

## PASTOR'S COLUMN

### *Mardi Gras, Carnival, and Ash Wednesday*

Mardi Gras is almost here. Mardi Gras is the kissing cousin of Carnival. Carnival comes from the Latin words *caro* (a piece of flesh) and *levare* (to remove). Carnival literally means “to remove flesh,” or more colloquially, “Farewell to Flesh.” Mardi Gras is French for “Fat Tuesday” and embodies the same concept as Carnival – a farewell to the flesh on the last day of Ordinary Time before the start of the penitential season of Lent.

According to historians, Carnival is embedded deeply in the tradition of the Catholic faith. Its origin is the annual pagan celebrations of the god of fertility in ancient Rome. The celebrations involved feasting, drinking and carnal behavior. With the rise of Christianity in Rome, Christian morals took root and there was a need to blend traditional Roman practices with the mores of the Catholic faith. The concept of Carnival began as the Church’s way to compress all the carnal celebrating into a single time period before Lent began.

As Christianity spread through Europe, different countries celebrated Carnival according to their own cultural expression. In France, the holiday became a day to finish off meat, eggs and milk before Ash Wednesday. That is how the term Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday originated – a day to slaughter the fattened calf and feast before the great 40-day fast.

When French immigrants came to America, they brought the tradition of Mardi Gras with them. Over time, the celebration of Mardi Gras became more and more elaborate and secular. In New Orleans, grand celebrations became common place with masked balls and parades. Even non-Catholics joined the party.

In sum, Mardi Gras is a Catholic tradition intended to condense the celebration of the flesh into the final days of Ordinary Time preceding Lent – so that people are ready spiritually to enter into the penitential character of Lent. In these final days of the Mardi Gras season, may we enjoy ourselves within reason so we can hit the ground running with the prayer, repentance, sacrifice and conversion that Lent calls us to engage.

Enclosed in this bulletin is a flyer for Ash Wednesday Masses and Services. We mark ourselves with ashes as a sign of our mortality and need to repent and turn from sin. May Lent 2019 help us focus on the brevity of earthly life and the call to live for the life that never ends.

Happy Mardi Gras, and God bless,  
Fr. Joe