



CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE of RALEIGH

**NORMS AND GUIDELINES FOR THE  
BEGINNING OF THE SEASON OF LENT  
2021**

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“For by your gracious gift each year, your faithful await the sacred paschal feasts with the joy of minds made pure, so that, more eagerly intent on prayer and on the works of charity, and participating in the mysteries by which we have been reborn, they may be led to the fullness of grace that you bestow on your sons and daughters” (Preface I of Lent).

“Christ redeemed us all and give perfect glory to God principally through paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life. Therefore, the Easter triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year. Thus, the solemnity of Easter has the same kind of preeminence in the liturgical year that Sunday has in the week.” (*General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, 18).

**INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As the Coronavirus Pandemic continues to ravage the world, it is our earnest hope that the celebration and observance of this most holy period in the Church’s calendar will proceed in an adapted fashion. Of primary concern and importance, as it has been throughout the pandemic, is safeguarding the welfare and health of the faithful gathered for worship. This is particularly significant as the selfless care and concern we demonstrate for one another strongly mirrors the events that won us new life through the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which we remember in the seasons of Lent and Easter.

Because of the unpredictable nature of the virus and its impact, and we cannot yet foresee the long-range impact of the course of the pandemic and its impact upon our celebrations, the Norms for 2021 will be offered in stages as we journey through these seasons. Your patience as the guidelines are published is great appreciated.

## NORMS FOR FASTING AND ABSTINENCE

Ash Wednesday, **February 17, 2021**, and Good Friday, **April 2, 2021**, are days of fasting and abstinence. Fridays of Lent are also days of abstinence.

Fasting is to be observed by all 18 years of age and older, who have not yet celebrated their 59th birthday. On a fast day one full meal is allowed. Two other meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one's needs, but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted, but liquids, including milk and juices, are allowed.

Abstinence is observed by all 14 years of age and older. On days of abstinence, no meat is allowed. Note that when health or ability to work would be seriously affected, Church law does not oblige. When in doubt concerning fast and abstinence, the parish priest should be consulted.

Fasting, almsgiving, and prayer are the three traditional disciplines of Lent. The faithful and Catechumens should undertake these practices seriously in a spirit of penance and of preparation for Initiation into the Church or the renewal of Baptismal Promises at Easter.

El miércoles de ceniza, **17 de febrero del 2021** y el viernes santo, **2 de abril del 2021**, son días de abstinencia y de ayuno. También deben abstenerse los viernes durante la Cuaresma.

Todas las personas a partir de los 18 años de edad y los que no hayan cumplido los 59 años de edad, deben ayunar. Se permite comer una vez durante el día de ayuno, aunque también pueden comer dos veces para mantener la energía, según la necesidad de cada individuo. Sin embargo, estas dos comidas no deben igualar a la cantidad de una comida completa. No se puede comer entre comidas, pero está permitido tomar líquido, incluyendo leche y jugos.

La abstinencia se debe cumplir desde los 14 años de edad en adelante. En los días de abstinencia, no se debe comer carne, aunque si la salud o la habilidad para cumplir su trabajo se ve seriamente afectado, la ley no lo obliga. Si tiene alguna duda sobre la práctica del ayuno o de la abstinencia, consulte al sacerdote de su parroquia.

El ayuno, la limosna y la oración, son las tres disciplinas tradicionales durante la Cuaresma. Los feligreses y los catecúmenos deben realizar estas prácticas con seriedad en espíritu de penitencia y en preparación para la Iniciación a la Iglesia o para la renovación de las promesas Bautismales durante la Semana Santa.

## OBSERVING LENT IN 2021

### The Character of the Lenten Season, the Sacred Paschal Triduum, and the Easter Season

This period of the Church's calendar is made up of 96 days – Ash Wednesday and the three days that follow it; the forty days of Lent concluding on the morning of Holy Thursday; the Sacred Paschal Triduum beginning Holy Thursday evening and concluding with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday evening; and the Great Fifty Days of Easter, which also begin on Easter Sunday and culminate on Pentecost. More than a quarter of the year is devoted to the commemoration and celebration of these events, which won for us so great a salvation.

#### Ash Wednesday: February 17, 2021

While Ash Wednesday is not a holyday of obligation and while there is no requirement for the clergy and faithful to receive the imposition of ashes, it is rightly observed as a celebration of high importance, and many will surely wish to participate even amid the current difficulties. During this time of pandemic, the Holy See has modified the method of distributing the ashes, as outlined in the following "Note:"

The Priest says the prayer for blessing the ashes. He sprinkles the ashes with holy water, without saying anything. Then he addresses all those present and only once says the formula as it appears in the Roman Missal, applying it to all in general: "***Repent, and believe in the Gospel.***", or "***Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.***" ("***Conviértete y cree en el Evangelio.***" O: "***Recuerda que eres polvo y al polvo has de volver.***")

The Priest (or other Minister) then cleanses his (or her) hands, puts on a face mask and distributes the ashes to those who come to him (or her) or, if appropriate, he (or she) goes to those who are standing in their places. The Priest (or other Minister) takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything. (**Prot. N. 17/21**)

These changes minimize the necessity of physical contact between minister and recipient and remove the need for the minister to speak while in close proximity to the recipient.

