

THEMES OF LENT

Prayer, fasting, almsgiving

Repentance, turning away from sin

Jesus the true way, the presence of God in our lives for our good.

Jesus' saving death and resurrection.

Lent a season of forty days, leading up to Holy Week, culminating the Paschal Triduum.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a day of fast and abstinence: fast – eating less food than usual; abstinence – not eating certain food, i.e. flesh meat. (Gospel of First Sunday of Lent, year B)

The sign of this day: ashes rubbed on the forehead with the words, 'Remember you are dust and to dust you will return', or 'turn away from sin and believe in the gospel'. Ashes a sign of mourning, and penitence. The discomfort of the ash on the skin, by contrast with oil that is soothing.

Practices advised throughout Lent: prayer, fasting, almsgiving. (All in moderation – avoiding excess and show, - beware hypocrisy!! Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 (Ash Wednesday gospel).)

In the last forty years or so, increased awareness that our penance implies responsibility for the needs of others, the causes of injustice and our part in removing them. (Caritas)

During the liturgy of the Word during the weekdays and Sundays of Lent, the themes progress.

At first, heavily recognising our sinfulness – our distance from God. The consequences of wrongdoing, the benefits of righteousness.
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32. (Saturday of second week)

By the fourth week of Lent, interwoven with these themes, the figure of Jesus as the righteous one begins to predominate; not only righteous but healing sickness, injury even death – the consequences of sin. (not punishment)

Especially shown in the lengthy passages from St John's gospel, read especially in parishes where the RCIA is being held.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Lent and RCIA a journey of life in miniature: awareness of sin, and its consequences; turning away from sin to embrace righteousness; receiving the forgiveness of God; forgiveness bringing a new kind of life by faith, through baptism in water and the Holy Spirit.

So to Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday of the Passion – and ending with the Paschal Triduum. The forty days of Lent followed by the fifty days of Easter.