



DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER
2026 GUIDELINES FOR LENT
FROM THE OFFICE OF DIVINE WORSHIP

These guidelines are for priests, deacons, musicians, sacristans, members of the parish liturgy committee, art and environment committee and all involved in liturgy. Please forward as necessary.

The annual observance of Lent recalls the twofold theme of **baptism** and **repentance**.

1. Catechumens are led to the sacraments of initiation by means of the rites of election, the scrutinies, and catechesis;
2. Validly baptized non-Catholics are received into the Church by renewal of the baptismal promises, the professions of acceptance of the Catholic Faith and reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist;
3. The Faithful, listening more intently to the word of God and devoting themselves to prayer, are prepared through a spirit of repentance to renew their baptismal promises.

CHURCH ENVIRONMENT DURING LENT

- On the Altar at least one cloth, white in color. In the U.S. other cloths are used in addition, provided that the *mensa* itself is covered in a white altar cloth.
- The Altar is not to be decorated with flowers, though solemnities, feasts and the Fourth Sunday of Lent/*Laetare* Sunday are exceptions.
- Rose colored vestments may be worn on the Fourth Sunday of Lent (*Laetare* Sunday), 15 March 2026.
- **From the Saturday eve of the Fifth Sunday of Lent until the beginning of the Easter Vigil, images in the church may be covered.**
 - ✓ **Images are not covered at the beginning of Lent.** Universal custom for centuries directed that from the week before Palm Sunday and throughout Holy Week the images were to be covered. In recent years the covering of statues is universally restored as previously from the Saturday eve of the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Please be sure that your parish liturgical environment ministry is made aware of this. All other Lenten decoration may be in place on the eve of Ash Wednesday, but covering of images must follow universal norm.
- Holy Water – Emptying or covering holy water fonts during Lent is a modern innovation not found in the Church’s directives. Water is always kept in holy water fonts until after Mass on Holy Thursday, when they are emptied of holy water and later refilled with the water blessed at the Easter Vigil. (*Paschales Solemnitatis*, #97) Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the sacraments: 3/14/03.Prot.N.569/00/2
- Use of Musical Instruments during Lent: The GIRM (2011) states in #313: “In Lent, the playing of the organ and musical instruments is allowed only in order to support the singing. Exceptions are on *Laetare* Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), solemnities, and feasts.”

THE COMMEMORATION OF THE SAINTS DURING LENT

- Solemnities and feasts are celebrated as usual.
- All memorials of Saints occurring during Lent are observed as *optional*.
- Saints are commemorated as follows:
 - ✘ At Mass: (*only the Opening Prayer may reflect the saint's commemoration*).
 - ✓ The color of vestments is always violet.
 - ✓ Opening prayer of the saint may replace that of the Lenten weekday.
 - ✓ Liturgy of the Word remains that of the Lenten weekday.
 - ✓ Prayer over the Gifts remain that of the Lenten weekday.
 - ✓ Preface of Lent remains (*except with Eucharistic Prayers having their own Preface*).
 - ✓ Prayer after Communion remains that of the Lenten weekday.
 - ✘ In the Liturgy of the Hours
 - ✓ At the Office of Readings:
After the Lenten weekday second reading and responsory, the reading of the saint and its responsory may be read.
The concluding Prayer of the Saint's commemoration may be offered.
 - ✓ At Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer:
The Antiphon for the Saint and the concluding Prayer of the Saint may replace those of the weekday.

ASH WEDNESDAY 18 February 2026

- Is a day of universal **Fast**
(observed by all who are 18 to 58 years of age inclusive/ one full meal and two much lighter meals/ nothing to eat in between meals/ liquids such as water, milk and juices are allowed).
- and **Abstinence**
(observed by all who are 14 years of age and older/ no meat is allowed unless required for reasons of health).

Liturgical Note: **There is no Act of Penitence on Ash Wednesday.**

The Liturgy of the Word begins immediately after the Collect.

Fasting, almsgiving and prayer are the three traditional disciplines of Lent that should be **taken seriously** in a spirit of penance and of preparation for baptism and renewal of baptism by Easter.

