LENT CUSTOMS

* **Shrove Tuesday/Pancake Tuesday**
  In earlier times, on the day before Lent began, the "Shriving Bell" rang, summoning everyone to church to be "shriven," or to confess their sins before beginning the serious preparation for Easter. Earlier too, Lent involved considerable fasting, so this day was the time to eat up foods that spoiled, such as eggs, meat, milk and butter. It was also called *Fat Tuesday* (Mardi Gras).

* **Ash Wednesday**
  In nature, plants have to wither and die, decay and in a sense turn to ash before new life can emerge. In Lent, it is hoped that a person's faults and bad habits will die away, be turned to ash and that at Easter time, s/he will experience new life. On Ash Wednesday, an ashen cross is placed on each person's forehead. The ash is a reminder of bodily death and the need to review our priorities.

* **Forms of Repentance**
  Lent is a kind of spiritual spring cleaning, inviting a review and "clean-up" of values, attitudes and actions. A more attentive listening to God's Word, a greater focus on prayer, sacraments and liturgy, undertaking acts of kindness (doing something positive, not necessarily giving up anything), and a fasting in order to share with others (the emphasis is on compassion, not mortification) are the ways to make the process real.

* **Sacramental Reconciliation**
  It is especially appropriate in this season, when God invites us to reconversion, to a complete turning back into God's loving embrace, to seek the graces of this sacrament.

* **Seasonal colours**
  The colours of the season are purples and greys: a season of dryness with the promise of water; of death with the promise of life; and of darkness with the promise of light. (J.N.Ahearn)

SOME LENTEN SUGGESTIONS

Focus attentively on prayer and liturgy. * Go for a walk and have a chat with God. * Try to get to an extra Mass, or say the rosary, once a week.
* If you don't normally have family prayer at meal times, Lent is a good time to begin! * Spend ten minutes reflecting on the gospel for the coming weekend's Mass. * Say a prayer with the children as you wish them "good night." * Visit a church and pray the Stations of the Cross. * Take part in a Lenten discussion group, eg the Archdiocesan Ecumenical one. * Spend five minutes every day reflecting on God's love for you. * Reflect on how well you are using the gifts God gave you.

Undertake acts of kindness. * Voluntarily and unobtrusively do an extra chore several times one week. * Be a peacemaker with someone in your family. * Give a message of hope to someone.
* Bake a cake and share it with someone who is house-bound or older. * Check your cupboards and pass on the clothes (in good condition) that you could do without. * Pray for world justice and peace. * Let someone else have the last piece of pudding. * Baby-sit for a single parent and give her/him some free time.

Fasting and sharing. * Fast from your favourite music and phone someone who is unhappy, discouraged or grieving. * Have some cheaper meals and donate the money saved to a local or overseas charity. * Fast from sport/practice for thirty minutes and contact someone you've been postponing contact with. * Fast from a TV show and give the time to a person in need. * Fast from criticising your family or work colleagues, and say a prayer for each person. * Join an active social justice group or charitable organisation.

The Liturgical Seasons of the Church Year

The Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission and CatholicLIFE
Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
THE SEASON OF LENT

Lent is a preparation for the celebration of Easter, both for those preparing to enter the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass (the catechumens) and the whole Catholic community.

It has a two-fold focus. It is a time of reflection on (or preparation for) baptism and time for a type of voluntary spiritual spring cleaning, leading to repentance.

Lent means spring, from lengthening days, so the symbolism has a northern hemisphere bias. There, Lent occurs when the earth is coming to life once more, often after a long and bitter winter.

On the other hand, Lent falling in autumn also has significance. Buds which remain on bare branches, the watering of seedpods on the scorched earth, the regrowth of hardy bush: these aspects of the Australian landscape speak of the resurrection in the midst of passion and death. Autumn is nature's season of hope and promise of a glorious spring. (Patrick Sharpe)

There are 40 days of Lent (not counting Sundays: always days celebrating the resurrection), from Ash Wednesday until Easter morning. There are many references to forty in the scriptures: Jesus' days of fasting in the wilderness; Jesus' hours in the tomb; the days Moses fasted before he received the Ten Commandments; the years the Israelites wandered in the desert before reaching the Promised Land. The early Church Fathers believed that forty represented the necessary period for cleansing or testing and strengthening, which allows spiritual wisdom to mature.

EXTRACTS FROM LENTEN READINGS

How do the Lenten readings speak to you of the need for personal and communal renewal, for purification and enlightenment?

- **First Sunday of Lent, Year B.**
  Lord, make me know your ways.
  Lord, teach me your paths.
  Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:
  for you are God my Saviour.

- **Second Sunday of Lent, Year B.**
  Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give.

- **Third Sunday of Lent, Year A.**
  .... those who who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

- **Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year C.**
  So, we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God.

- **Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year C.**
  Jesus looked up and said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" “No one, Sir,” she replied. “Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. “Go away and don’t sin any more.”

- **Palm / Passion Sunday, Year A.**
  At that moment the cock crew, and Peter remembered what Jesus had said, “Before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

LENTEN REFLECTIONS

**Baptism.** From the fourth century on, Lent was a time when Christian converts were prepared for baptism (and more recently, for full communion with the Catholic church). The Catholic community, whilst supporting and welcoming these new members, is invited to reflect on baptism as its commitment to the Christian vocation.

**Not 40 but 90 days!** As a Church, we are slowly grasping that Lent and Easter are a single season, that we are celebrating ninety days of renewal of the death and rising of Jesus in our lives. There are three phases: the forty days of Lent, lived as the intense time of preparation for Easter; the three days (Triduum) of one event -- the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection; the fifty days of Easter, as a joyful reflection on our responses to Christ's giving of himself.

**Self-discipline.** The disciplines of fasting, almsgiving (sharing our wealth, skills and time) and prayer have clear purposes. In fasting we experience bodily hunger, but also discover what we truly hunger for. Almsgiving aims to correct the maldistribution of the world's resources caused by greed and abuse of power. Real fasting and sharing raise our awareness. We come to prayer more alert, with the mind and heart sharpened, more ready to hear God's word.

**A desert?** In a way, Lent is a desert pilgrimage. A desert is sparsely settled, yet where evil was sent (the Jews' scapegoats). It is also a place where God can be met (Mt Sinai). The desert is a place where good and evil struggle. In Lent, we are symbolically withdrawn from “the world,” to reflect on our personal and social sinfulness and on our need for forgiveness.