

# CELEBRATING LENT



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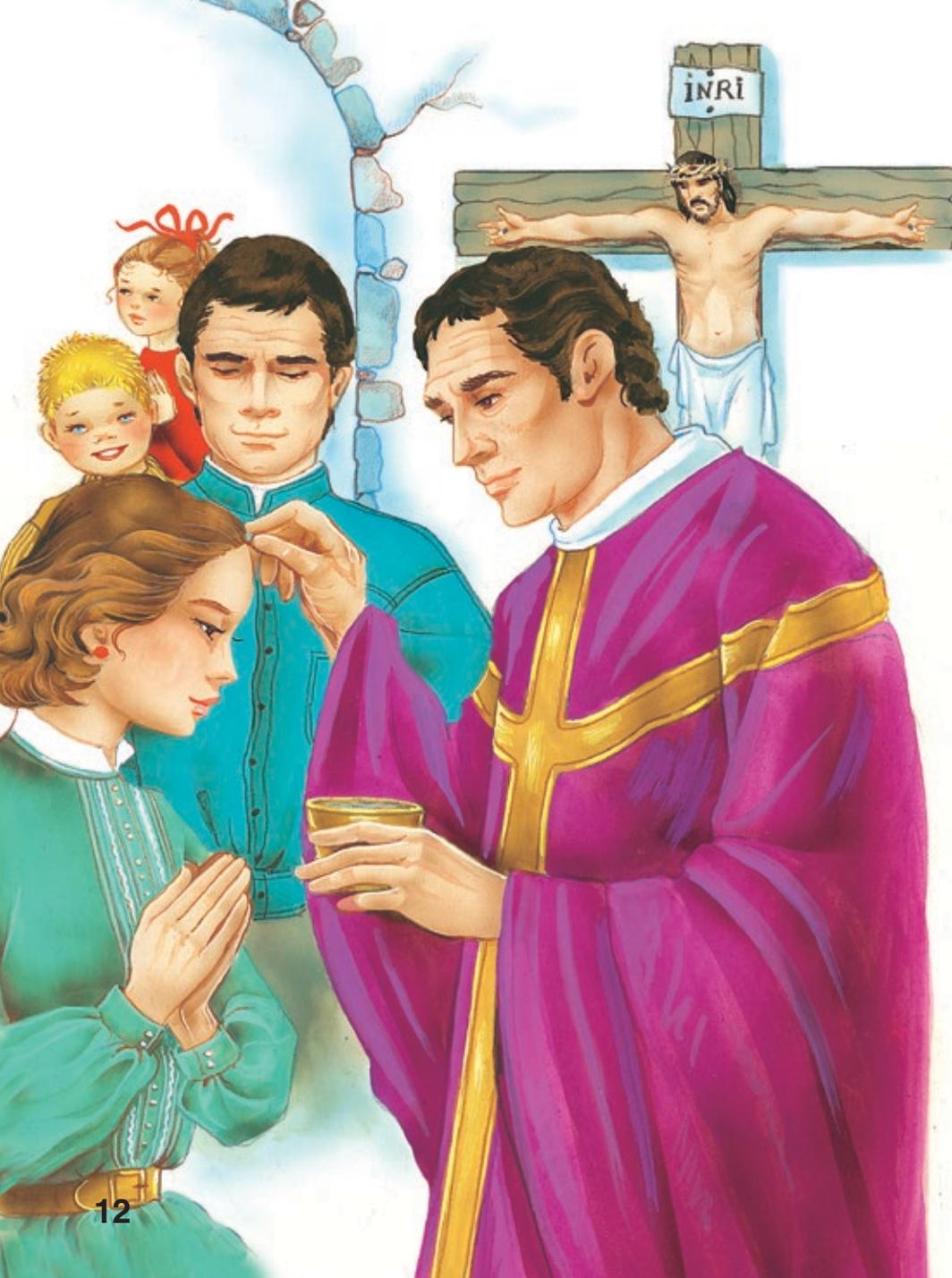
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## ASH WEDNESDAY

**T**ODAY we call the forty days during which we prepare for Easter “Lent.” This name comes from an Old English word that means the “Spring,” for Lent begins toward the end of Winter and leads us into the season of Spring.

The actual date for the beginning of Lent depends upon the date of Easter. Unlike Christmas Day, which is the same date every year, Easter moves from year to year. It falls on the Sunday after the first full moon after the beginning of Spring. Thus it can fall any time between the end of March and the end of April.

Lent begins six and one half weeks before that date. It can begin between mid-February and mid-March. We begin Lent on Ash Wednesday. On that day we go to church to receive ashes on our heads. These ashes are a sign that we are entering a time of penance.

When the priest places the ashes on our head, he says either, “Remember, man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return,” or “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” Both of these sayings remind us of how precious time is and how we should use it to grow closer to God.

## FASTING

**A**NOTHER part of our Lenten preparation is fasting. From its earliest days, Lent was a time to give up certain things that people enjoy throughout the year. Long ago, the fasting was very serious. People would eat only one meal a day. From Ash Wednesday on they would eat no fish or meat. They would have no eggs or cheese or milk. In some places, people would fast like this for five days a week, while in others they would fast every day except for Sunday.

Today we do not fast in the same way as they once did. One of the things that we do is eat no meat on any Friday during Lent. We can eat fish or cheese or any other thing as long as it has no meat.

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday we also have special rules. Those who are over 18 years old and less than 59 years old and in good health are obliged to fast. They may eat one full meal and have two other smaller ones that together do not equal one full meal.

The reason that we fast is to remind us that God is more important than food. We also fast to share the pain of those who do not have enough to eat.