

WHAT ARE LENT AND EASTER ALL ABOUT?

Our Church liturgical seasons of Lent and Easter are given to us by God our Father with perfect timing in our lives. The winter months are a test bringing us often to our limits of health and endurance. This is a perfect time for us to readjust ourselves to God's time and rhythm of life. We don't notice it but life has a way of speeding us up as we run after so many good things that we tend to forget what it's all about and why we are making all these efforts in the first place. So the Lord gives us pertinent Scripture texts, prayers and hymns to once again adjust our inner movement and rhythm to Jesus' life and preaching, miracles and signs, to the great love of God He made visible in His passion, death and resurrection, His ascension into heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

ASH WEDNESDAY

As we receive ashes, we hear God's call to remember our mortality and the value of God's gift of life to us, admit our selfishness, confess our sins, do penance to repent and change our lives, and give God more room through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

40 DAYS OF LENT

Jesus invites us to join Him and let the Holy Spirit lead us into the desert: where for 40 days we turn our heart away from satisfying our senses' insatiable cravings to free it up to attend to God and our neighbour, beginning with our family. The desert image of Lent is about letting our spirit be still and silent, so it can be awake again and find the Holy Spirit guiding us to find and do the Father's Will like Jesus. These 40 days can bring us a new peace with God, our family, and the world; as the 40 days and nights of rain washed away all the evil in Noah's day as he followed God's guidance. Lent also connects us to the 12 tribes of Israel who wandered in the desert for 40 years until they were purified of their rebellious attitudes and became willing to enter into the Promised Land and live the new life God offered them in accord with His instructions.

HOLY WEEK

The 7 days of every week are a perennial echo of the 7 days of Creation when God brought the universe, the earth, all creatures and humanity into being, declared them good, and rested. It is good and necessary for humans to imitate God and rest one day each week; so as not to become enslaved by work but remain free to enjoy life and let love radiate by being with our family and adoring God. Lent is our chance to respond to God by turning away from sin and frantic busyness, paying closer attention to God's Word, and praying more fervently. Holy Week is a very solemn 7 days looking back to the 7 days of Creation and giving us a renewed personal experience of God's action in Jesus effectively redeeming humanity and making all creation new.

40 DAYS OF EASTER

Through His selfless sacrifice, Jesus attracted the Father's mercy and forgiveness for all of humanity and for each one of us personally. While humanity continues to participate in the sinfulness of the original disobedience and rebellion, and to suffer under the burden and curse of unsatisfying, tiring or meaningless labor; all are invited to repent of their sin, accept to live the freeing obedience of Jesus, walk in the peace and love of God's children, and enter with hope into rest in the Holy Spirit. Easter Sunday, the new day of rest in God for Jesus' disciples, extends into the 40 days of Easter and Sundays of the year for the rest of our lives - as long as it will take for us to enter fully into God's rest.

10 DAYS UNTIL PENTECOST

The Ascension of Jesus into Heaven marks the end of the 40 days of Easter rest. During that time and at those moments when Jesus is with us, we celebrate His Presence and enjoy the warmth of His Love and the radiance of His victory over death. However, Jesus doesn't want us only to celebrate, because the victory which is complete in His human flesh is not yet fully won in us. That is why Jesus calls us to pray together just as the Apostles and the other disciples did. For 10 days - which means as long as we need - they prayed; as we need to pray, for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes in a way that dispels doubts and fears, with power like a mighty wind and light like tongues of fire: illuminating the mind, purifying the heart, inflaming the soul, and strengthening the flesh. The illumined mind sees as true the mysteries of God; the purified heart - free from all other attachments - clings to God as the one thing necessary; the inflamed soul loves God as the One who alone is worthy of all its affections; the strengthened flesh overcomes all obstacles and fears and gives a personal and whole-hearted response to the Lord's call: "Come, follow Me!"

ORDINARY TIME UNTIL CHRIST THE KING

The weeks from Pentecost to the end of November and the Solemnity of Christ the King are Ordinary Time, and they represent our life of faith, our labors of love, and our joyful anticipation in hope; as we await the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds, the second and glorious coming of Christ our King and Lord of the Universe. On that day He will come as Judge of the Nations, having lavished the riches of His merciful Love on all who accept His gifts of grace and return his love by loving others as He loves them.

JESUS CHRIST FULFILLS HIS PROMISES

In Matthew 28:20 Jesus promise to remain with us every day until the end. We experience Jesus fulfilling his promise at the Sunday Eucharist and other Liturgical Celebrations where the People of God gather around Jesus. His real Presence and life-giving Love raise the poor and afflicted to new life and strengthen us to live fully to the end as Jesus did.

Written by Fr. Gilles A. Surprenant for a Lenten letter in 1995