INTRODUCTION TO GREAT LENT

What is "Great Lent", the "Great Holy Forty Days", or the "Great Fast"? They all mean the same thing: Preparing for Easter.

During Lent, Catholics think about the suffering and death of Jesus. That is why Lent is a sad time. But because we also get ready for Easter, it is a bright time. The word **bright sadness** is the mood that Catholics have during Lent. Bright sadness means we have sorrow and hope at the same time.

The time for Lent is 40 days. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the Thursday before Easter. But before we prepare for Easter, we also prepare for Lent!

Soon after Christmas, on January 6th, Catholics get ready for Lent. January 6th is the Feast of Epiphany. Epiphany is the end of Christmas time. So, there are about four weeks to get ready for Lent. That is why we announce the dates for Lent and Easter after Mass on January 6th.

During Lent, the church is dressed in purple cloth and ministers were purple. Sometimes the cross and statues of Jesus are covered in purple cloth. Also, during Lent, we do not sing "Glory to God..." at Mass. There are few weddings during Lent. Why? Because we need to think about Jesus' pain. Jesus' pain should make us sad. That is why Lent is full of sadness.

But we look forward to a bright day: Easter Sunday! So we have a feeling of "bright sadness."

THREE IMPORTANT THINGS

We begin Lent on **Ash Wednesday**. On Ash Wednesday we listen to a special Gospel reading at Mass. The priest reads from St. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18. In this story, Jesus talks about three things: 1) **almsgiving**, (2) **prayer**, and (3) **fasting**. These three things Catholics do during Lent. The Mass on Ash Wednesday tells us we must do these three things.

1. We must **give alms**. Jesus tells us that we need to share our money and food with poor people. But Jesus says we must be quiet when we give alms. Do not brag or tell people about what we give to the poor,

2. We must **pray**. Jesus tells us we must be secret about our prayer. We must not draw attention and pretend to be holy.

3. We must **fast**. During Lent, we must limit our food to help us pray better. We also limit our food to make us thinking more about poor people.

So, at the beginning of Lent, Jesus reminds us of three things to do: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

At Mass on Ash Wednesday, the priest and the ministers put ashes on our foreheads. Why? Ashes on our forehead is to embarrass us because we are sinners. We tell other people that we are sinful and need God's mercy. Therefore Lent is especially about **repentance**. Repentance means we change our hearts to become better people.

FASTING DURING LENT

The Catholic Church has special rules for Lent to help us. The Church tells us to limit our food on Ash Wednesday and on all Fridays of Lent. This means Catholics don't eat meat and eat very little other things. To limit our food is called **fasting**. That is why Lent is sometimes called "the Great Fast."
But the Church encourages us to choose how we limit our food. If your favorite food is pizza, then maybe give up pizza. If your favorite drink is coffee, then maybe give up coffee. We fast to think about some people who cannot afford food or drink. We also limit our food to show God we are sorry for our sins.

THE PRAYER OF ST. EPHREM

There is a famous prayer that Catholics say during Lent. It was written almost 1,500 years ago! During Lent, we try to pray this prayer every morning:

O Lord and Master of Life!
Grant that I may not be infected
with the spirit of slothfulness
and faintheartedness,
with the spirit of ambition
and vain talking.
Grant instead to me your servant
the spirit of purity and humility,
the spirit of patience and love.
Yes, O Lord and King!
Grant me the grace of
being aware of my own sins
and of not judging my brother;
For You are blessed for ever.
Amen!

This prayer tells us everything about Lent. It asks God to take away slothfulness (being lazy), and faintheartedness (being wimpy.). It also asks God take away ambition (being too busy) and vain talking (useless chat). Instead, we ask God to make us pure, humble, patient, and loving. Finally, we ask God to show us our sins and to stop us from judging other people. What a wonderful prayer! Let us pray this every morning and think about the words. Then our Lent will be full of bright sadness!

There are about five weeks of Lent. But during the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sunday of Lent, we reach a high point.
The Third Sunday of Lent is called Sunday of the Samaritan Woman. The Gospel of Mass on this day is about Jesus talking to the woman from Samaria. It is special because Jesus tells the Samaritan Woman about the Living Water. Jesus explains that believing in Jesus is like drinking water that makes us live in heaven with God.
The Fourth Sunday of Lent is called the Sunday of Bartimaeus. The Gospel of Mass on this day tells us about Jesus healing a blind man named Bartimaeus. Jesus explains that believing in Jesus is like losing blindness to see God.
The Fifth Sunday of Lent is called the Sunday of Lazarus. The Gospel of Mass on this day tells us about Jesus raising his dead friend Lazarus back to life. Jesus says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Jesus explains that believing in Jesus means we have a new life in God.
THE SCRUTINIES

On the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent, we have a special prayer called the Scrutinies. During the homily, the priest talks about the Samaritan Woman, Bartimaeus, or Lazarus. The priest explains these stories about us changing our lives. After the homily, the priest prayers the Scrutinies. The prayer asks God to "scrutinize' or check us for sin and asks God to make us better people.

