

Celebrate Mardi Gras

On the day before Ash Wednesday, Catholics get one last shot at celebration before beginning 40 days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The name Mardi Gras (literally, French for “Fat Tuesday”) may refer to the fact it is the day before the strict fast of Lent begins and all the “fat” foods such as meat, eggs, cheese and butter had to be used up before they went to waste. At least, that’s the excuse we use in our house for eating everything in the fridge.

Whatever the name’s origin, Mardi Gras is a great time for family faith and fun:

Green, gold and purple are the colors of the holiday, so use them liberally. Purple represents justice, green stands for faith, and gold signifies power. Set the dinner table with green napkins, a purple tablecloth and golden-colored utensils (if you’ve got utensils made of real gold, consider upping your weekly contribution to your parish).

Wear costumes. Dressing up like kings and queens is integral to many Mardi Gras festivals. Don crowns, glass slippers, pirate hats and puffy shirts. Or put on your own dressiest outfit and join in the party. Be sure to wear lots of colorful beads since brightly colored strings of beads are part of the fun.

Make a mask. Masks are an important part of any costume, so cut a paper plate in half, attach a paper doll, cut out eye holes, get out the glitter, glue, feathers and have at it!

Pick your tradition. New Orleans is the country’s most famous Mardi Gras celebration, but it’s not alone. If the Louisiana style of Mardi Gras doesn’t move you, celebrate with moon pies (like in Pensacola, Fla.), host a “masquerade ball” (Mobile, Ala.) or dance the samba (San Francisco).

Go for a walk. Most of us probably can't organize a parade with floats on short notice. That doesn't mean we can't take to the streets. "Walking clubs" in New Orleans are groups of people in costume walking about on Mardi Gras. Once you are all decked out in your finery, take a stroll around your neighborhood and hand out pieces of gold-wrapped chocolates.

Bake a king cake. Celebrating Epiphany, a tiny plastic baby Jesus is baked inside a specially made cake. The person who finds it will have good luck the next year (and they have to provide the next king cake, so brush up on that [recipe](#)). The cake is usually decorated with sugar that has been colored purple, green and gold with food coloring.

Whatever you do, just make sure that your day is filled with love, laughter and lots of good stuff to eat.