Bishop Luis does not advise the use of any instrument in the distribution of ashes.

The distribution of ashes via sprinkling is a common practice in some countries but is not well known here. Therefore, the Committee encourages ministers to provide some explanation to the faithful, to avoid unnecessary confusion.

The blessing and distribution of ashes may take place either at a celebration of Mass or at a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word (the **Book of Blessings** provides instructions for the distribution of ashes outside of Mass (nos. 1656-1678).

The blessing and distribution of ashes follows the homily. **The Penitential Act is omitted.** Ordinarily ashes are distributed by Priests and Deacons. However, in parishes where there is a large number of the faithful present, others may assist the ordained in the distribution of ashes. Acknowledging all safety and health protocols and where permitted, ashes may be taken to the home-bound and those in nursing homes by those who regularly minister to them.

## Celebrations during Lent

The Sundays of Lent take precedence over all Solemnities and Feasts. Solemnities occurring on these Sundays are observed on the preceding Saturday. The weekdays of Lent have precedence over obligatory Memorials.

While the obligation to attend Mass in person continues to be waived, participation in daily Mass via livestream or another social media platform during the Season of Lent should be encouraged in order to afford the faithful more opportunities to deepen their preparation for the Sacred Triduum and Easter Time.

Spiritual exercises which are traditionally associated with Lent ought to be encouraged also, whether in person or via livestreaming, again with respect and due attention given to safety and health protocols.

Stations of the Cross should be prayed particularly on each Friday of Lent, to foster the preparation of the faithful for the celebration of Easter. In addition, more frequent use of the Liturgy of the Hours, the official prayer of the Church, through the celebration of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, and the Office of Readings, are ways to unfold the rich scriptural tradition that recounts salvation history through the Lent and Easter cycles for the benefit of the faithful. Other Lenten family/parish activities can assist in fostering a full appreciation and understanding to these primary seasons of our Church year.

## The Sacraments of Initiation

Lent is oriented towards the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter; and, care must be taken to maintain this central focus. It is customary that the Baptism of infants not take place during Lent except in the case of emergency.

Likewise, the reception of First Holy Communion is to be rare and only by exception during Lent, but most appropriate during Easter Time.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* was designed primarily for adults who have not been baptized, nor formally catechized in the dogmas and doctrines of Christianity. The Rite, therefore, places particular focus on the journey of the unbaptized to the waters of Baptism, the chrism of Confirmation, and to reception of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

This journey is one of profound transformation in the whole person who undertakes it, and in order that this profound transformation be recognized as pivotal in the lives the catechumens, the First Sunday of Lent is centered on the transition of the Catechumens into the Elect. **The First Sunday of Lent falls this year on February 21, 2021.**

The situation of the on-going pandemic and the necessary protocols to maintain the health and safety of the faithful, however, has cautioned us against the usual communal celebration with all catechumens of the diocese at the Cathedral of the Holy Name of Jesus. **Therefore, Bishop Luis has delegated the celebration of the *Rite of Election* for the Catechumens of the Diocese and of the Church to the parishes and pastors of the diocese for 2021.** The ritual for the *Rite of Election* is found in the RCIA text at nos. 129-137.

The Diocesan Office of Evangelization and Discipleship will be preparing relevant resources and training sessions to assist parishes in carrying out the Rite of Election. Adaptations may be necessary when carrying out the Rite given pandemic restrictions and social distancing protocols.

The Rite of Sending for Election will not be celebrated this year.

Candidates for Full Communion in the Catholic Church will celebrate the *Call to Continuing Conversion* on the Second Sunday of Lent in the parishes where they are being catechized and prepared. In addition, the *Penitential Rite* for baptized candidates preparing for the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist may be celebrated on the Second Sunday of Lent, February 28, 2021 (RCIA, nos. 459-472).

The **Masses for the Celebration of the Scrutinies** are included in the Ritual Masses section of the Roman Missal. The ritual of the Scrutiny itself is found in the RCIA text at nos. 160-166 (First Scrutiny); nos. 167-173 (Second Scrutiny); and nos. 174-180 (Third Scrutiny). They are to be celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent whenever possible. If for pastoral reasons, the Scrutinies cannot be celebrated on these Sundays, other appropriate Lenten weekdays may be chosen. The Gospels of the Samaritan Women, the Man Born Blind, and the Resurrection of Lazarus are proclaimed at the respective celebrations of the Scrutinies.

The Scrutinies for children preparing for Initiation should be celebrated apart from those celebrated for adults. They are held in a celebration of the Word using the adult rite as a guide, with appropriate adaptations. Pastoral care should dictate the number of Scrutinies celebrated (RCIA, no. 294).

