



A Parent's Guide to

# Lent and Holy Week

# Celebrate *Mardi Gras*

*Eat, drink and be merry, because tomorrow begins the season of Lent!*

By **Lonne Murphy**

Mardi Gras (March 5 this year), the day before Ash Wednesday, is a day of celebration throughout the Catholic world.

As part of your Mardi Gras celebration, have a special meal where you remember what Lent is about and then decide on a focus for your prayer, fasting and almsgiving this year.

Make a list of the people you feel called to pray for; the areas in your lives that call for fasting, such as from food and drink; technology; games and entertainment, and the causes or places to which you wish to offer alms (donations).

Put each item on your lists on a small piece of paper and place in a container in your kitchen. On Ash Wednesday morning, pull from the container for the first time. Draw one item from each container each week and focus on that intention as a family. Save the slips of paper so that at Easter you can celebrate all of the ways you've grown closer to the people in your life — and closer to God.



Have everyone in the family wear something green, purple or gold, the traditional colors of Mardi Gras. Purple represents justice; green, faith; and gold, power.

## Ash Wednesday

By **Lonne Murphy**

On Ash Wednesday the procession to the altar is as diverse as we will ever see it! Mother's carrying babies, toddlers holding on to dad's hand, teens, parishioners, neighbors, employees from nearby places of business, the elderly supported by walkers; we all come together to mark the beginning of Lent. We receive the ashes on our foreheads. We "remember that we are dust and unto dust we shall return."

The act of receiving ashes is not a sacrament. Actually, ashes are what we call a "sacramental."

Sacramentals are dynamic signs that help us prepare for receiving the sacraments. They help us receive the graces of the sacraments and they help make various occasions in our lives holy. They also remind us that all of creation has the potential to reveal God's presence and blessing. ("Encyclopedia of Catholicism," HarperCollins, 1995)

In receiving the ashes, we are saying that we are entering into the time of Lent, preparing for Easter with prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We are embracing Jesus' journey: the cross of suffering and the promise of the Resurrection. The ashes help us connect the spiritual aspect of Christ's cross and resurrection with our everyday lives. In addition to the liturgical significance of receiving ashes, we also are called to remember that in our repentance is a call to proper relationship between God and ourselves, and between others and ourselves.



### Talking to Kids about Ash Wednesday

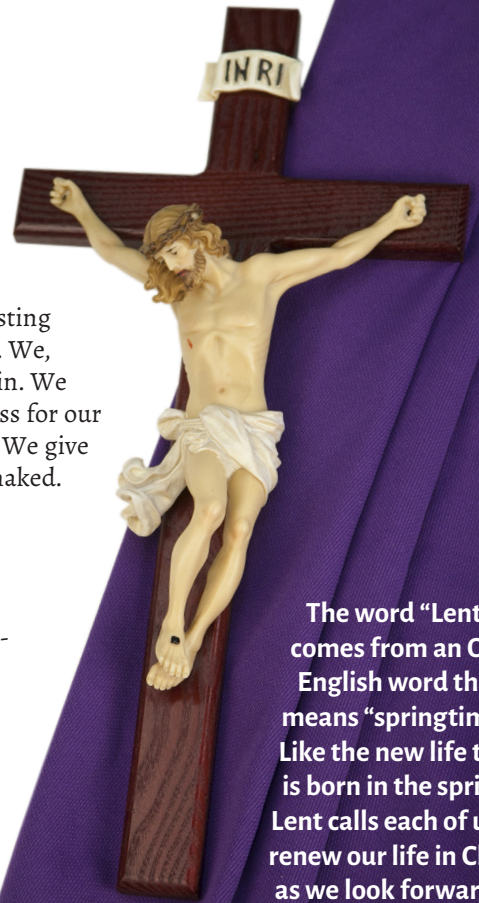
Kids seem to love Ash Wednesday, and they are often interested in the meaning behind the ritual of ashes. It is helpful to remind them that ashes placed on our foreheads represent a visible sign that we are followers of Jesus. The ashes are also a way to tell those around us, as well as ourselves, that we are beginning the holy season of Lent — the 40 days leading up to Easter. Ask them how they might grow closer to Jesus this Lent as a member of a family, as a student and as a friend.

Wear your ashes proudly today as a sign of your faith.

