

Sometime before the year 330 the duration of Lent had been fixed at forty days, to correspond to Christ's forty days in the desert. It was evident quite early that a six-week Lent contained only thirty-six days-since Sunday is never a fast day. Gradually **four** more days were added at the beginning of Lent and became known as Ash Wednesday. The first evidence of this increase is in the Galasian Sacramentary of the early eight century.

****(excerpted from: www.funmunch.com)

****In Mark's Gospel, the desert marks the beginning of Jesus' battle with Satan; the ultimate test will be in Jesus' final hours on the cross. In a similar way, our Lenten observances are only a beginning, a preparation for and a reinforcement of our ongoing struggle to resist the temptations we face in our lives. During Lent, we are led by the Holy Ghost to remember the vows of Baptism in which we promised to reject sin and to follow Jesus. Just as Jesus was ministered to by the angels, God also supports us in our struggle against sin and temptation. We succeed because Jesus conquered sin once and for all, in his saving death on the cross.

****(excerpted from: www.loyolapress.com)

*****While, over the years, modifications have been made to the Lenten observances, making our practices not only simple but also easy, Catholics have been taught, "If you gave something up for the Lord, tough it out. Do not act like a Pharisee looking for a loophole." Moreover, an emphasis must be placed on performing spiritual works, like attending the Stations of the Cross, attending Mass, making a weekly holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament, taking time for personal prayer and spiritual reading and most especially making a good confession and receiving sacramental absolution. Although the practices may have evolved over the centuries, the focus remains the same: to repent of sin, to renew our faith and to prepare to celebrate joyfully the mysteries of our salvation.

***** (excerpted from: www.catholiceducation.org)

*****While Lent is about giving up (i.e. fasting), it is also about putting something positive in its place. The best way to remove vice is to cultivate virtue. Lent has been a traditional time of helping the poor and doing acts of charity and mercy...Giving alms can be done in more ways than just giving out money to people on the street. It can be done by helping your family, friends and neighbors...One of the best ways to give alms is to get out of your comfort zone and volunteering for a charity or shelter...Lent is a perfect time to discern a call to these or any other ministry...

***** (excerpted from: www.churchyear.net)



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Lent



Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

But He answered and said, "***It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'***"

Origin of the word Lent

***The** etymological meaning of Lent is ‘long days’. It comes from ‘langginitnaz’, a prehistoric West Germanic compound formed from ‘lanngaz’ ‘long’ and an element ‘tina’-denoting ‘day’. This signified originally spring, an allusion to the lengthening days at that time of the year. It passed into Old English as lencten, which became Middle English Lenten, but in the 13th century the en- was dropped from the noun, leaving Lenten to function as an adjective. By this time too the secular sense of spring was fast dying out, having been usurped by the application of Lent to the period between Ash Wednesday and Easter.

*(excerpted from: word-origins.com)

****This** Teutonic word Lent from the Anglo-Saxon period translates to the more significant Latin term quadragesima meaning the “forty days”, or more literally the ‘fortieth day’. This in turn imitated the Greek name for Lent, tessarakoste (fortieth), a word formed on the analogy of Pentecost (pentekoste), which last was in use for the Jewish festival before New Testament times. This etymology is of some importance in explaining the early development of the Easter fast.

***(excerpted from: newadvent.org)

Biblical Reference

*****Lent** is one of the oldest observations on the Christian calendar. Early Church father Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-200) wrote of such a season in the earliest days of the Church, but back then it lasted only two or three days, not the 40 observed today. In 325, the Council of Nicea discussed a 40-day Lenten season of fasting, but it is unclear whether its original intent was just for new Christians preparing for Baptism, but it soon encompassed the whole Church.

How exactly the churches counted those 40 days varied depending on location. In the East, one only fasted on weekdays. The Western Church’s Lent was one week shorter, but included Saturdays. In both places, the observance was both strict and serious. Only one meal was taken a day, near the evening. There was to be no meat, fish, or animal products eaten.

Until the 600’s, Lent began on Quadragesima (Fortieth) Sunday, but Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) moved it to Wednesday, now called Ash Wednesday, to secure the exact number of 40 days in Lent-not counting Sundays, which were

fast days. Gregory, who is regarded as the father of the medieval papacy, is also credited with the ceremony that gives the day its name. As Christians came forth to the church for forgiveness, Gregory marked their foreheads with ashes reminding them of the biblical symbol of repentance (sackcloth and ashes) and mortality: “You are dust, and to dust you will return” (Gen. 3:19).

By the 800’s, some Lenten practices were already becoming more relaxed. First, Christians were allowed to eat after 3p.m. By the 1400’s, it was noon. Eventually, various foods (like fish) were allowed, and in 1966 the Roman Catholic Church only restricted fast days to Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It should be noted that practices in Eastern Orthodox churches are still quite strict.

***(excerpted from: www.christianitytoday.com)

******The** forty day period has symbolic importance in religion. Moses and Elias spent forty days in the wilderness; the Jews wandered forty years searching for the Promised Land; Jonah gave the city of Nineveh forty days’ grace in which to repent. Jesus retreated into the wilderness and fasted for forty days to prepare for his ministry. It was for him a time of contemplation, reflection, and preparation. So by observing Lent, most Christians join Jesus on His retreat.

The Lenten period of forty days owes its origin, as noted, to the Latin word Quadragesima, originally signifying forty hours. This referred to the forty hours of complete fasting which preceded the Easter celebration in the early Church. The main ceremony was the baptizing of the initiates on Easter Eve, and the fast was a preparation to receive this sacrament. Later, the period from Good Friday until Easter Day was extended to six days, to correspond with the six weeks of training, necessary to instruct the converts who were to be baptized.

A strict schedule was adhered to in the teaching of the converts. In Jerusalem near the end of the fourth century, classes were held throughout the seven weeks of Lent for three hours a day. With the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion of Rome in the 4th century, its character was endangered by the great influx of new members. To combat the hazard, the Lenten fast and practices of self renunciation were required of all Christians. The less zealous of the converts were thus brought more securely into the Christian fold.