



Carnival is one of the most popular festivities worldwide. Parades, costumes, music, and an atmosphere of indulgence make it an event many look forward to. But how should a Catholic approach this celebration? Is it simply a cultural tradition, or is there something deeper at play?

To answer these questions, we must understand the origins of Carnival, its historical evolution, and its significance today. More importantly, we must discern how our faith calls us to live these times authentically as Christians, without falling into excesses that may lead us away from God.

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## **The Origins of Carnival: Christian Roots or Disguised Paganism?**

Carnival has both Christian and pagan roots. The name comes from the Latin expression “*carne levare*”, meaning “to remove meat,” referring to the fasting that begins on Ash Wednesday. In this sense, Carnival emerged as a period of preparation before Lent, where certain excesses were permitted before the season of penance.

However, its oldest roots trace back to pagan festivals like the Roman Saturnalia and Bacchanalia, which promoted excess and the inversion of social order. With the expansion of Christianity, many of these celebrations were reinterpreted, but Carnival maintained an ambiguous character, blending the sacred with the profane.

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## **Carnival in the History of the Church**

Since the Middle Ages, the Church has had a tense relationship with Carnival. While some saw it as a harmless tradition, others warned that it often became an excuse for sin. As early as the 5th century, Saint Augustine denounced how these indulgent celebrations distracted the faithful from the Christian life.

In the 13th century, Saint Thomas Aquinas spoke about the dangers of excessive pleasures, emphasizing that temperance is a key virtue for the soul. During the Counter-Reformation, the Church reinforced fasting and penance rules, attempting to curb Carnival’s influence.



However, its deep cultural roots allowed it to survive to this day.

Today, Carnival has almost entirely lost its connection to Lent and has become a celebration dominated by hedonism, sensuality, and, in many cases, irreverence toward the sacred.

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## What Does the Bible Say About These Festivities?

Although the Bible does not mention Carnival specifically, it does warn against indulgence and worldliness. Saint Paul exhorts in his letter to the Galatians:

*“The works of the flesh are evident: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).*

Carnival, as it is celebrated today, often promotes these “works of the flesh” rather than the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, a Catholic must discern whether participating in certain aspects of Carnival brings them closer to or further from God.

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## How Should a Catholic Approach Carnival?

The goal is not to condemn everything related to Carnival but to live it with a Christian heart. Here are some key points to consider:

### 1. Discern with Wisdom

Before participating in any event, ask yourself: Does this glorify God, or does it lead me to unnecessary temptations? Does it help me prepare spiritually for Lent, or does it distract me



from my faith?

## 2. Avoid Excess and Sin

Carnival celebrations often encourage unrestrained sensuality, uncontrolled alcohol consumption, and irreverence. A Catholic should not be part of environments that promote such behaviors.

## 3. Use This Time for Evangelization

If your community celebrates Carnival, you can use the opportunity to remind people of its original meaning and promote Christian values. Some parishes organize alternative activities that encourage wholesome joy.

## 4. Do Not Be Swayed by Secular Culture

Social pressure may make us feel like we are “missing out” if we do not participate. But Jesus calls us to be a light in the world, not to follow trends blindly. As Saint Paul says:

*“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2).*

## 5. Spiritually Prepare for Lent

Rather than a time of partying, this is an opportunity to start preparing our hearts for Lent. Reflect on your prayer life, fasting, and acts of penance. What do you need to detach from to grow closer to God?

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## Can Anything Good Be Taken from Carnival?

While modern Carnival has largely lost its Christian roots, the concept of “celebration” is not foreign to Christianity. God created us for joy, but for authentic joy—not one dependent on worldly excesses. The Church joyfully celebrates significant liturgical moments, such as



Christmas and Easter.

If Carnival can be lived in a wholesome way, avoiding sin and promoting true joy, there is no reason to reject it completely. However, if it becomes an obstacle to our Christian life, it is best to stay away from it.

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## Conclusion: A Celebration or a Test of Faith?

For a Catholic, Carnival is not just a cultural event—it is a test of faith. It challenges us to decide whether we follow the world's values or Christ's values.

While the world invites us to “enjoy without limits,” faith calls us to a deeper joy, one that does not depend on fleeting pleasures but on communion with God.

The true celebration is not found in the excesses of Carnival but in the joy of the Gospel. As Jesus reminds us:

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides” (Matthew 6:33).

May this time help us prepare for Lent with a willing heart, renouncing whatever distances us from God and embracing the true joy that only He can give.