

Catholic

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Lenten Customs *Baptism Is the Key*



By Rev. Lawrence E. Mick

The key to understanding the meaning of Lent is simple: baptism. Preparation for baptism and for renewing baptismal commitment lies at the heart of the season. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has reemphasized the baptismal character of Lent, especially through the restoration of the catechumenate and its Lenten rituals. Our challenge today is to renew our understanding of this important season of the Church year and to see how we can integrate our personal practices into this renewed perspective.

Why is baptism so important in our Lenten understanding? Lent as a forty-day season developed in the fourth century from three merging sources: (1) the ancient paschal fast, which began as a two-day observance before Easter but was gradually lengthened to forty days, (2) the catechumenate as a process of preparation for baptism, including an intense period of preparation for the sacraments of initiation to be celebrated at Easter, and (3) the order of penitents, which was modeled on the catechumenate and sought a second conversion for those who had fallen back into serious sin after baptism. As the