

# LISTENING FOR GOD

## *Lent: the Season of Quiet Reflection*



Many Christian denominations observe the **Season of Lent** and use it as a time of reflection on the meaning and purpose of Jesus' life and death. These are weighty matters, to be sure. They give the season a somber tone, but also draw us up into a sacred realm where we can contemplate the very mysteries of life. We are led to wonder about the purpose of our own lives, and the way we may be squandering our days on misguided priorities and actions. And our pondering can, if we are fortunate, lead us to new insight and resolve about healthy and holy ways to reorder our thinking and doing.

**Lent:** (which, in Middle and Old English refers to *spring* and the *lengthening of days*) is one of the oldest observations on the Christian calendar and has always been a season for self-examination (deep personal reflection) and penitence (sorrow for sin). The observation was first mentioned by Irenaeus of Lyons in the late 100s and by the Council of Nicea in 325. It was a time of fasting – which meant eating very little in a day, or perhaps only one evening meal per day that did not include meat or fish.

**Ash Wednesday:** We refer to Lent as lasting for 40 days, beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending with Holy Saturday. This year that is February 22 to April 7 – which is 46 days. But the Sundays of Lent don't count since Sundays are always celebrations of the resurrection of Christ. Thus Lent is indeed 40 days plus 6 Sundays. It was Pope Gregory the Great (540 – 604) who declared that Lent began with the Wednesday that was 40 weekdays prior to Easter. And he is credited with initiating the practice of marking believers with ashes on the forehead on that day as a reminder of their mortality and need of forgiveness. "You are dust, and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19).



**The Triduum:** The final three days of Lent are days of great intensity. Holy Thursday recalls Jesus' last supper with the disciples. It is a Jewish Passover celebration, and we are led to see Jesus as the Passover lamb sacrificed for the people. At the table he speaks of the bread and wine as his body and blood, he demonstrates servanthood by washing their feet, and he commands his disciples to love one another without exception. By the end of day Jesus will have gone to a garden to pray and

there be arrested and brought to trial where he is falsely accused, beaten, mocked and sentenced to die. Good Friday is a day of stillness and soberness as death wraps itself around Jesus on the cross, darkness gathers, the earth trembles and the cries of the lonely figure on the cross begin their journey down through history. It is finished; Jesus is dead. Holy Saturday becomes a day of aimless searching for a meaning in all these events and somber waiting for God to emerge in the ashes of the moment. Jesus lays wrapped in his burial clothes in his grave while all wait for God's surprise. **Easter Resurrection!**