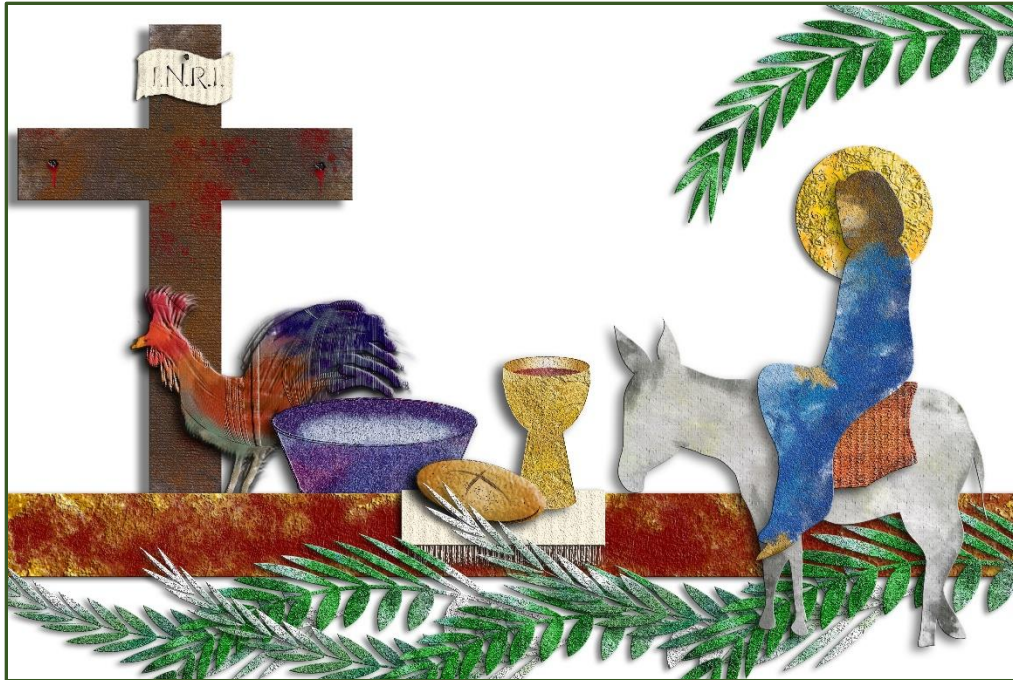


## Christians Observe Lent in Pakistan

by: Fr. Tariq Isaac, Parochial Vicar & Chaplain for the Pakistani Community at St. William Church, Subcommittee Adviser for Pakistani Ministry in the USA



I am very happy to write a few lines on how Christians living in Pakistan among Muslims observe Lent. The season of Lent is a very special time for us to fast, pray and give alms. You may know very little about the Month of Ramadan for the Muslims. They strictly keep fast, without eating food from sunrise to sunset. Timing is very important for them. They have a fixed time to start and end the fast.

Since there are very few Christians living among densely populated Muslims, our people always question the timing of our fast. Many people fast from morning to morning and some people fast from morning to evening. During this fast time, we do not eat or drink anything.

During Lent, we try to give more time to praying. A very large number of people gathers to take part in the Stations of the Cross and the Holy Mass on Fridays. Almost all churches are packed on Fridays. On Good Friday Service, our churches are not big enough to sit all the people. Either we remove the pews from the church and let the people sit on the floor, or we need to arrange the service outside the church in an open area covered with tents. Several Easter Masses are from morning till evening. It is really a faith strengthening experience.

On Palm Sunday, we celebrate with great honor the day Jesus enters into Jerusalem. People prefer to hold branches of palms rather than palm leaves in the procession. In Catholic villages, the procession starts from the church, passing through the streets of the village and ending in the church with Holy Mass. Even in the cities, a procession takes place in the church premises. People decorate the palm branches with flowers waving them in the air.



On Holy Thursday, after the Holy Mass, all the faithful have a meal together in one place in remembrance of the Last Supper. In the churches, they either eat one dish, or they collect a donation and prepare the food at one place.

It is also common among the people to invite those in their homes to break the fast in the evening. Almsgiving is common in the church. We give Lenten envelopes or piggy banks. The faithful bring them back before Good Friday and the collection goes to the diocese for a charity. People are very kind and generous during Lent.

It is an old tradition in the Church in Pakistan that during Lent, a priest with his catechists makes house visits throughout the parish going from house to house. A catechist arranges the visit for the priest. The visit helps people to prepare themselves for Easter.