

# The Church Guardian

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## CALENDAR FOR MARCH.

- MARCH 2nd—Second Sunday in Lent.  
 " 9th—Third Sunday in Lent.  
 " 16th—Fourth Sunday in Lent.  
 " 23rd—Fifth Sunday in Lent. (*Notice of the Annunciation*).  
 " 25th—Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
 " 30th—6th Sunday in Lent. (*Notice of Holy Days in this week*).

## LENT: WHAT IT IS, AND HOW TO KEEP IT.

COMPILED BY A PRIEST.

Lent is the name given to the forty days of fasting and penitence, which come before the great feast of Easter.

This fast begins with Ash Wednesday, and ends with Easter eve. Each of these forty days is strictly speaking, a fast day. The six Sundays which occur in Lent are, of course, not days of fasting, but feast days like all other Sundays of the Christian year. Fasting is not a new thing. If you will read your Bible you will find that David fasted for his sins (2 Sam. xii. 16), and that the Jews used to fast. Ezra viii. 23, Neh. ix. 1).

But above all it should be remembered that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. Now, Jesus Christ is your pattern, reader, and you must "follow His steps" (1 Pet. ii. 21), and try, as far as you can, to do as He did. Christ prayed; therefore Christians who are named after Christ must pray; Christ fasted, therefore must Christians fast likewise. Again, Jesus Christ fasted when He had no need to fast, for "He did no sin, neither was any guile found in His mouth." [1 Pet. ii. 22] Much more should Christians fast who say daily that they are "miserable sinners," always "leaving undone these things which they ought not to have done." This is what the Church of God thought in very early Christian times. For this reason she set apart this season of Lent for fasting, penitence and prayer. The Church did not invent fasting and penitence, but merely set apart a time for fasting and penitence.

Jesus Christ, by His life and doctrine says "Fast"; the Church says "Fast now in this holy season of Lent."

In early times more Christians were very strict in keeping Lent. Each of the forty days was devoutly observed. Nothing was eaten before six o'clock in the evening; and then the meal was very light, no meat or strong food being allowed. The sick and the infirm alone were excused from this severe fasting. But about eight hundred years after this the rule became more lax. Christians were permitted to break their fast in the middle of the day, but as before, all the meals were light. Since that time the rule has become more lax still. Christians were allowed to take flesh meat on all days in Lent, except on Wednesday, in remembrance of our Lord's betrayal, and on Friday, in remembrance of his Crucifixion and Passion. This is the rule which now holds good in the Church.

But how few there are who keep even this rule. How very few in this country of ours, where most men eat and drink more than is good for them, even try to keep it. How many there are who do not observe Lent, because they never repent of their sins. How many profess to keep Lent, but never really keep it after the way of Jesus and His Saints. How sad this is among those "who profess to call themselves Christians." They use, nay they honor the name of Jesus; they say the prayer of Jesus, the "Our Father"; they show forth the death of Jesus at the Holy Eucharist; but they will not bear the fast of Jesus. Is this consistent? Try and bear all His burdens, even the burden of self denial. Remember his own words, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." [Matt. xvi. 24].

You are touched, reader, you are moved; you say to yourself, I never saw Lent in this light before. I will this year keep the fast of Jesus for the love of Jesus. I will deny myself a little for His sake, for He denied Himself much for the sake of me, poor worm of earth. I will try and follow the saints who followed Jesus, [Heb. vi. 12], those "examples of suffering affliction and patience," [Jas. v. 10], in their self-denial and fasting, in their heartfelt penitence, in their earnest prayers.

But you say, "Though I know more of Lent than I did before, though I desire to keep this fast of Jesus, though I wish to give more time to prayer and repentance; I do not know the way of setting about it. What shall I do? What shall I not do? What prayers shall I use? How shall I divide my time between these holy duties and my every-day business? Well, in answer to your question, you will find in this article a few simple rules to guide you in the holy observance of Lent, which will come easy to you if you ask God to give you His help to practice them. To speak generally; you should keep Lent with your whole man, that is with your body, and with your soul, both outwardly and inwardly.

### 1. And first of all, I will speak of the

#### LENTEN FAST

as it concerns the body.

Now, it is right, just and proper that a sinful man should keep Lent with his body; that he should chasten his flesh, and deny himself in the way of food and drink. Man sinned in Paradise with both soul and body, His soul desired what God had forbidden; his hand took the fruit, his mouth devoured it. And as the wages of his sin, not only was his soul punished by becoming sinful, but his body likewise by becoming subject to disease, decay, and death.

This being so, man should repent with both body and soul. David repented in this way when he said, "My heart is smitten down and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread." [Ps. ciii. 4]. Bodily fasting from food went along with the inward repentance of his heart. The Ninevites repented in this way at the preaching of Jonah; they "proclaimed a

fast," and the king said, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed nor drink water" [Jonah iii. 5-7]. And St. Paul, fearing lest the flesh "which lusteth against the spirit," should get the mastery over him, says, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." [Cor. ix. 27] Elsewhere he refers to this bodily mortification as the practice of devout Christians when he says, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." [Gal. v. 24]. In both these texts he implies that bodily mortification goes along with inward repentance from sin and sanctification of the soul. Bethis your work. O reader, this Lent; while you seek to conquer your passions, chastise your body also, as a means to this good end. Make a resolution, asking God to help you, that you will abstain from delicate food during the whole of Lent; from all idle, vain amusements which often hurt the soul; and that besides this, you will, on each Wednesday and Friday, abstain from flesh meat and strong food as far as you are able. This will not be very hard to you if you are in earnest about your soul, and if you have a real love for Jesus Christ in your heart. Of course, if you are really sick in body, so as to be unable to go about your business, you are excused from this bodily fasting; as are also the aged, very poor persons, and children, by the law of the Church. But beware of making false excuses, by pretending that you are not strong enough to fast, when you are strong enough to take your pleasure, and to work at your daily business.

### 2. Next, let me say a few words on the

#### INWARD AND SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCE

of this season of Lent. This is the most important part of your Lenten duties, for the mere practice of bodily abstinence alone will be of little avail in the sanctification of your soul. This would be as though a man professing to be friendly with his neighbor should be content with abstaining from striking him, while at the same time he was plotting against him in his heart. Such friendship as this none would value. So God cares not for the merely outward observance of Lent, while the heart is far from Him. Such a Lent is an abomination unto Him. [Is. i. 10-15]. Keep then this holy season with both soul and body, offering your whole man as a holy sacrifice well pleasing unto God through Jesus Christ. [Romans xii. 1].

Now this spiritual observance of Lent divides itself into these heads: Prayer, self-examination and Meditation.

### 1.—PRAYER.

Make it a rule throughout Lent to rise earlier in the morning, so as to have more time for private communing with God before your day's work. Many persons either omit, or say carelessly their morning prayers, forgetting that this early lifting up of the heart to God is the most important duty of the day, and is far more likely to bring down blessing from heaven than the evening prayers uttered when the body is tired and weary.

Make it a practice also at this time, as far as you are able, to spend a few moments by yourself in some church, the doors of which are always open; and there, in the silence of God's house while no service is being performed, give yourself up to holy thoughts or to reading the passion of our Lord in the holy Gospels, or to offering up to God your private prayers and intercessions. Try and do this on each Wednesday and Friday in Lent. Besides you will no doubt consider it a pleasure to attend some of the special Lenten services which may be held in your own parish church. If so, you might go there some thirty or fifteen minutes before the time in order to practice these holy duties I am recommending to you. But whether you go to church or not; whatever your dif-