- **Blessing and Distribution of Ashes**

- ✓ On Ash Wednesday, the blessing and distribution of ashes normally takes place during Mass, after the homily. However, when circumstances require, the blessing and distribution may take place apart from Mass during a celebration of the word of God. (See Book of Blessings #1656-1678).
- ✓ These ashes are of branches of the olive tree, or, according to custom, of the palm tree or other trees, which have been blessed the previous year.
- ✓ The ordinary minister for the blessing of ashes is a priest or deacon. Others (e.g., Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion) may assist with the imposition of ashes where there is genuine need, especially for the sick and shut-ins. One of the following formulas is used when imposing ashes on the forehead: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” Or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

FRIDAYS OF LENT FULL ABSTINENCE FROM MEAT

- All Fridays of Lent are days of full abstinence from meat for all who are 14 years of age and older (unless prohibited for reasons of health).

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT 22 February 2026

- Rite of Election of Catechumens and Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion.
- Celebrated at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph (Manchester) at 2:00 p.m.

LENTEN RITES FOR CHRISTIAN INIATION OF ADULTS

- The “Scrutinies” should be celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent and are to be celebrated for the elect who will be initiated at the Easter Vigil. The Scrutinies use readings from Cycle A. (*Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, #20)
- *Presentations of the Creed* and the *Lord’s Prayer* take place on the Third and Fifth weeks of Lent. (*OCIA*, #21)
- The celebration of the Optional Rites for Holy Saturday morning are highly encouraged. (*OCIA*, #22)

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT 22 March 2026

- **Images in the church may be covered** from the conclusion of the Mass for **Saturday (morning) of the Fourth Week of Lent until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.**

SOLEMNITY OF SAINT JOSEPH Thursday, 19 March 2026

- Liturgically, this is the Patronal feast of the Diocese of Manchester and a Solemnity.
- White vestments.
- Propers of St. Joseph, 19 March 2026.
- Gloria is sung or said.

WEDDING MASSES

Ritual Masses for the Celebration of Marriage may not take place on Ash Wednesday, on Sundays of Lent, during Holy Week, during the Paschal Triduum, or on Sundays of Easter. “The celebration of Marriage on Friday of the Passion of the Lord and on Holy Saturday is to be avoided altogether.” Marriages may take place at other times during Lent according to the proper liturgical norms and provisions (it is important to be mindful that should the *Ritual Mass for the Celebration of Marriage* be used, the use of the Gloria is prescribed even during the season of Lent). It is contrary to the penitential spirit of the season to have overly elaborate weddings or lavish receptions. Those who need to have marriages convalidated before the Easter Vigil should do so prior to Holy Week, not on Holy Saturday or during the Great Vigil of Easter.

FUNERAL MASSES

Funeral Masses are not to be celebrated on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday, nor on the Sundays of Lent. When pastoral considerations necessitate that a funeral be celebrated on these days, the Liturgy of the Word with the Final Commendation and Farewell may be conducted.

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

- The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord – *Wednesday 25 March 2026*
 - ✓ *Gloria* sung or said
 - ✓ All are asked to genuflect at “and by the Holy Spirit” in the Creed.
- Spring Adult Confirmation: *Sunday, 19 April 2026, 2:00 p.m.*
- Fourth Sunday of Easter: *26 April 2026*
 - ✓ World Day of Prayer for Vocations is celebrated this day. Prayers for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life should be inserted into the General Intercessions at Mass.
- Ascension Thursday: *14 May 2026*
- Pentecost Sunday: *24 May 2026*
- Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity: *31 May 2026*
- Ordination to the Order of Presbyter: *Saturday, 6 June 2026*
- The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi): *7 June 2026*
- Diocesan Wedding Anniversary Mass (Cathedral of St. Joseph): *7 June 2026, 2:00 p.m.*
- Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus: *Friday, 12 June 2026*
 - ✓ World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests: *Friday, 12 June 2026*

Notes on Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter will follow in a later notice.

❖ *LITURGICAL QUESTIONS MAY BE DIRECTED TO THE OFFICE OF WORSHIP, 603-622-6404, X17*