



These days form a unified liturgical season: the Easter season, the spring (beginning) of the Church. The words "Easter" and "Paschal" are derived from the word pascha, which means passage. During this time, let's take time out of our daily routine to celebrate our pascha.

As we pass from winter to spring, we recognize the image of our passage through baptism. What was once cold now warms up, what was dark now becomes clear. The enslaved regain their freedom and the dead rise to life. During Easter we return to our baptism, to the death to which we died in the waters of baptism, and to the life to which we were born in the Holy Spirit. We renew baptismal promises and accompany people who get baptised for the first time: The Catechumens. Decide what rules you and your family will observe, what traditions you will make your own, and when and where you will spend time in prayer.

Lent usually coincides with spring. The days are getting longer as the northern hemisphere begins to turn towards the sun, the source of life.

Yahweh says: "Return to me with all your heart" (Joel 2,12). Sin is turning away from the Lord. The Lord asks us to turn to Him with all our hearts. But it also asks us to return to our brothers from whom sin has separated us. The word "Lent" means "forty days." Actually, there are 46 days that, in the solitude of the desert and fasting, we accompany the Lord in prayer. What does the Lord ask of us? He asks us to turn to him from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday.

### **Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.**

Self-denial requires three things, according to the Gospel of Saint Matthew. First, we pray: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is there with you." We fast: "Others should not realize that you are fasting, but your Father who is in secret knows." We give alms: "Take care that your alms remain secret, and the Father, who sees the secrets, will reward you."

We can all find reasons or excuses not to pray, not to help, or not to give alms. For many, these practices have gone out of fashion and are even considered pious. The rules and norms of Lent are certainly no longer as strict as before, when the Church first imposed them on us. Now, it does not impose them on us, but we assume them with freedom of spirit. By praying, fasting, and doing works of mercy, we imitate Jesus Christ. He prayed and taught us to pray. Jesus fasted and we also fast. Jesus gave alms (the Greek word is

tzedakah), which means "righteous works." Therefore, we are asked to give alms, works of justice.

### **Prayer:**

During Lent, more than during other times of the year, we realize our needs, our inner emptiness, and our limitations. During Lent, our weaknesses and needs naturally lead us to prayer. It is only when we realize our inner emptiness and admit our limitations that we begin to pray.

### **Fast:**

The words "Fasting" and "Lent" are inseparable. Even grocery stores are stocking fewer meat products and increasing quantities of Lenten foods. This is the time when animals give birth to their young or lay the eggs from which they will hatch. The Lenten fast originates from these rhythms of nature. For 40 days we remember that the earth is very similar to Noah's Ark: all creatures depend on, to a large extent, each other. The Lenten fast is a way to participate in the new birth of the season of the year. Saint John Chrysostom calls fasting "medicine," that is, something that preserves or restores health.

### **Alms:**

As we approach the Easter Vigil, the Holy Scriptures challenge us to renew our commitment to our Christian obligation to give alms throughout

the year. We are invited to give time, money, and creative efforts to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the lonely or sick, and restore dignity and justice to those who suffer from human wrongdoing.

Remember that the Lord invites you once again to live your Pascha, your renewing path. With Jesus let us walk this Lenten journey, to reach with Him the glory of the Resurrection.

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