

Bonus Worksheet

Subject/Course: Religious Education - **Secondary**

Topic: Prayer in the Liturgical Season of Lent & Easter

Liturgical Days: Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday

The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and lasts 40 days. It comes to an end before the evening Mass on Holy Thursday.

Holy Week also includes Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday when we celebrate Christ's resurrection. Lent is a time of prayer, fasting, abstinence and giving to the poor in preparation for Easter where we renew a sense of who we are – a renewal of baptism as Christians and what we stand for.

1. Liturgical Meanings

What is the liturgical significance of each of these days? Explain what the church commemorates and celebrates for each of these days in a few brief sentences.

Eg Ash Wednesday – Beginning of Lent (40 days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness)

Holy Thursday – commemorates the Last Supper

2. Rituals and Symbols

a. What are the rituals associated with these liturgical days? In groups, research the historical, cultural and religious background of the symbols, rituals, prayers, traditions associated with the Lenten season.

b. Choose ONE day. Each member of the group is to research one aspect of the chosen day in detail.

c. Use images, audio, text, and imaginative play to present your work. Finish with a prayer as a reflective meditation at the end of your presentation.

For example:

Ash Wednesday

Symbol: Ashes

Meaning of symbol: Ashes are an ancient symbol of repentance (sackcloth and ashes).
Rituals & tradition: ashes on forehead; fasting; not eating meat; giving up on what is considered to be a treat or luxury, giving to the poor, a time of reflection and renewal; the liturgical colour is purple or violet which symbolise suffering and humility. Purple is also the colour of royalty that celebrates hope of the resurrection to come. Ash Wednesday comes one day after Fat Tuesday (Mardi Gras in French or Shrove Tuesday) which was the last day before fasting and people would eat all the leftovers.

Historical & religious background: ashes come from having to come to terms with our eventual death – 'remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return' (Genesis 3:19). Being marked with ashes means we need to make changes, clean up our spiritual act and remember Christ's own suffering. In the early church, ashes had been used as a sign of admission to the Order of Penitents

Links to ancient pre-Christian/indigenous cultures: the story of the mythical bird, *the phoenix*, rising out (being reborn) of its own ashes (known as Benu (or Bennu) to the ancient Egyptians, as the Feng-Huang to the Chinese, Zhar-Ptitsa to the Russians.

Explore how the early church fathers were able to explain Christ's resurrection by using the phoenix as a symbol.

Prayer and reflection: Read 'Lord of Lent', pg 48; 'Giving up', pg 52 in *The Australian Catholic Youth Prayer Journal*

3. Charity

As a class, raise funds for a worthy cause or charity during Lent. Use your existing funds such as lunch money or allowance to give generously.

4. Fasting: Interfaith

All major religions and faiths practice some form of fasting followed by a celebration or festival. The intention is very similar with an emphasis on self reflection, abstinence, charity and good deeds.

Similar to the Christian Lent, the Jewish have Yom Kippur and the Muslim faith practice Ramadan.

a. Compare and contrast religious fasting and celebrations. In groups, highlight these differences and similarities. Draw a table with information such as when, why, how these faiths practice fasting. See this link for further information.

<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2001/02/Fasting-Chart.aspx>

b. Prayers are an important element of the fasting rituals.

Discover how prayer is used during this time.

For Catholic prayers, refer to *The Catholic Youth Prayer Book*

c. Class discussion on why fasting for religious purposes is so universal. Compare to protest fasting – hunger strikes for a personal belief or injustice.

4. Lent and 40 Days Prayer Journal

The number 40 as significant in the Bible because it prepares for something of major importance to happen: Some eventful episodes were:

The great flood (Noah) lasted 40 days and nights

Moses led his people through the wilderness for 40 years.

Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights

Lent recalls Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness. (Matthew 4:2)

There were 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3)

To do:

a. In 40 days of Lent, create your own prayer journal for each day. Write when you are in a reflective and meditative state – perhaps before you go to bed or if you are somewhere alone and undisturbed.

You may use a blank journal or create an electronic one. Think about what Lent means to you. What will you 'give up' so that you can become the person you truly want to be? What 40 day detox will you do that will allow you to make changes that reflect a more spiritually connected you?

For example, it can be giving up old habits, belief systems, hurtful behaviour, lack of attention to your health, safety or work ethics, anything that does not serve you. Then, in what ways will you put this new 'you' into action for the good of others?

b. On one side of the page, write the heading: *My Intention*

- Write down one intention to change something that no longer works for you or you want to change about yourself.
- Copy a prayer or write your own – it can be a quote, a psalm, a song lyric, an image that best reflects your intention.

c. On the other side of the page, write the heading: *My Call to Action*

- List one action that you will commit to that demonstrates your new self. For example, if you've been hurtful to someone, either apologise or do something to restore that person's dignity.
- Write a prayer that reflects your call to action. Add a visual image.

