

About Shrove Tuesday

Shrove Tuesday is also known as Fat Tuesday, Mardi Gras, and Carnival. Shrove Tuesday, as Episcopalians know it, has a rich and varied tradition, going back for centuries. The purpose of this day is two-fold: to rid the Christian home of all dairy products, fats, and meats, which used to be forbidden to be kept in the home during the fasting of Lent, and to go to confession and be “shriven”, that is, to receive absolution for your sins.

The names Mardi Gras and Fat Tuesday are identical and refer not only to the removal of fat, dairy products, and meat from the home and the diet, but they also refer to the three or four days of overeating which can precede Ash Wednesday.

Carnival goes back to the Latin “Carnem levarem” (carnelevarium), meaning a withdrawal or removal of meat. More loosely translated, it means “farewell to meat.”

One English tradition is the Pancake Race on Shrove Tuesday. It seems that a housewife became so engrossed with preparing breakfast on Shrove Tuesday morning in 1445, that she forgot the time and ran to church carrying a pan, flipping pancakes as she went. This has evolved into a race in which women clothed in dresses, aprons, and scarves race down the street to the church with pans of pancakes in their hands. They must flip the pancakes three times as they run. The first to arrive at the church door is greeted by the vicar with “The Peace of the Lord be always with you.”

Other countries have traditions as well. In Belgium, the feast is known as Vastenavond and culminates in a series of carnival events which vary regionally. Koekebakken and wafelen (pancakes and waffles) are served. In another region, Walloon farmers believe that eating cabbage on Shrove Tuesday will prevent flies and caterpillars from attacking their cabbage crops in the spring.

In France, Mardi Gras ends a three day carnival period before Ash Wednesday. People go out in costume and play pranks on each other. There is a “Bataille de fleurs” (battle of flowers) in which cars and floats are decorated with flowers and paraded through the streets for hours as the occupants pelt bystanders (who reciprocate) with flowers. In some areas of France, an ox is led through the streets, to become the main course at a barbecue later that evening.

Mobile, AL, Biloxi, MS, and New Orleans, LA, all claim to be the first to celebrate Carnival in America. Biloxi claims the earliest date, 1699, saying that when Pierre Charles d’Iberville placed a flag near the site of present day Biloxi, he realized it was Shrove Tuesday and celebrated with some friendly Native Americans and his men.

New Orleans claims it had the first Mardi Gras in 1827 when a group of young men returned from the continent. Mobile says it held the first really splendid celebration in 1830 and that it showed New Orleans how Mardi Gras was properly done. Regardless of who was first, all three cities continue to celebrate on a grand scale.

Since pancakes play such a large role in Shrove Tuesday, here is a recipe for English Pancakes:

1 and $\frac{3}{4}$ cups flour
Salt
2 teaspoons sugar
2 eggs
1 egg yolk
1 cup milk
1 cup water
Grated rind of $\frac{1}{2}$ lemon
3 teaspoons melted butter
Oil for frying
Juice of 1 lemon
Confectioner's sugar

Sift the flour with a good pinch of salt and the sugar. Beat the eggs and yolk and add them slowly to the flour. Add the milk and water and beat until the batter is covered with bubbles. Add the lemon rind and let stand in a cool place for at least 1 hour. Stir in the melted butter. Heat the oil in the pan until it is very hot. Add a little batter to make a thin pancake. Flip it once. As soon as it's cooked, remove from the pan and sprinkle with lemon juice and sugar.