

# Why is Lent 40 Days?

A Reflection for the First Sunday of Lent



*at the*  
**foot of the cross**

*A Lenten journey from Family Rosary*

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# Welcome to Our Family

Each year, the Church gives us the Lenten season to help us reorient our lives toward God. We encourage you and your family to enter into this season together, journeying with Jesus and Mary to the foot of the Cross and, ultimately, to the joyful celebration of Easter.

The traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (acts of love and service) help us to turn away from everything that binds and blinds us in order to make space for God in our hearts and our homes. He wishes to bring light and warmth to family life, to free us and fill us with Himself! This is the tremendous call of the entire Christian life, but the Lenten season bids us to respond to this call with even greater intentionality.

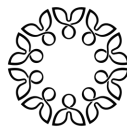
Orienting our lives toward God always requires an experience of the Paschal Mystery—the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Notably, however, this experience does not end with the Cross; it leads to the glory of Easter! As you and your family find ways to practice prayer, fasting, and almsgiving this Lent, let Mary accompany you on your journey, so that she can show you how her Son redeems and brings new life.

To facilitate your Lenten journey, we are offering prayer resources and a 40-day Lenten family activity calendar on our website, [Familyrosary.org](http://Familyrosary.org). May God continue to bless you and your family.

## A Little History

*Servant of God Patrick Peyton began his ministry in 1942 with the goal of building family unity through daily prayer of the Rosary. Inspired by his own father who had a deep devotion to family prayer, praying the Rosary became the foundation for the life of Father Peyton (1909-92).*

*We at Family Rosary are ever so grateful Father Peyton's family instilled in him the importance of family prayer. Now it can be part of your family's tradition so you can fulfill the vision that "The Family That Prays Together Stays Together," the slogan coined by Father Patrick Peyton, C.S.C., so many years ago.*



**Family Rosary**

HOLY CROSS  
FAMILY MINISTRIES

The family that prays together stays together

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In the English language, the special season before Easter is called “Lent.” The word comes from the “lengthening” of daylight hours as we progress from the darkness of winter to the new light of spring. But other languages, such as Spanish, have a name for this season that is derived from the word for forty. It is the season of the forty days.

OK, we do penance for forty days because Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness. But did you ever wonder why he was out there for forty days rather than seven or ten or fifty?

Think back to the Old Testament. Noah and company were in the Ark for 40 days. Moses was up on Sinai receiving the 10 commandments for 40 days. The Israelites wandered around the desert for 40 years.

## So why all these forties?

Probably because it is forty weeks that a woman carries her developing baby in the womb before a new birth can take place.

All these “forties” are a necessary and not-so-comfortable prelude for something new. In Noah’s case, it’s the rebirth of a sinful world that had been cleansed by raging flood waters. In Moses’ case, it was the birth of the people of the covenant. For the nomadic Israelites, it was the start of a new, settled existence in the Promised Land.

And Jesus? What did his forty days mean? The birth of a new Israel liberated from sin, reconciled to God, and governed by the law of the Spirit rather than a law chiseled in stone.

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But think back to the story of Moses and the Israelites. There was someone who did not want them to go out into the desert to offer sacrifice to their God. Pharaoh did not take the loss of his cheap labor lying down. When Jesus begins his mission of liberation, there is another slave-master who is no more willing than Pharaoh to let his minions go without a fight.

Since the sixties, it has been fashionable in some quarters to dismiss the devil as a relic of ancient mythology or an invention of medieval fantasy. The guy with the pointy tail and the pitchfork comes in handy in cartoons and costume parties, but how can we take such an image seriously? In the Bible, they say, let's read "Satan" merely as a symbol of human evil.

Such a view is clearly at odds with Scripture, Tradition, and the constant teaching of the Magisterium. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, says St. Paul. If you don't know your enemy and his tactics, you are bound to lose.

The temptation of Jesus in the desert shows us the tactics of the "Dark Lord." Bread, a symbol for all that sustains our physical life, is a great blessing. But Satan tries to make material things the ultimate, distracting us from a deeper hunger and a more satisfying food. Political power and all leadership is intended by God for the sake of serving the common good; Satan twists things to make leaders self-seeking, oppressive tyrants like himself. The lust for power and fame ironically leads not to dominion but to slavery to the Dark Lord (remember what happened to the Nazgûl in the Lord of the Rings!). Then there's religious temptation, the trickiest of them all-- Manipulating God for our own glory, using his gifts to make people look at us rather than at Him. Sounds a lot like the Pharisees.

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Jesus triumphs in this first wrestling match. He shows us how to keep from being pinned. Fasting breaks undue attachments to material blessings and stimulates our spiritual appetite. Humble service breaks the stranglehold of pride. The reverent worship of authentic faith breaks the full nelson of superstition, magic, and all arrogant religion. And the word of God is shown as the sword of the Spirit, the secret weapon that slashes through the lies of the enemy.

## So our forty days?

Time to use the tactics modeled by our captain and break the strongholds. Prayer, fasting, humble service fueled by the heavenly bread of the Eucharist and Scripture. If we make use of them diligently during this season, pregnant with possibilities, we can enter into greater freedom. Darkness can give way to increasing light. Something new and wonderful can be born in us.

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Reflecting on the context of our Lenten practice this year, let us note that in the first place, Lent is the time to prepare for the great annual remembrance of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord, so that we will be ready to stand at the foot of the Cross with Mary. Christ, both Victim and Priest, sacrifices Himself to the Father for the forgiveness of sins and to open the way to Eternal Life. Mary once more says YES, offering her Son as this Sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant. This is our Salvation. This is our true Hope.

**Keep an eye on:**

Family Rosary@ [familyrosary.org](http://familyrosary.org)

Catholic Mom@ [catholicmom.com](http://catholicmom.com)

Museum of Family Prayer@ [museumoffamilyprayer.com](http://museumoffamilyprayer.com)

and on our Facebook and Instagram sites too!

**#AtTheFootOfTheCross #Lent2021**



We hope the time you've spent reflecting with this material has been enriching. Continue to pray with your family every day, wherever you are.

For additional online resources for family prayer including additional e-books and the mobile Rosary App, please visit our website at [www.FamilyRosary.org](http://www.FamilyRosary.org).

This e-book and all our resources represent a culmination of Father Peyton's passion for family unity through prayer. We hope our services will enhance your family's prayer life particularly remembering Father Peyton's famous words, "The family that prays together stays together."

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