

Our Faith: Lenten Observances

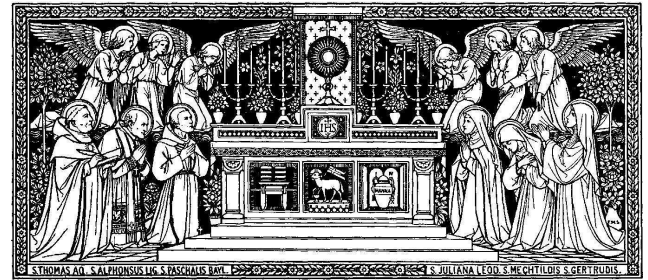
This week we will enter the solemn season of Lent, that period of forty days when Mother Church vests herself simply in violet, when her sacred halls are bare, and much of her music is muted. Flowers are set aside, our Glorias have ceased, and our Alleluias disappear. And at the end of the season, candles and lamps which have burnt in her sanctuaries all year round will be extinguished, bells will fall silent, and altars will be stripped. Lent is a solemn season characterized by austerity in our liturgy. But Lent does not end with the liturgy. Instead, the liturgy – the work of the church – is rightly the source and expression the sacrifice we make in our lives. And so in this season, it is not just the Church, but our lives too which should be characterized by that austerity. Traditionally, the Church calls to us to do four things in Lent: to fast more, to give more alms, to do more good deeds, and to pray more. Note the word ‘more’: these are practices that should characterize the Christian anyway. But in Lent, we are called to do them ‘more’. St Thomas Aquinas reminds us that it is through the pragmatic and practical things we do that our souls are nurtured, because what we do affects who we are. So, for instance, practicing hospitality will, over time, make a person a more generous person. And in terms of those traditional disciplines: practicing almsgiving or doing good deeds will make a person more charitable; practicing fasting will make a person more grateful; practicing prayer will make a person more like Jesus. We have to commit to doing it. So, this Lent, let us adopt a little bit more austerity in our lives, that in these forty days and forty nights, we might be transformed into his likeness.

Quinquagesima

Today is the last Sunday before Lent and is known as Quinquagesima. It means ‘fiftieth’ in Latin and marks the start of the fifty days before Easter. In earlier times Quinquagesima had a semi-Lenten character, because Lent started gradually rather than, as now, all at once on Ash Wednesday. The liturgy also reflected the coming start of Lent, and the liturgical colour was already violet. On this day, Eastern Orthodox Christians ask each other for forgiveness to begin the ‘Great Lent’ with a good heart, to focus on the spiritual life, to purify the heart from sin in confession, and to meet Easter – the day of the Resurrection of Jesus – with a pure heart. This is the last day before Lent when non-Lenten food is eaten.

11th February 2024

Sunday next before Lent/
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time



St Paul writes to the Corinthians ‘The God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ There are two ‘glorious’ people in Scripture: Moses had to cover his face when he left the presence of God, and Jesus’ clothes at the Transfiguration shone brighter than the sun. This radiant light of the divine presence is the same light that shines in our heart when we come to know the truth, life and love of God in Jesus. It is a given as an encouragement and a foretaste to provide comfort and encouragement on our journey to God. We are like St Paul writes to the Ephesians ‘children of light.’ We are called to ‘cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light’. This is the work of penitence and fasting that we anticipate in Lent. But he also reminds us elsewhere that although we see only dimly now we will come to fullness of knowledge when we meet God face to face: this will be the fully realized encounter with glory revealed in the face of Christ.

Prayers to Remember

Protect us, Lord, from becoming entangled in the cares of this life, or absorbed by too much pleasure in it. Give us strength to resist all that distracts us from living daily towards you, patience to endure all the challenges on our path and constancy to persevere to the end; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Adapted from Thomas à Kempis