



We live in an era where almost everything is emptied of meaning. Festivals become excuses for excess, traditions turn into mere folkloric events, and words become sounds without depth. Among those words that have lost their soul is *carnival*.

For many, “carnival” means costumes, revelry, and fun before Lent. But the original concept—*farewell to the flesh*—holds immense spiritual richness. It comes from the Latin *carnes tollendas*: “the flesh to be removed,” or more popularly, *carne vale*: “farewell to the flesh.”

But what does it really mean to say goodbye to the flesh?  
Is it merely giving up meat for a few days?  
Or is it something much deeper and more radical?

This article aims to help you rediscover the true theological and pastoral meaning of Carnival, not as a superficial party, but as a spiritual gateway to conversion.

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## 1. The Christian Origin of Carnival

Long before the world turned carnival into a spectacle of excess, the Church had already established a time of serious preparation for Lent.

In the ancient liturgical tradition, the days leading up to Ash Wednesday—Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima—gradually introduced the soul into a penitential spirit. The “alleluia” disappeared from the liturgy. The color purple anticipated spiritual combat. The Church, as a wise mother, prepared the heart.

Carnival marked the threshold between two worlds:

- Ordinary time.
- Penitential time.

It was not an invitation to sin, but a conscious farewell to legitimate pleasures in order to prepare for sacrifice.

Christianity has never been opposed to joy. But it teaches that there are times to celebrate and times to purify the heart.



*“To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).*

Carnival was precisely that: the moment to become aware that spiritual battle was approaching.

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## 2. “Farewell to the Flesh”: More Than a Diet, a Spiritual Decision

When the Church spoke of “flesh,” it did not only refer to food. In Sacred Scripture, flesh symbolizes disordered inclination, human weakness, the old self.

Saint Paul explains it clearly:

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Romans 8:5).*

Saying “farewell to the flesh” is not simply changing your menu. It is declaring war on that which enslaves us internally.

In the biblical sense, flesh represents:

- Selfishness.
- Disordered sensuality.
- Spiritual laziness.
- Pride.
- Excessive attachment to pleasure.

Carnival, in its deepest sense, is the moment to ask ourselves:

- What dominates my life?



- What prevents me from loving God more?
- Which desires govern my decisions?

Because true fasting begins in the heart.

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### 3. The Contrast with the Modern World

If we look at contemporary culture, we see exactly the opposite of the original spirit of Carnival.

Today, carnival is synonymous with:

- Excess.
- Sexualization.
- Moral looseness.
- Mockery of the sacred.
- Breaking of limits.

What was meant to be a sober farewell has become a celebration of indulgence.

But this is not accidental. Modern society has lost the sense of penance. It has forgotten that man needs purification. It has confused freedom with lack of restraint.

Yet the human heart still thirsts for order, meaning, and redemption.

When the world exaggerates pleasure, deep down it is trying to fill a spiritual void that only God can satisfy.

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### 4. The Church’s Spiritual Pedagogy

The Church does not propose Lent as punishment, but as therapy for the soul.

Just as the body needs detoxification, the soul also needs purification.

Carnival was the final reminder before the spiritual treatment:



- Prepare yourself.
- Simplify.
- Detach.
- Order your desires.

Fasting, abstinence, and penance have a profoundly human and theological logic:

1. They remind us that we are not slaves to our impulses.
2. They teach us that pleasure is not the ultimate goal.
3. They reorient us toward true love.

Jesus himself gave an example:

*“This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).*

Spiritual battle is not won with speeches but with inner discipline.

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## 5. The Flesh Today: What Should We Say Goodbye To?

If Carnival means “farewell to the flesh,” we must honestly ask ourselves:  
What “flesh” dominates our life today?

Perhaps it is not a steak.

Perhaps it is:

- Compulsive consumption.
- Dependence on the phone.
- Constant need for approval.
- Pornography.
- Superficiality.
- Lack of silence.
- Intellectual pride.

In a hyper-stimulated society, true fasting may be:



- Fasting from screens.
- Fasting from noise.
- Fasting from criticism.
- Fasting from comparisons.
- Fasting from resentment.

Lent begins long before Ash Wednesday: it begins when we become aware of that which distances us from God.

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## 6. Deep Theological Dimension: The Old Man and the New Man

Saint Paul speaks of the “old man” and the “new man” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Carnival symbolizes the transition between the two.

The old man lives dominated by the flesh.

The new man lives in the Spirit.

This does not mean despising the body. Christianity is not dualistic. Flesh is good because it was created by God and assumed by Christ in the Incarnation.

The problem is not the flesh itself, but its disorder.

Penitence does not destroy nature; it heals it.

Fasting does not hate the body; it disciplines it.

Renunciation does not eliminate joy; it purifies it.

Christianity does not seek to crush desire but to redirect it toward God.

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## 7. Practical Applications: How to Truly Live Carnival Today

If we want to recover the authentic meaning, here is a concrete spiritual guide:



## 1. Conduct a Serious Examination of Conscience Before Lent

Ask yourself:

- Which habit dominates me?
- Which sin repeats itself?
- What attachment do I struggle to let go of?

## 2. Choose a Significant Renunciation

Not something superficial, but something that truly costs you.

## 3. Establish a Spiritual Plan

- Confession.
- Daily structured prayer.
- Spiritual reading.
- Concrete works of charity.

## 4. Practice Conscious Sobriety

In food, consumption, words, and social media.

## 5. Recover the Communal Sense

Live this time with family, explaining to children the true meaning. Faith is transmitted starting at home.

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## 8. Carnival as an Act of Freedom

The world calls freedom doing whatever you please.

Christianity calls freedom not being enslaved by what you please.

Saying “farewell to the flesh” is a profoundly revolutionary act in our age.

It affirms:



- I am not my impulses.
- I am not my desires.
- I am not my addictions.
- I am a child of God.

And that reminder transforms life.

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## 9. From Renunciation to Resurrection

Let us not forget that Carnival does not end in abstinence.  
It leads to Easter.

Christian renunciation is always oriented toward something greater.

We give up something good to receive something better.  
We leave the immediate to embrace the eternal.

Christ does not ask us to renounce for the sake of renouncing, but to make us capable of a deeper joy.

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## Conclusion: Recovering the Soul of Carnival

Perhaps this year you cannot change the culture.  
But you can change your heart.

Perhaps the world will continue celebrating excess.  
But you can celebrate inner freedom.

Carnival is not a license to sin before “behaving well.”  
It is a sacred threshold.  
It is a call to conscious conversion.  
It is the whisper of the Church saying:

“Prepare yourself. Return to God. Order your life. Say farewell to what enslaves you.”



If we recover the true meaning of “farewell to the flesh,” we will not only transform Lent.

We will transform our entire life.

And then we will understand that the greatest celebration is not the fleeting carnival, but the eternal Easter toward which we walk.

Because true joy does not arise from excess.

It arises from a purified heart.