THE SACRED LITURGY DURING GREAT LENT

Great Lent lasts 40 days, from Ash Wednesday until the day before Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday, Lent is over, and 'Holy Week of the Lord's Passion' begins. During Great Lent, the ministers wear purple vestments. The color purple is a sign of sorrow and repentance. During the whole season of Lent, the Church focuses on repentance and sorrow for sin.

Also, during Great Lent, many things change during Mass. For example.

1. There is no "Glory to God in the highest";
2. There is no "Alleluia" before the Gospels;
3. The services are much shorter.

The decoration of the church is much simpler. There are no flowers. The church is dark. These changes help us to develop an attitude of Bright Sadness. In the sacred liturgy, we come together to worship God. But during Great Lent, we focus on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem to die so that we may live. Let us focus attention on Lent. Let us develop an attitude of "Bright Sadness."

Lent prepares us for the "Great Fifty Days" of the Easter and Pentecost Season. May God prepare us well for celebrating the Resurrection of his only Son.

Lord,
Protect us in our struggle against evil.
As we begin the discipline of Lent,
Make this season holy
by our self-denial.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Your Son,
Who lives and reigns with You
and the Holy Spirit, One God,
for ever and ever. Amen.
INTRODUCTION TO HOLY WEEK

Great Lent is almost over. Palm Sunday is the last day of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week. At the end of Holy Week, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, we remember the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Burial of Jesus.

What is Holy Week? Holy Week remembers the last week of Jesus' life. On Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion we have the Feast of the Entry into Jerusalem. On Palm Sunday, the Gospel is read twice during Mass: At the beginning, before we gather into the church; Second, after the First and Second Reading, as usual.

At the end of the Palm Sunday is The Great Three Days. This is the most important time during the Church year. Palm Sunday is a 'preview' of the Great Three Days. Sometimes the word Triduum is used; this means the same as 'the Great Three Days.'

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

On Palm Sunday, we celebrate the important feast, the Entry into Jerusalem. At the beginning of Mass, everybody gathers outside the Church. The Presider (the priest who leads Mass) reads from the Gospel story about Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem. The people are excited to welcome their King. They wave palm leaves and lay cloth on the path where Jesus will walk on. (St. Matthew 21: 1-11; St. Mark 11:1-10; St. Luke 19: 28 - 40). After the Gospel is read, the people march into the church with palm leaves.

After the First and Second Reading, another Gospel is read. It is a long reading. The Gospel that is read is called the Passion Gospel. (St. Matthew 26: 14 - 27; St. Mark 14:1-15:7; St. Luke 22: 14 - 23: 56). When we read the Gospel, we kneel at the story when Jesus died. This is to show our respect to the Lord Jesus. The whole Gospel tells the story from the Last Supper of Jesus until the Burial of Jesus. That is why the Gospel story is so long.

There is another reason we read the long Gospel story. The 2nd Gospel on Palm Sunday is a preview of what will happen during the Great Three Days (= the Triduum). We read about the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Burial of our Lord Jesus Christ. Later in the Holy Week, we will read reach part of the story by itself.

Remember: 'Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion' is the 'Feast of the Entry into Jerusalem.'

MASS OF THE CHRISM

Usually, during Holy Week, there is a special Mass at the bishop's Church. The bishop's Church is called the Cathedral. This special Mass is called the Mass of Chrism. It is usually celebrated on Tuesday of Holy Week.

The Catholic Church uses blessed (= consecrated) oil for special events. When people are sick or dying, the priest anoints their forehead with oil. This is called Oil of the Sick. It is in a container with letters "O.I" on it. We also anoint the foreheads of people who are preparing for baptism. This is Oil of Catechumens. It is in a separate container with the letters "O.C" on it. Finally we have the most important oil. This special oil is used for three things: anointing at baptism, anointing at confirmation, and anointing at ordination. This special oil is called Sacred Chrism and has letters "S.C" on it. Sacred Chrism is different from the other two oils because it has a sweet smell.
Every year, every parish gets new oils that are consecrated by the bishop. Because the Sacred Chrism is the most important oil, it is called the 'Mass of Chrism.'
The Mass of Chrism is special for another reason. All priests and deacons are required to go to the Mass of the Chrism. Why? Because they renew their promise to serve and teach the People of God. It is a special day for all priests and deacons to gather and support each other. On this day, we should remember to pray especially for all priests and deacons.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT THREE DAYS

After Palm Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of the Holy Week, we begin the most holy time of the year. This is called the Great Three Days. In Latin, this is called the Triduum.
The Liturgy of the Great Three Days is very different. Why? Because on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, we have one Mass that continues through three days! There are Three Days, but not three Masses! There is only one Mass the begins in the evening of Thursday and ends very late on Saturday night.

How do we have one Mass? Remember: Mass begins with the sign of the cross, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Also remember: Mass ends with “The Mass is ended. Go in peace!”

