

Lent: A Time of Preparation

Lent lasts 40 days

The number 40

4x10

4 – the world, 4 directions, 4 winds, 4 elements, etc.

10 – perfection and completion

40 – enough time on earth for consecration and trial

40 in the Old Testament:

Noah's ark

40 days and nights of rain

Slavery in Egypt

400 years

Desert wanderings

40 years

Out of slavery, but haven't left it completely behind

Aren't to the Promised Land yet

Today's 1st Reading (*Deuteronomy 26:4-10*)

Moses tells of this exile to Egypt and of being brought
to the Promised Land

He does this in the context of telling what sacrificial offerings to make

Elijah

40 days preparation

Then sees God

40 in the New Testament:

Today's Gospel (*Luke 4:1-13*)

Jesus' temptation in the desert

40 days of preparation

“By the solemn forty days of *Lent* the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.” (CCC 540)

Today's 2nd Reading (*Romans 10:8-13*)

THE CONVERSION OF THE BAPTIZED

1427 Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."¹⁶ In the Church's preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism¹⁷ that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.

1428 Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This *second conversion* is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal."¹⁸ This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.¹⁹

1429 St. Peter's conversion after he had denied his master three times bears witness to this. Jesus' look of infinite mercy drew tears of repentance from Peter and, after the Lord's resurrection, a threefold affirmation of love for him.²⁰ The second conversion also has a *communitarian* dimension, as is clear in the Lord's call to a whole Church: "Repent!"²¹

St. Ambrose says of the two conversions that, in the Church, "there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance."²²

Today's Responsorial Psalm (*Psalms 91*)

protection by God even in hardships

INTERIOR PENANCE

1430 Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the *conversion of the heart, interior conversion*. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.²³

1431 Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace. This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* (affliction of spirit) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart).²⁴

1432 The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart.²⁵ Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him: "Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!"²⁶ God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.²⁷

Let us fix our eyes on Christ's blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.