



Irish Spiritans



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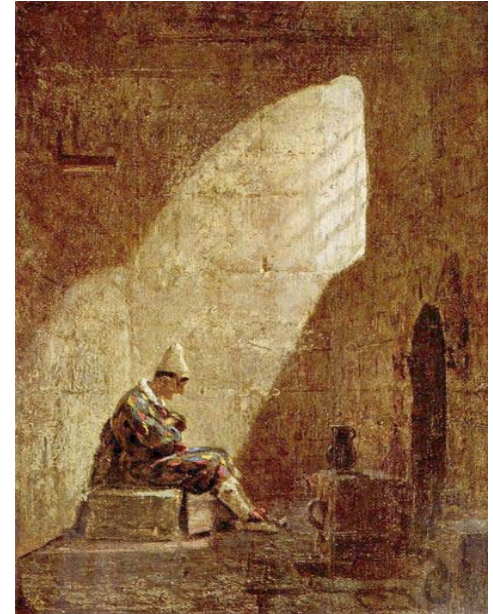
Background to the season of Lent

Lent probably originated with the pre-Easter baptismal rituals of catechumens, although the number of days set aside for fasting varied according to region. Irenaeus (AD 180) testifies to the variety of durations of pre-Easter fasts in the second century. Tertullian (AD 200) suggests that Catholics fasted two days prior to Easter, but that the Montanists (a heretical sect that Tertullian later joined) fasted longer.

However, the number forty, hallowed by the fasts of Moses, Elijah, and especially Jesus, probably influenced the later fixed time of 40 days. The Canons of Nicaea (AD 325) were the first to mention 40 days of fasting. Initially the forty day

Lenten fast began on a Monday, and was intended only for those who were preparing to enter the Church at Easter. Lent still begins on a Monday in many Eastern Churches.

Eventually the West began Lent on Ash Wednesday. In the Western Christian calendar, Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent and occurs forty-six days (forty days not counting Sundays) before Easter. It is a moveable feast, falling on a different date each year because it is dependent on the date of Easter. It can occur as early as 4 February or as late as 10 March.





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Ash Wednesday gets its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful as a sign of repentance. The ashes used are gathered after the Palm Crosses from the previous year's Palm Sunday are burned. In the liturgical practice of some churches, the ashes are mixed with the Oil of the Catechumens (one of the sacred oils used to anoint those about to be baptized), though some churches use ordinary oil. This paste is used by the minister who presides at the service to make the sign of the cross, first upon his or her own forehead and then on those of congregants. The minister recites the words: "Remember (O man) that you are dust, and to dust you shall return", or "Repent, and believe the Gospel."

The East has no equivalent to Ash Wednesday.

The purpose of Lent is to be a season of fasting, self-denial, Christian growth, penitence, conversion, and simplicity. Lent, which comes from the Teutonic (Germanic) word for springtime, can be viewed as a spiritual spring cleaning: a time for taking spiritual inventory and then cleaning out those things which hinder our corporate and personal relationships with Jesus Christ and our service to him.