This means that on Thursday evening of Holy Week, the presider begins the Mass: "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Then there is no closing. Then after Mass from Thursday night. There is no sign of the cross. Then after communion, we take another break until Saturday night. Finally, on Saturday night of the Holy Week, the Mass ends. So:

Thursday:
Mass begins: "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Friday:
Mass continues: "Lord, by shedding his blood for us, Your Son, Jesus Christ, established the Paschal Mystery...."

Saturday:
Mass continues more: "...Dear friends in Christ...."

Finally, the Mass ends on Saturday: “Mass is ended. Go in peace, alleluia, alleluia."

THE HOUR OF JESUS

Many times in the Gospels Jesus talks about "my Hour...." In the Gospel of St. John, the 'Hour of Jesus' is an important idea. What does The Hour of Jesus mean? Remember that Jesus was Jewish. The Jewish people had a different way of talking. For example, when we say "Day", we mean from midnight to midnight. But the Jews say "Day" to mean from sunset to sunset. When Jews talked about "Hour," they mean "Time." So Jesus, because he was Jewish, was talking about a special time when he said "Hour."

But what is the 'Hour of Jesus'?
In the four Gospels (St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John), the Lord sometimes spoke about "My Hour" or "The Hour has not yet come..." It was for the "Hour" that the Son of God came into the world: To save people from sin and death. The 'Hour of Jesus' means the whole time of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.

After Jesus ate Last Supper with his friends, they went to a garden to pray and spend time together. (Remember the First Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary?) It was in Gethsemane where Jesus said: "Behold, the hour was drawn near..." (St. Matthew 24:45b). This was on the night of Holy Thursday of Holy Week (= Maundy Thursday). What happened? Jesus said next, "...the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners..." The sorrowful events leading to Jesus' death begins. Judas Iscariot hands over Jesus to be killed. But the 'Hour of Jesus' is not exactly one hour long or sixty minutes. The Hour of Jesus is the whole time from when he prayed at Gethsemane until Jesus Christ rose from the dead. This means Thursday (night), Friday when Jesus was killed, Saturday when Jesus was in the grave, and finally on Sunday when Jesus rose from death.

That is why we celebrate the 'Great Three Days.' We remember the Hour of Jesus, and follow him. When his 'Hour' began, Jesus asked his friends, "could you not stay with me...?" Again, every year, Jesus asks us the same question. He asks us to stay with him.

**GREAT THREE DAYS: HOLY THURSDAY**

The first day of the Great Three Days is Thursday of the Holy Week. This day is also called Maundy Thursday.

This day is special because we remember that Jesus left a Gift to his friends. This Gift called the **Eucharist**, or the Mass. Here, Jesus changes bread and wine into his Body and Blood. Jesus gave us the Eucharist to remember his suffering and death. He told his friends, "Do this in remembrance of me." The broken Bread and poured wine are signs of Jesus' death; Jesus is really present in the Bread and Wine. Jesus gives himself for us to eat.

The Great Three Days begins on Holy Thursday. We go to Church to celebrate a special service. The service is called **The Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper**. We remember the Last Supper. At the end of the service, the sacrament of the Lord's Body is carried out of the church and put in a special room. This is like Jesus leaving the table at the Last Supper to go to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. Jesus invites us to go with him and pray, too.

**GREAT THREE DAYS: GOOD FRIDAY**

The 'second act' is the **Celebration of the Lord's Passion**. On this day, we remember that Jesus suffered and was killed on the Cross. That is why we put a big cross in the church. We are invited to go to the Cross to touch it or kiss it. This is because the Cross was how Jesus saved the world from sin and death.

The Celebration of the Lord's Passion has three parts: (i) we read the Bible about Jesus' death, (ii) we **venerate** the Cross, which means we show special respect; (iii) and we receive Holy Communion from the Bread that was consecrated last night (on Holy Thursday).

Good Friday continues from Holy Thursday. There is no sign of the cross; at the end, there is no Dismissal. But when we leave the church, we should be quiet and think about terrible suffering and death of the Son of God. We keep silence to remember that Jesus was buried.

**GREAT THREE DAYS: HOLY SATURDAY**
On Holy Saturday, during the day, we remember that Jesus is dead in the grave. Jesus waits for the Father to call him back to life.

It was very, very late on Holy Saturday or very very early the next morning that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. This is why the Church has a Vigil. A vigil is a long prayer service that lasts through the night. On the night of Holy Saturday, the Catholic Church around the world has a vigil. This is the Easter Vigil. It is a very long service with nine readings from the Bible, with nine Psalms. There is also a very long celebration of Baptism and Confirmation, when people join the Catholic Church for the first time.

There are many symbols at Easter Vigil. Fire is used to remember that Jesus is the light of the World. Water is used to purify us through Baptism. Oil is used to make us strong in the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

The Great Three Days is the most important Liturgy of the year. It is more important than Christmas! The Great Three Days (= Triduum) remembers the Hour of Jesus, when he suffered, died, was buried, and then rose again. Let us prepare ourselves to celebrate the Hour of Jesus.