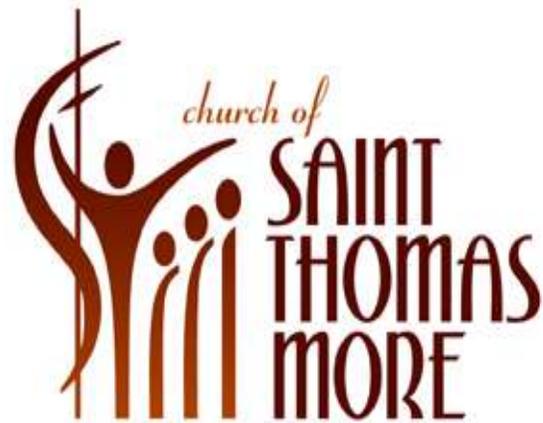


## Lent – Giving Up

When I was young, Lent was all about what I was going to “give up”. Most of the time, it was candy, which was tough, but I knew the reward would be there in a huge Easter basket filled with chocolate eggs and jelly beans! For many people, this is still what Lent is all about.

But when the Second Vatican Council issued the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in 1963, the bishops called for a renewal of the season of Lent:



*The season of Lent has a two-fold character: primarily by recalling or preparing for Baptism and by penance, it disposes the faithful, who more diligently hear the word of God and devote themselves to prayer, to celebrate the paschal mystery. This two-fold character is to be brought into greater prominence. (CSL # 109).*

The Council's reference to the baptismal character of Lent may still seem strange to most of us, 40 years later. We had not been trained to link Baptism and Lent in our minds or in our devotional practices. Yet Lent is fundamentally baptismal in its origins and its meaning.

Lent as a 40-day season developed in the fourth century by merging three church practices. The first was the ancient Paschal Fast, which began as a two-day observance before Easter but was gradually lengthened to 40 days. The second was the process of preparation for Baptism known as the Catechumenate, an intense period of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation to be celebrated at Easter. The third was the Order of Penitents, which sought a second conversion for those who had fallen back into serious sin after Baptism. As the Catechumens (those preparing for Baptism) entered their final period of preparation for Baptism, the Penitents and the rest of the community accompanied them on their journey and prepared to renew their baptismal vows at Easter.

Liturgically, Lent is radically baptismal. On Ash Wednesday, we all made our way toward the baptismal font to receive a mark on our foreheads. The core of the great Easter Vigil comes when we welcome our new members by plunging them into the waters of that same font. We join them by renewing our own baptismal promises. Let us journey with them in this baptismal season of Lent.

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