

Today we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Lent. Today marks the half-way point in Lent; and that we should persevere in our penitential practices since we've made it to the mid-point ... or if we've been putting off doing something for Lent, that maybe we should think about starting.

The liturgical color for the two penitential seasons of Lent is Purple. On the Sunday that marks the mid-way point, the liturgical color of "Rose" is used. Looks a lot like pink ... but then again, real men can get away with wearing pink.

Lent begins, we all know, on Ash Wednesday. And if you break out a calendar, Ash Wednesday is 46 days before the Paschal Triduum. And if you're asking yourself, how come we don't sing "These Forty Six Day of Lent O Lord," it's because the Sundays don't count as part of Lent - rather Sundays are "little Easters" and foreshadow Easter Sunday.

The last week of Lent is called Holy Week - the first day of Holy Week is Palm Sunday; and the last three days of Holy Week are called: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday.

The Latin word for Lent is "Quadragesima," which means "40." The English word is, of course, Lent - which comes from the word "lengthen" which is an old German word for Springtime - that is, the days are lengthening.

We all know that the "40 days" parallels the 40 day fast done by Jesus - as we heard on the first Sunday of Lent. If you've listened closely to some of the hymns, you'll also remember that Moses and Elijah fasted for 40 days.

A little-known parallel to the 40 day periods we observe is that it parallels a more visceral period of 40 weeks. We all know that it takes 9 months to make a baby ... but do we know the math - that 9 months is 40 weeks.

Put into that context, our practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving can be seen as a time of spiritual rebirth. A mother may give up smoking during her pregnancy for the greater good of her child; the parents may be setting aside money already for the future of that child; and of course, they are praying that all goes well with the pregnancy.

The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. And we don't just do this for some arbitrary purpose - but rather to help in our own recreation - our own rebirth in Christ ... as well as our own rebirth as the mystical Body of Christ as a community.

As we proceed through the remaining days of our own annual spiritual re-birth - may we continue with our own practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving ... and may we intensify these practices wherever we may have slacked.

And let us remember to pray for each other, and encourage each other as we commence the downhill side of Lent 2012.