



### **Vox Populi**

15 February 2024

The season of Lent has begun and continues until Holy Thursday. If Sundays are excluded from the count, the season lasts forty days.

The forty-day length of Lent is rooted in the biblical usage of the number forty. Forty is typically indicative of a time of testing, trial, penance, purification, and renewal. In the New Testament, forty days is the length of Jesus' time of trial in the desert in preparation for his public ministry, proclaiming the Gospel.

While we recognise Lent is a time of preparation and participation in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, there are also three key practices or markers for Lent - prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Our Lenten prayer is essentially an act of prayer spread over 40 days. As we pray, we go on a journey, one that hopefully brings us closer to Christ and leaves us changed by the encounter with Him.

It's a time to fast. With the fasts of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, meatless Fridays, and our personal disciplines interspersed, Lent is the only time many Catholics these days actually fast. How often do we hear, "What are you giving up for Lent? Chocolate? Coffee? Beer?" Fasting shouldn't be taken light heartedly. Fasting is actually a form of penance, which helps us turn away from sin and toward Christ.

Lent is also a time for almsgiving when we can really reach out in charity, be more compassionate for those who are hungry, suffering, or otherwise in need; helping without question as a way of sharing the experience of God's unconditional love.

It is sometimes tempting to be overly ambitious during Lent and see it is a time for personal reinvention or even renovation – which often doesn't go the 40 days! Best to keep it simple and focused. We spend our entire lives growing closer to God. Instead of cramming everything we think we should be doing into one Lent, we can put down a really good foundation, and with the power of prayer build upon every day of the year as we participate in the Mission of Christ.