# Lent

## Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving: The Pillars of Lent

The solemn season of Lent is marked by three pillars of spiritual practice: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Lent recalls the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert, battling temptation. We, too, walk through the desert this season as we struggle with our own temptations to sin. We pray more in Lent so as to strengthen our relationship with God and ask his forgiveness for our shortcomings. We fast as a reminder of how hungry we are for God's everlasting love. We give alms to people in need to follow Christ's command to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.



The word "Lent" comes from an Old English word that means "springtime." Like the new life that is born in the spring, Lent calls each of us to renew our life in Christ as we look forward to Easter renewal and the Resurrection.

### Prayer

"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

**PRAY THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS.** This ancient prayer is a moving experience of the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Attend as a family and include grandparents, who are some of the best models of Catholic faith traditions for kids.



### Fasting

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward." ~ Matthew 6:16



**SACRIFICE:** Fast one day this week by eating only a simple meal, such as soup. Notice when you feel hungry and pray for people who do not have enough to eat.

### Almsgiving

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me." ~ Matthew 25:35-36

**ACTION:** Secretly put a gift card for gas or food in the mailbox of someone who is out of work.



### Symbols of Lent

**ASHES:** Made from burned palm leaves of the previous year, ashes can remind us of the baptismal and penitential character of Lent. They not only represent our own mortality and utter dependence on God, but also symbolize our efforts of dying to sin (and rising to new life in Christ).



**VIOLET (DEEP PURPLE):** Violet is the liturgical color of the season and symbolizes its repentant character, as well as Christ as the King of the world. (Deep purple was a color reserved for royalty in Jesus' time.)



**FISH:** As a Lenten symbol, fish stands for the obligation to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. We also abstain from meat on other Fridays of the season.



**BARREN STONES:** Stones call to mind the desert, and Jesus' testing by the devil there.



**PRETZELS:** Made from simple dough which has no dairy or fat, pretzels remind us of fasting and, shaped like two arms crossed, of prayer.



# Sharing Holy Week as a Family

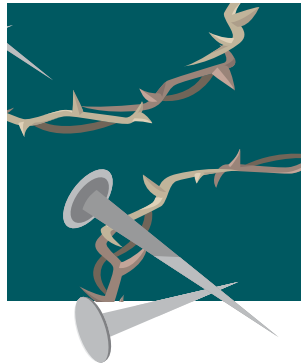
*What are you doing for Holy Week this year?*

By Lorene Hanley Duquin

It's OK if your list includes coloring eggs, photos with the Easter Bunny, buying jelly beans and chocolates, shopping for new outfits, and preparing Easter dinner. There's nothing wrong with secular Easter activities, but it's important to remember that there is also a profound spiritual basis for the holiday celebration.

## The Reason for the Season

Our remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus makes Holy Week the most sacred time of the year for Catholics. The week begins with Palm Sunday, which commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. At sundown on the following Thursday, we begin the Triduum, a word that simply means "three days," which concludes at sundown on Easter Sunday.



## The Triduum

**Holy Thursday**, which commemorates the Last Supper when Jesus gave us the gift of himself in the Eucharist, and set an example of service by washing the apostles' feet.

**Good Friday**, which recalls the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

**Holy Saturday**, a day of waiting.

**Easter**, which celebrates the resurrection of Jesus, beginning at the Easter Vigil and continuing with Masses on Easter Sunday.

## Make Holy Week Eggs

Fill plastic eggs with items that reinforce the events of Holy Week.



On **Palm Sunday**, children can open eggs that contain a piece of palm, a furry fabric that represents the donkey Jesus rode, and a picture of Jesus smiling.



On **Holy Thursday**, they might find a piece of towel recalling the washing of feet, a cracker symbolizing the Last Supper, and three dimes that recall the 30 pieces of silver.



On **Good Friday**, the eggs might contain a crucifix, dice to recall the casting of lots for Jesus' clothes, and a sad picture of Jesus.



On **Easter Sunday**, include a stone to recall the opening of the tomb and a picture of the risen Jesus.

This information came from **Take Out: Family Faith on the Go**. Take Out offers faith-based solutions to real-life issues and inspiration to help teach your kids about the Faith. It's a one-of-a-kind activity guide and support tool designed and written for busy families. Visit [teachingcatholickids.com/take-out](http://teachingcatholickids.com/take-out) to subscribe.