### The Sacrament of Penance

While not specifically derived from the gospels as a discipline of the season of Lent, the season itself “is the principal time of penance both for individual Christians and for the whole Church.” (RP Appx. II). The purpose of the celebration of the sacrament in this season is to avail the faithful of ample opportunity to “be reconciled with God and their neighbor and so be able to celebrate the paschal mystery in the Easter Triduum with renewed hearts” (RP, no. 13).

The Sacrament of Penance with individual confession, penance and reception of absolution, ought to be provided in all parishes of the Diocese. However, as was the situation during the Advent Season, increases in infection with the Coronavirus and the demands of social distancing and health and safety protocols do not favor the celebration of Communal Penance Services for Lent in 2021.

Therefore, parishes of the diocese are encouraged to make available additional days and/or times for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance with individual faithful to the best of their ability. The faithful should be clearly and positively encouraged to receive this sacrament during Lent. Pastors should devote themselves to the ministry of reconciliation and provide sufficient time for the faithful to avail themselves of this Sacrament in the parish.

One should avoid referring to the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance during the season of Lent as an “Easter duty.” According to canon 21 of Fourth Lateran Council (1215) from which council such language proceeds, celebration of the sacrament is to occur at least once a year, anytime during the year. The canon continues that it is Eucharist, which ought to be received once a year at Easter. The Code of Canon Law reiterates this teaching at Canon 920. The objective is always participation in and reception of the Eucharist.

### Funeral Liturgies during Lent and the Paschal Triduum

Good liturgical practice of the celebration of Christian funerals suggests reflecting the liturgical season in the choice of music and scripture. Lent may also be reflected through the option to use purple vestments (OCF, no. 39).

On Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, a Funeral Mass may not be celebrated. On these days the body of the deceased may be brought into the Church for a *Funeral Liturgy outside Mass* using the *Order of Christian Funerals*, Part I, Chapter 4. A Funeral Mass for the deceased should be offered as soon as is convenient after Easter Sunday (OCF, nos. 107-203).

### Marriage during the Season of Lent

Marriages are not prohibited during the season of Lent, but if a Marriage is to be celebrated during this time, “the pastor is to counsel the spouses to take into account the special nature of this period of the Church year. The celebration of Marriage on Friday of the Passion of the Lord (Good Friday) and on Holy Saturday is to be avoided altogether.” (OCM, no. 32).

### Communion for the Sick and Viaticum

Conscious of the protocols for dealing with the pandemic, the Distribution of Holy Communion outside of the Liturgy of the Sacred Triduum, except to the sick, is prohibited on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Holy Communion may be brought to the sick on all days except Holy Saturday. On Holy Saturday, Communion may be given only as Viaticum.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

During Lent, it is not permitted to decorate the altar with flowers. The Fourth Sunday of Lent (*Laetare Sunday*), Solemnities, and Feasts are exceptions to this rule. On the Fourth Sunday of Lent, rose-colored vestments may be used (CB, no. 252).

Unless it poses a significant health risk, Holy Water should remain available in the fonts at the doors of the Church as well as for the Sacrament of Baptism when appropriate, throughout the Season of Lent. The practice of replacing Holy Water in the fonts with sand is prohibited.

In the Dioceses of the United States, the practice of covering images throughout the church on the Fifth Sunday of Lent may be observed. Crosses remain covered until Good Friday, unveiled either for the purpose of veneration during the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord or, in the case of all other crosses, at the close of that liturgy. Other images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.

Crosses and crucifixes in the church are to be removed, if possible, after the stripping of the altar on Holy Thursday. If they cannot be removed, they are to be veiled (*RM, Thursday of the Lord's Supper*, no. 41).

Musical instruments may ordinarily be played only to give necessary support to singing. “Those preparing liturgical celebrations should attend to the purpose rather than the strict letter of this law as certain instrumental pieces, for example, may in the local situation indeed foster the spirit of the Lenten season” (Ordo 2021, p. 65).

From Ash Wednesday until the Easter Vigil, the *Alleluia* is to be omitted in all celebrations, even on Solemnities and Feasts.

Encouragement is to be given to pray for the Elect of the Church and for the continued conversion of all its faithful with an appropriate intention included each week in the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful).

Approved for publication on January 15, 2021

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#### **References**

[Congregazione per il Culto Divino e la Disciplina dei Sacramenti. Note on Ash Wednesday: Distribution of Ashes in Time of Pandemic](#)

#### **Abbreviations**

CB – Ceremonial of Bishops; CN – Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion; CL – Circular Letter concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts (Congregation for Divine Worship, 1988); GIRM – General Instruction of the Roman Missal; OCM – Order of Celebrating Matrimony; OCF – Order of Christian Funerals; RCIA – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; RM: Roman Missal; RP – Rite of Penance; STTL – Sing to the Lord.