



Lent and Easter

with the **Holy Fathers**



Compiled by Peter Celano



PARACLETE PRESS
BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Lent and Easter with the Holy Fathers

2010 First Printing

Copyright © 2010 by Paraclete Press, Inc.

ISBN: 978-1-55725-692-8

Quotations from the Holy Scriptures, as used by the editor, are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Lent and Easter with the Holy Fathers / compiled by Peter Celano.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-55725-692-8 (hard cover)

1. Catholic Church--Prayers and devotions. 2. Lent--Prayers and devotions. 3. Easter--Prayers and devotions. I. Celano, Peter.
BX2170.L4L44 2010

242'.34--dc22

2009046201

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in an electronic retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published by Paraclete Press
Brewster, Massachusetts
www.paracletepress.com

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
ONE	
<i>Shrove Tuesday</i>	
13	
TWO	
<i>Asb Wednesday</i>	
23	
THREE	
<i>Forty Days of Preparation</i>	
37	
FOUR	
<i>Holy Week</i>	
53	
FIVE	
<i>Easter</i>	
81	
SIX	
<i>Eastertide</i>	
or THE EASTER SEASON, or PASCHAL TIME	
93	
PERMISSIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	107
NOTES	108

INTRODUCTION



LENT AND EASTER WITH THE HOLY FATHERS offers an opportunity for you to slow down and listen for God in this most important time of the Christian year. There is no more vital moment in our lives of faith than this one. Lent and Easter are when the essence of our faith is made manifest before our eyes. At this time of year, we are able to combine active participation in worship with personal study, prayer, and attentive listening for God's voice, learning anew how best to follow the One who died for us and then rose again.

Everything we do as Christians centers around this time of year. As Pope Clement XIII said in an encyclical from 1759 (quoted in detail below), Easter is the celebration "by which alone the dignity of all other religious occasions is consecrated." The Church would not exist if it were not for what happened on that first Easter Sunday. Also, the events of this season are all essentially connected: there would have been no Easter Sunday without Good Friday; Good Friday

is best understood in the context of Palm Sunday; and the forty days of Lent begin for a variety of reasons at Ash Wednesday.

This is the story of the passion of our Lord. Our faith revolves around that passion, His death, and His resurrection. Without the events of this season, our faith wouldn't make any sense at all.



We usually think of this season of the Church year as a time for repentance and forgiveness, both interior and exterior. We devote ourselves more deliberately to prayer, reflection, study, making Confession, taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice of Holy Communion, spending time in adoration of the Eucharist, and all other manner of observances of our Catholic faith.

We also rededicate ourselves to the Christian life by renouncing, or "giving up," certain things that have perhaps become too precious to us. We do these things in order to make amends for our own and other people's sins, and in the hope of the promise of everlasting love. In Galatians 5:24 St. Paul says:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

And as Pope John XXIII wrote in an encyclical from 1962:

Doing penance for one's sins is a first step towards obtaining forgiveness and winning eternal salvation. That is the clear and explicit teaching of Christ, and no one can fail to see how justified and how right the Catholic Church has always been in constantly insisting on this. She is the spokesman for her divine Redeemer. No individual Christian can grow in perfection, nor can Christianity gain in vigor, except it be on the basis of penance.¹

So, many of us ever since childhood have identified the Lenten season with these two kinds of observances: interior and exterior. Both of these types of penance are important for the renewal of our religious lives.

Lent is not only about giving things up, but also about refocusing and rededicating. It is about the profound ways that we are reminded to turn again to God, to seek and find His loving presence ever closer in our Christian lives.



The second half of the title of this book is important as well: *with the Holy Fathers*. Popes past and present will be guiding us along this path, showing us what is

most important, and encouraging us to allow God to fill much more of our lives than before.

Down through history, the personalities of the popes have varied widely, and each of them has had his own way of communicating and his own unique messages for the essential life of the Church in that day. The following collection of insights includes messages from Holy Fathers going back in history as far as St. Peter himself, and Pope St. Leo the Great, and also includes the teachings of other great saints from those earliest days. And then, of course, we have also included selections from a variety of other Holy Fathers throughout the ages, including several from our own Pope Benedict XVI, as well as from Pope John Paul II. We have provided the dates for each of the quotations from Pope Benedict and Pope John Paul II, for the benefit of readers who may even recall hearing their words on the occasions when they were first spoken.

You may have your own favorite pope in history—or perhaps one whose words of spiritual wisdom have most touched your heart—and we have tried to include as many of them as we could. You'll find the following in these pages:

- St. Peter (AD 30–64)
- Pope St. Leo the Great (440–61)

- Pope St. Gregory I (590–604)
- Pope Innocent III (1198–1216)
- Pope Clement XIII (1758–69)
- Pope Blessed Pius IX (1846–78)
- Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903)
- Pope Blessed John XXIII (1958–63)
- Pope John Paul II (1978–2005)
- Pope Benedict XVI (2005–)

The season of Lent has always been a special time for the Holy Fathers—their most profound meditations and reflections have come during this essential season in our lives. Pope John Paul II perhaps put it best when he said in 1979, during the first Lenten season of his pontificate: “The main current of Lent must flow through the interior man, through hearts and consciences. The essential effort of repentance consists in this. In this effort the human determination to be converted to God is invested with the predisposing grace of conversion and, at the same time, of forgiveness and of spiritual liberation.”

