The Season of Lent at St. Margaret Mary Parish 2026

Ash Wednesday: Mass with the blessing and distribution of ashes at 9.00 am. and 7.00 pm.
Ashes are distributed in the parish schools during the day.

Friday's during Lent: Mass in the morning at 9.00 am. with adoration of the Blessed sacrament during the day in the church. **Holy Hour with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament** and **Meditations on the Stations of the Cross** begins at 7.00 pm.

Saturday, February 21: Parish Retreat Day from 9.30 am. to 3.00 pm. The theme for the day is ***Listening with the Ear of your Heart*** and is an opportunity to prayerfully prepare to enter the season of Lent and provide some insights from the treasury of the church's spiritual traditions. **Paul and Teresa Tratnyek** have spent many years in education, health care and leading retreats and faith formation opportunities. They are also gifted musicians which they will incorporate into the day. Please register at the office as we will provide lunch for all participants.

Saturday, March 14: Parish Retreat Day from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm. ***The Name of God is Mercy*** is an opportunity for parishioners to explore the beauty and freedom that we can experience when we cry out to God for mercy. Forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of the Lenten experience and this day long retreat with **Fr. Joseph de Viveiros**, a priest of the Congregation of the Resurrection. A gifted teacher and preacher, he will draw us into a deeper exploration of the meaning of Mercy in the scriptures and in the lives of the saints. Please register at the office as we will provide lunch for all participants.

Thursday, March 19: Celebration of Reconciliation during the day:
11.00 am. to 12 Noon.
2.00 pm. to 3.00 pm.
7.00 pm. to 8.30 pm.

March 28-29: Palm Sunday Mass on Saturday at 5.00 pm.
Sunday at 9.00 and 11.00 am.

Lent

Lent is often spoken of in the language of discipline: fasting, abstinence, repentance, self-denial. These practices are real and essential, and the Church never softens their importance. Lent is a season that asks us to take ourselves seriously, to look honestly at our lives, and to allow the light of the Gospel to reveal what needs healing, conversion, and renewal. It is a time to "put our house in order," to turn away from patterns of sin and distraction, and to return to the wisdom of Christ with renewed intention.

Yet the liturgical texts of Lent consistently point us toward a deeper truth: this season of penance is also, mysteriously and unmistakably, a season of joy.

This joy does not contradict Lent's seriousness; it grows directly from it. The Scriptures proclaimed during these forty days speak again and again of God's mercy, faithfulness, and desire for communion with his people. The call to repentance is never merely about correcting behavior; it is an invitation to relationship. "Return to me with your whole heart," the prophet Joel proclaims, not because God delights in our deprivation, but because God longs to restore what is broken and to give life more fully.

The joy of Lent, then, is not loud or carefree. It is quieter, deeper, and more enduring. It is the joy of honesty before God, of no longer pretending that we can save ourselves. There is a real freedom in acknowledging our need for grace. When we fast, we rediscover what truly sustains us. When we pray, we remember that we are not alone. When we give alms, we step outside ourselves and participate in God's generous love for the world. Each Lenten discipline clears space in the soul; space where joy can take root.

The liturgy itself teaches us this rhythm. Even as the Gloria and Alleluia fall silent, hope is never absent. The prayers of Lent are filled with confidence in God's saving work. We ask not only to be forgiven, but to be renewed; not only to resist sin, but to grow in love. Halfway through the season, the Church pauses on Laetare Sunday to **"Rejoice"** to remind us that Easter is not an afterthought but the destination toward which every act of penance is directed.

In this way, Lenten joy is profoundly Easter-shaped. It is the joy of knowing where the road leads, even while we are still walking it. It is the joy of a heart being reordered, of desires being purified, of life slowly coming back into alignment with the Gospel. The work is real, and sometimes difficult, but it is never empty.

As we enter Lent this year, we do so not as people seeking punishment, but as people seeking life. Penance and discipline are not ends in themselves; they are pathways to freedom, clarity, and communion with God. In walking them faithfully, we discover that joy is not something postponed until Easter morning. It is already present, quietly growing, wherever a heart turns back to God and allows itself to be transformed.