



Mary, Mother of Mercy Parish

<https://www.mary-mom.com/small-groups>

Gospel Reflection Small Group

Outline for week beginning February 21, 2021

First Sunday of Lent

Lectionary: 23

Opening Prayer:

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Lord God, we open our hearts, minds and souls to worship to you. Thank you that today we dwell in your kingdom and live in your presence. Thank you that as we gather together we join with all Catholic Christians across the world to glorify your holy name. Come be with us, inspire us and lead us in our time together. We ask all this in the beautiful name of Jesus. Amen.

This Day in the Church:

What is Lent?

According to the *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, "[Lent](#) is a preparation for the celebration of Easter. For the Lenten liturgy disposes both catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery: catechumens, through the several stages of Christian initiation; the faithful through reminders of their own baptism and through penitential practices" (*General Norms* 27).

Why is Lent approximately forty days long?

In the Bible, forty days is a traditional number of discipline, devotion, and preparation. Moses stayed on the mountain of God forty days (Ex. 24:18, 34:28). The spies were in the land forty days (Num. 13:25). Elijah traveled forty days before he reached the cave where he had his vision (1 Kgs. 19:8). Nineveh was given forty days to repent (Jonah 3:4). And, most significantly for our Lenten observance, Jesus spent forty days in wilderness praying and fasting prior to undertaking his ministry (Matt. 4:2). Thus it is fitting for Christians to imitate him

with a forty-day period of prayer and fasting to prepare to celebrate the climax of Christ's ministry, Good Friday (the day of the crucifixion) and Easter Sunday (the day of the Resurrection).

What are fast and abstinence?

Under current canon law in the Western rite of the Church, a day of fast is one on which Catholics who are eighteen to sixty years old are required to keep a limited fast. In this country you may eat a single, normal meal and have two snacks so long as these snacks do not add up to a second meal. Children are not required to fast, but their parents must ensure they are properly educated in the spiritual practice of fasting. A day of abstinence is a day on which Catholics fourteen years and older are required to abstain from eating meat. (Though under the current discipline of the Western rite of the Church, fish, eggs, milk products, and foods made using animal fat are permitted, they are not in the Eastern rites.) Their pastor can easily dispense those with medical conditions from the requirements of fast and/or abstinence.

Why are Fridays during Lent days of abstinence?

Because Jesus died for our sins on Friday, making it an especially appropriate day of mourning our sins by denying ourselves something we enjoy. (By the same token, Sunday—the day on which he rose for our salvation—is an especially appropriate day to rejoice.)

Why is giving up something for Lent such a salutary custom?

By denying ourselves something we enjoy, we discipline our wills so that we are not slaves to our pleasures. Just as over-indulging in the pleasure of eating leads to physical flabbiness, over-indulging in pleasure in general leads to spiritual flabbiness. When the demands of morality require us to sacrifice something pleasurable (such as sex outside marriage) or endure hardship (such as being scorned for the faith), spiritual flabbiness may well make us fail.

Read the full article at: <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/lent-is-old-english-for-spring>

Gospel Reading Background:

The Temptation of Jesus & The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

Gospel Reading:

Mark 1:12-15

¹² At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert, ¹³ and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

¹⁴ After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: ¹⁵ “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Reflections:

1. What phrase or phrases mean the most to you? Why?
2. How does this passage relate to:
 - a. You personally?
 - b. You spiritually?
 - c. Your relationship to others?
3. What do you think would happen if you went away by yourself for 40 days to face your particular temptations?

Study Guide:

- a. [1:12–13](#) The same Spirit who descended on Jesus in his baptism now drives him into the desert for forty days. The result is radical confrontation and temptation by Satan who attempts to frustrate the work of God. The presence of wild beasts may indicate the horror and danger of the desert regarded as the abode of demons or may reflect the paradise motif of harmony among all creatures; cf. [Is 11:6–9](#). The presence of ministering angels to sustain Jesus recalls the angel who guided the Israelites in the desert in the first Exodus ([Ex 14:19](#); [23:20](#)) and the angel who supplied nourishment to Elijah in the wilderness ([1 Kgs 19:5–7](#)). The combined forces of good and evil were present to Jesus in the desert. His sustained obedience brings forth the new Israel of God there where Israel’s rebellion had brought death and alienation.

- b. [1:14–15](#) **After John had been arrested**: in the plan of God, Jesus was not to proclaim the good news of salvation prior to the termination of the Baptist's active mission. **Galilee**: in the Marcan account, scene of the major part of Jesus' public ministry before his arrest and condemnation. **The gospel of God**: not only the good news from God but about God at work in Jesus Christ. **This is the time of fulfillment**: i.e., of God's promises. **The kingdom of God...Repent**: see note on [Mt 3:2](#).

Reference to Old Testament Prophecy

Psalms 25:4-5

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior.

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

III. The Conversion of the Baptized

1427 Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." In the Church's preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.

1428 Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, (is) at once holy and always in need of purification, (and) follows constantly the path of penance and renewal." This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.

Group Intercessions:

[Ask each participant if they have any specific prayer intentions that they would like the group to pray for. It may be a good idea to start a group prayer intention book and the leader can read from it each week and add new requests as needed.]

Closing Prayer:

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Lord, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Thank you that we can live in your light and walk in your truth. May the things that you have revealed and thoughts that we have shared dwell in our hearts and stir us to action. We ask all this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.