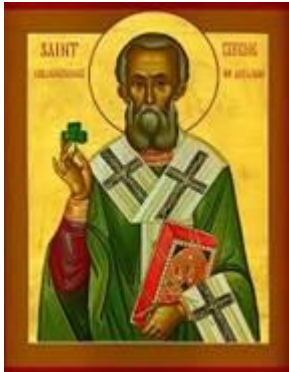
The story of the woman caught in adultery in John's gospel is one of my own favorites. I wish I could have been there to see the scribes and the Pharisees who thought they had a "gotcha" moment. "*Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,*" Jesus tells them, as this poor woman stands there. Jesus goes back to tracing patterns in the dirt as the Pharisees and scribes melt away. Jesus does not condemn the woman either as he tells her to go and sin no more.

In my own world, when I feel judgmental of others, I need to remember that powerful phrase. I can strive to start over, to know that God will welcome me as I am. I can try to live that way in my own life. I can remember the verse before the Gospel where God says: "*Return to me with your whole heart, for I am gracious and merciful.*" I pray that I return to God every day, every hour with a whole heart.

SAINTS

Definitions of common words we might not have

thought about: Saint: Saints, broadly speaking, are those who follow Jesus Christ and live their lives according to his teaching. Catholics, however, also use the term narrowly to refer to especially holy men and women who, through extraordinary lives of virtue, have already entered Heaven.



Who is St Patrick? St. Patrick of [Ireland](#) is one of the world's most popular saints. Apostle of Ireland, born at Kilpatrick, near Dumbarton, in Scotland, in the year 387; died at Saul, Downpatrick, Ireland, 17 March, 461. Along with [St. Nicholas](#) and St. Valentine, the secular world shares our love of these saints. This is also a day when everyone's Irish. There are many legends and stories of St. Patrick, but this is his story. Patrick was born around 385 in Scotland, probably Kilpatrick. His [parents](#) were Calpurnius and Conchessa, who were [Romans](#) living in Britian in charge of the colonies. As a boy of fourteen or so, he was captured during a raiding party and taken to [Ireland](#) as a slave to herd and tend sheep. [Ireland](#) at this [time](#) was a land of Druids and pagans. He learned the language and practices of the people who held him.

During his captivity, he turned to [God](#) in prayer. He wrote "The love of [God](#) and his fear grew in me more and more, as did the faith, and my [soul](#) was rosed, so that, in a single day, I have said as many as a hundred [prayers](#) and in the night, nearly the same." "I prayed in the woods and on the mountain, even before dawn. I felt no hurt from the snow or ice or rain." Patrick's captivity lasted until he was twenty, when he escaped after having a dream from [God](#) in which he was told to leave [Ireland](#) by going to the coast. There he found some sailors who took him back to Britian, where he reunited with his family.

He had another dream in which the people of [Ireland](#) were calling out to him "We beg you, holy youth, to come and walk among us once more." He began his studies for the priesthood. He was ordained by St. Germanus, the [Bishop](#) of Auxerre, whom he had studied under for years. Later, Patrick was ordained a bishop, and was sent to take the Gospel to Ireland. He arrived in [Ireland](#) March 25, 433, at Slane. One legend says that he met a chieftain of one of the tribes, who tried to kill Patrick. Patrick converted Dichu (the chieftain) after he was unable to move his arm until he became friendly to Patrick.

Patrick began preaching the Gospel throughout Ireland, converting many. He and his disciples preached and converted thousands and began building churches all over the country. Kings, their families, and entire kingdoms converted to [Christianity](#) when hearing Patrick's message. Patrick by now had many disciples, among them Benignus, Auxilius, Iserninus, and Fiac, (all later canonized as well). Patrick preached and converted all of [Ireland](#) for 40 years. He worked many miracles and wrote of his love for [God](#) in Confessions. After years of living in poverty, traveling and enduring much suffering he died March 17, 461. He died at Saul, where he had built the first church. Why a shamrock? Patrick used the shamrock to explain the Trinity, and has been associated with him and the Irish since that time.

In His Footsteps:

Patrick was a humble, pious, gentle man, whose love and total devotion to and trust in [God](#) should be a shining example to each of us. He feared nothing, not even death, so complete was his trust in God, and of the importance of his mission.

Woman Caught in Adultery, John Martin Borg, 2002



Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him,

Pharisee: “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”

They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them,

Jesus: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her,

Jesus: “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

Woman: “No one, sir.”

Jesus: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” (John 7:53-8:11)



Pope Francis Tweet “Small gestures of love, of tenderness, of care, make people feel that the Lord is with us. This is how the door of mercy opens.”