How to write prayers:

A prayer can be any expression of what you want to say to God (Pg 135 'Prayer Journaling', ACYPJ (Australian Catholic Youth Prayer Journal))

1. Free writing (whatever comes to mind)
2. Composing a letter (unsent)
3. Writing dialogue (write questions and answers)
4. Thoughts relating to things that happen on the day

Use prayer samples from Garratt Publishing books–

- *Bring Forth Hope*, C Ryan.
- *The Catholic Youth Prayer Book*,
- *Words for the Journey for Teens*

5. Stations of the Cross. Meditations for Teens.

Station 1: Jesus Is Condemned To Death

Station 2: Jesus Is Made To Carry His Cross

Station 3: Jesus Falls The First Time

Station 4: Jesus Meets His Sorrowful Mother

Station 5: Simon Of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

Station 6: Veronica Wipes The Face Of Jesus

Station 7: Jesus Falls The Second Time

Station 8: The Women Of Jerusalem Weep Over Jesus

Station 9: Jesus Falls The Third Time

Station 10: Jesus Is Stripped Of His Garments

Station 11: Jesus Is Nailed To The Cross

Station 12: Jesus Is Raised Upon The Cross And Dies

Station 13: Jesus Is Taken Down From The Cross And Placed In The Arms Of His Mother

Station 14: Jesus Is Laid In The Tomb

Background: How the Story of the Crucifixion in Pictures was born

During Lent, especially on Good Friday, we commemorate Jesus' death with the Stations of the Cross, also known as the 'Way of the Cross'.

It recounts 14 key events (stations) on the day of Christ's crucifixion, mostly of his final walk through the streets of Jerusalem, carrying the cross.

Early Christian pilgrims came to the Jerusalem to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, along the way of the cross. These became holy sites on their pilgrimage walk in the Holy Land.

In medieval times, replicas of the way of the cross were set up all over Europe with small shrines in the form of paintings or sculptures along a procession route or outdoors, stopping to pray at each 'station'. Today you can find Stations of the Cross in most Catholic churches.

a. Discuss why this method of praying at each 'station' was used in order to remember the story of Jesus' death. Consider the use of storytelling at a time when illiteracy was the norm. Why is this method still effective today despite our high literacy standards?

How to Pray and Meditate the Stations of the Cross

Reflection: A prayer is a voice of hope. Reflect on this: How do we cope with our own suffering (problems, issues, hurt, disappointments, break ups), if we don't have the ultimate role model in Jesus, who showed us how to get through the most painful suffering of all that led to his death?

Step 1: Walk the Station

Begin with the first station of the cross image: Jesus is condemned to death. Study the image. What is the action? What is the background?

For example: I look at Jesus. His hands are tied. The crown of thorns digs into his forehead. Blood drips down his face. Wrongfully accused, Pilate has washed his hands of him. **When describing each station of the cross, use the five senses to describe the scene – how heavy is the wood? What's its texture? The hot rocky ground Jesus walks on? The steep climb to the hill – what's happening around Jesus?**

Step 2: Feel the Station

Your text response. **How do you feel when you look at the image? What words come to you? How does this image move you? What would you say to Jesus if you were in the crowd? Imagine what Jesus felt and thought.**

For example: I am moved by outrage at the injustice. I feel Christ's anguish at what awaits him on the cross. I feel gratitude that he's accepted his destiny for the sake of all of us.

Step 3: Embrace the Station

Visual or audio response. **Sketch and/or find a music piece that illustrates how you felt when contemplating this station of the cross. Create 14 images.**

Refer to these resources from Garratt Publishing for more specific information on how to use the Stations of the Cross as prayer.

The Catholic Youth Prayer Book, 'The Seven Last Words upon the Cross', Chapter 8.

Virtual Meditations: Stations of the Cross (14 cards)

Stations for Teens: Meditations of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, G. Egbert

Words for the Journey, 'Stations of the Cross', pg 67

Other resource: <http://resource.fraynetwork.com.au/object.cfm?o=196&pid=1390>

6. Easter Symbols and the Exsultet

After the darkness of Lent comes light – the Easter Candle (Paschal) represents the light and fire of the resurrected Christ.

There are many symbols to remind us of the importance of Easter.

a. Research these symbols that go back to the early Christian church and their meanings and use.

- Easter Candle – find examples of the many special designs and what they symbolise

- Water – explore the idea of baptism, being reborn, dipped in water, water as life giving
- Oil – in what ways were oils important for the early Christians
- White clothing – how is it relevant to baptism and the colour of white
- Bread – what is its metaphoric significance
- Wine – how does this symbol belong naturally with bread?

The *Exsultet* (Ester Proclamation) is a beautiful prayer that is sung on Easter Vigil. It's an ancient hymn sung over the Easter candle that is lit at the start of Easter Vigil on the Holy Saturday evening and celebrates the resurrection of Christ. It contains vivid imagery and metaphors, and history.

b. Read this excerpt from the prayer below and explain the symbols of *light, pillar of fire, flame, morning star, bee and wax* and any others. In what ways is this prayer poetic?

c. Write your own poetic prayer using fire and light as metaphors or images to welcome Easter Sunday.

'...Accept this Easter candle,
a flame divided but undimmed,
a pillar of fire that glows to the honour of God.

(For it is fed by the melting wax,
which the mother bee brought forth
to make this precious candle.)

Let it mingle with the lights of heaven
and continue bravely burning
to dispel the darkness of this night!

May the Morning Star which never sets
find this flame still burning:
Christ, that Morning Star,
who came back from the dead,
and shed his peaceful light on all mankind....'

Resources:

- *The Catholic Youth Prayer Book*, 'The Seven Last Words upon the Cross', Chapter 8.
- *Virtual Meditations: Stations of the Cross* (14 cards)
- *Stations for Teens: Meditations of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, G. Egbert
- *Words for the Journey*, 'Stations of the Cross', pg 67
- *The Australian Catholic Youth Prayer Journal*
- *Bring Forth Hope*, C Ryan.
- *Guided Meditations for Young Catholics with CD*