

# FAT TUESDAY

By Kevin R. Fermerick

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, this year, the celebration of Fat Tuesday (or in the French language, Mardi Gras) was observed. As the day approached, in Portland, Oregon, near where I live, the local media with an anticipatory holding of breath regularly hyped its onset. Taxpayers shelled out thousands of dollars to pay for the Portland Police Bureau to control the revelers, in fact little more than a mob of drunks. A former police captain turned media “expert” referred to the police activities as “stopping stupid people from doing stupid things.”

The odd thing about Fat Tuesday is that this party day is supposed to be part of greater religious observance of the Roman Catholics. As this day of partying has spread to other areas where it never was formerly celebrated, I began to ponder this day, and whether Christians should have any association with it at all.

I am not against celebrating specific days of secular significance (e. g. July 4<sup>th</sup>, Presidents’ Day, Memorial Day etc.). While I am sure to offend some, I don’t even oppose the *secular* observance of Halloween, Christmas and Easter *per se*. However, when *religious* significance is placed on a specific day or season, we must look to the Bible for authority for such.

Let’s take a moment and review the context of Fat Tuesday. The day is the culmination of the season of Carnival. During Carnival, all meat and animal products (lard, eggs, butter, etc.) are to be completely consumed before the beginning of the Lent season, beginning Ash Wednesday.

While there is some disagreement over the origin of the term, Carnival, the website, [www.americancatholic.org](http://www.americancatholic.org), states that the term comes from the Latin, *carne vale*, meaning farewell to the flesh. This site surprisingly allows for the likelihood that this season has its roots in pre-Christian traditions (in other words, pagan origins). Others concur believing its origins are from the Roman festivals of Saturnalia and Lupercalia, which in later Roman times became outrageous spectacles of debauchery. As these pagan festivals evolved they were, in effect, co-opted by what became the Roman Catholic Church. The purpose of this was to turn them into religious festivals, in an attempt to Christianize the pagans while not angering them by removing their already established festivals.

What is interesting about this is the already developed system of compromise, if one is kindly disposed to the Catholics, or the insidious system of deceit, if one is not so disposed, that the Catholics already had in practice. We must always remember that truth, the word of God (John 17:17), has nothing to fear, nor is there any cause for compromise. Paul declared, *"For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God."* Acts 20:27, and *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* Romans 1:16. He further proclaimed, *"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not: but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."* 2 Corinthians 4:1-2.

Carnival begins with the Epiphany, or Twelfth Night that occurs January 6<sup>th</sup>, twelve days after Christmas. Epiphany is to celebrate the visit to Jesus by the wise men. So we see that a season of revelry is created that lasts well over a month in length. During Carnival, parties of varying sorts take place. Depending on the country, some of these parties get rather bawdy. Alcohol flows freely. In other words, the season mimics the Roman festivals more than the Catholic preparation for Lent.

At the conclusion of Carnival, with Fat Tuesday being its last day, comes the season of Lent. The Season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and lasts forty days where it culminates with the celebration of Easter. Lent was formerly a time of penance and sacrifice. We may recall hearing of Catholics giving up some practice of which they were fond during this period.

Lent has taken on a different meaning now, according to a Catholic website, [www.franciscanradio.org](http://www.franciscanradio.org). As the Catholic Church has restored the rite of initiating adults into the Christian faith, Lent becomes a period of preparation for the initiates prior to baptism. For existing Catholics, according to [www.americancatholic.org](http://www.americancatholic.org), Lent is a time to renew their commitment to the life they began when they entered the Church. There are three main aspects of the Lent season: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. These three items consider God, self and others, respectively.

While I can hardly fault one from wanting to be a better follower of Christ, we see no teaching or example of people having to wait for a special day in order to become Christians. When the Apostle Paul told the Jews of his conversion to Christ, by Ananias, Paul said he was told, *"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name."* Acts 22:16. When Paul and Silas were in Philippi and were teaching the gospel to their former jailer, the jailer and his house were baptized *"...the same hour of the night..."* Acts 16:33. As Philip taught the Ethiopian eunuch, when they

came to some water the eunuch said, *“Behold, (here is) water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”* Acts 8:36b.

Further, I can only commend one for engaging in prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Show me though, where such activities are for special times of the year, as opposed to all other times? Paul wrote, *“Pray without ceasing.”* 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Paul also thanked God *“without ceasing,”* 1 Thessalonians 2:13. Fasting while not condemned, in the New Testament, is not commanded us today either, nor are there binding examples given for the practice. Though the practice was common in New Testament times, its practitioners did not limit themselves to certain times of the year, nor were certain times special with respect to other times. As for almsgivings, Paul instructed the Galatian brethren, *“So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith.”* Galatians 6:10. Timothy was told by Paul, *“Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not highminded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate;”* 1 Timothy 6:17-18.

Let us return to Carnival and Fat Tuesday. Where are we allowed license to carry on in preparation of a holy day? Each Lord’s Day is holy to us. Following the Carnival/Fat Tuesday line of thinking, from Monday through Saturday, and especially on Saturday, we can “howl at the moon” then be pious on Sunday. The New Testament has much teaching on how our life as children of God is not a collection of acts but a lifestyle. Everyday we are to live as servants of our Lord. *“A servant is not greater than his lord,”* said Jesus, John 13:16. With Jesus as our example, where do we have the authority for periodic episodes of hedonism? Note Paul’s admonition to the Galatian brethren, *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would.”* Galatians 5:16-17. As you read the next few verses you see some of the works of the flesh listed. Many of these are practiced every Fat Tuesday and even throughout Carnival.

These special days have become little more than excuses to engage in drunkenness and revelings, both condemned in the Bible. The giving of beads, at least as practiced in New Orleans and other U. S. cities, is from an appreciative male to a female who exposes her breasts to him. How can a Christian even attempt to justify his or her presence among such activity as this? The days are now celebrated by people to whom Roman Catholicism means nothing. Indeed cities now promote the celebration as a way to generate revenue for the city’s coffers.

As for Christians, Fat Tuesday is a party day, not spoken of in the Bible, nor is it authorized for us to observe as a religious day. It is not a day of indifference to God, as addressed in Romans 14. Due to the activities that are associated with Fat Tuesday, we should have nothing to do with it. Remember the words of the Apostle Peter, *“Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in (the time of) your ignorance: but like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy ; for I am holy.”* 1 Peter 1:13-16”