We have included excerpts from as many of the papal homilies, encyclicals, and messages as we could. All of their messages are vital for the people of God, regardless of their denomination.

Again in the words of Pope John Paul II:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us set out with trust on our Lenten journey, sustained by fervent prayer, penance and concern for those in need. In particular, may this Lent be a time of ever greater concern for the needs of children, in our own families and in society as a whole: for they are the future of humanity.

With childlike simplicity let us turn to God and call him, as Jesus taught us in the prayer of the "Our Father," "Abba," "Father."

Our Father! Let us repeat this prayer often during Lent; let us repeat it with deep emotion. By calling God "Our Father," we will better realize that we are his children and feel that we are brothers and sisters of one another. Thus it will be easier for us to open our hearts to the little ones, following the invitation of Jesus: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mt. 18:5).

In this hope, I invoke upon each of you God's blessings, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Word of God made man and Mother of all humanity.

—*Message of His Holiness, John Paul II, for Lent 2004*



ONE

Shrove Tuesday

THE DAY BEFORE
THE HOLY SEASON OF LENT

*T*HIS DAY has two popular names: Shrove Tuesday and Fat Tuesday. We should say right at the beginning that Fat Tuesday (English for the French *Mardi gras*) is not on the Christian calendar. Fat Tuesday is not a liturgical feast. Far from it!

But Fat Tuesday is still an important aspect of Christian tradition, stemming back at least hundreds of years. This is the day that we remember we are only creatures. However, too often today this day before Ash Wednesday is marked by sinful, or at least imprudent, excesses and celebrations that are not at all mindful of the Lenten days to follow.

By tradition, the purpose of Fat Tuesday is to feast in order to mark the great difference between feasting and the fasting that begins the following morning. Traditionally, in old Europe and throughout Latin America even today, the feasting would consist of good wine, fattened calves, dairy, eggs, and cheese, and all manner of foods that should be gone from the cupboards and cellars before Lent begins. The parties in the French Quarter of New Orleans are what pops into many of our minds when we think of Fat Tuesday in the United States, and these are not the sort of

celebrations that should mark the way that Christians spend the day before the season of Lent begins. But even in New Orleans, the streets are cleaned and the revelers pushed toward home—at midnight.

The origins of Fat Tuesday come from a time when the fasting of Lent was more deliberate and strict than it usually is today. It is uncommon today for Catholics to abstain from all wine, meat, and dairy products during the season of Lent. But such fasting is still encouraged, and it returns us to a better understanding of the purpose of this time of the year.

Given all of this complexity, let's call this day *Shrove Tuesday* instead. Shrove Tuesday focuses us on the specifically religious aspects of the day before Lent. *Shrove* comes from the old Anglo-Saxon verb *to shrive*, or "to make a confession," and to be *shriven*, or absolved of sins. This is the day when we finally make our spiritual preparations for the Lenten season that's upon us. In 1748, Pope Benedict XIV instituted what he called the "Forty Hours of Carnival" as an antidote to the excesses so often seen on Shrove Tuesday. Prayers were offered, the people were encouraged to make their confessions, and the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in parishes during the days leading up to Ash Wednesday. Still, in some parts of the world, these practices are a vibrant part of the "celebration" of this day before Lent.

PSALM 51

[In church, this is the last day of the liturgical calendar when Alleluias are supposed to be sung; they will now be put away for the next forty days. The Church reminds us that this day is supposed to be marked by waiting and a renewal of penitence, asking for God's mercy.]

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your
deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering,
you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God
is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise.

Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

A PRAYER FOR THE FORGIVENESS
OF SINS

MY JESUS, I place all my sins before you. In my estimation they do not deserve pardon, but I ask you to close your eyes to my want of merit and open them to your infinite merit.

Since you willed to die for my sins, grant me forgiveness for all of them. Thus, I may no longer feel the burden of my sins, a burden that oppresses me beyond measure.

Assist me, dear Jesus, for I desire to become good no matter what the cost. Take away, destroy, and utterly root out whatever you find in me that is contrary to your holy will. At the same time, dear Jesus, illumine me so that I may walk in your holy light.

— ST. GEMMA GALGANI

St. Gemma Galgani was an Italian mystic and stigmatist who lived from 1878–1903. She was orphaned at the age of eighteen and lived a short life, becoming one of the most popular saints of the Passionist order. Her feast is celebrated on April 11.