

Diocese of Fargo

Lent & Easter Regulations

The penitential days for the universal Church are each Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Lent is an opportunity to prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration of Easter. The following regulations are observed in this sacred season:



Abstinence

Catholics 14 years of age or older must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent. It is only on the other Fridays of the year that abstinence may be substituted by another form of penance.

Fasting

Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59 (inclusive) are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. There is a limit of one full meal and no food between meals on those days. Two smaller meals are permitted as needed to maintain one's strength.

Sacrament of Penance

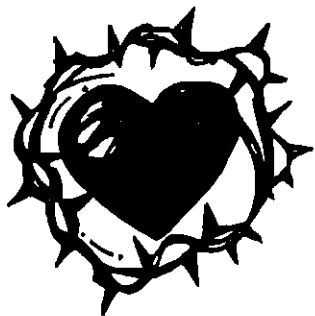
All the faithful who have reached the age of reason are bound faithfully to confess their grave sins at least once a year. Lent is a good time to fulfill this precept of the Church. Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion without previously having been to sacramental confession (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1457).

Holy Communion

Catholics who have received their First Holy Communion are obliged to make a worthy reception of Holy Communion at least once a year during the Lenten or Easter seasons.

Other Lenten Observances

Each weekday of Lent is also an obligatory day of penance. Some recommendations include the participation in daily Mass, increased prayer or spiritual study, self-imposed fasting or abstinence, works of charity, and participation in traditional Lenten Devotions (parish missions, Stations of the Cross, rosary).



The proper context for all Lenten discipline is the conversion of our hearts. As the Catechism states, however, "interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance." These penances help us to redirect our whole life to God and away from sin and the evil we have committed (CCC, 1430-1439).

As we celebrate our Lenten penitential practices, may we experience this conversion of heart and be strengthened in our faith in God's mercy. May our discipline, through God's grace, lead us to full participation in the eternal Easter.

Q&A for Lent

Q. Why do we say that there are forty days of Lent? When you count all the days from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday, there are 46.

A. It might be more accurate to say that there is the "forty day fast within Lent." Historically, Lent has varied from a week to three weeks to the present configuration of 46 days. The forty day fast, however, has been more stable. The Sundays of Lent are certainly part of the Time of Lent, but they are not prescribed days of fast and abstinence.

Q. So does that mean that when we give something up for Lent, such as candy, we can have it on Sundays?

A. Apart from the prescribed days of fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and the days of abstinence every Friday of Lent, Catholics have traditionally chosen additional penitential practices for the whole Time of Lent. These practices are disciplinary in nature and often more effective if they are continuous, i.e., kept on Sundays as well. That being said, such practices are not regulated by the Church, but by individual conscience.

Q. I understand that all the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence from meat, but I'm not sure what is classified as meat. Does meat include chicken and dairy products?

A. Abstinence laws consider that meat comes only from animals such as chickens, cows, sheep or pigs --- all of which live on land. Birds are also considered meat. Abstinence does not include meat juices and liquid foods made from meat. Thus, such foods as chicken broth, consomme, soups cooked or flavored with meat, meat gravies or sauces, as well as seasonings or condiments made from animal fat are technically not forbidden. However, moral theologians have traditionally taught that we should abstain from all animal-derived products (except foods such as gelatin, butter, cheese and eggs, which do not have any meat taste). Fish are a different category of animal. Salt and freshwater species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, (cold-blooded animals) and shellfish are permitted.

Q. I've noticed that restaurants and grocery stores advertise specials on expensive types of fish and seafood on Fridays during Lent. Some of my Catholic friends take advantage of these deals, but somehow I don't feel right treating myself to the lobster special on Fridays during Lent.

A. While fish, lobster and other shellfish are not considered meat and can be consumed on days of abstinence, indulging in the lavish buffet at your favorite seafood place sort of misses the point. Abstaining from meat and other indulgences during Lent is a penitential practice. On the Fridays of Lent, we remember the sacrifice of Christ on Good Friday and unite ourselves with that sacrifice through abstinence and prayer.

Q. I understand that Catholics ages 18 to 59 should fast on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday, but what exactly are the rules for these fasts?

A. Fasting on these days means we can have only one full, meatless meal. Some food can be taken at the other regular meal times if necessary, *but combined they should be less than a full meal*. Liquids are allowed at any time, but no solid food should be consumed between meals.

Q. Are there exemptions other than for age from the requirement to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?

A. Those that are excused from fast and abstinence outside the age limits include the physically or mentally ill including individuals suffering from chronic illnesses such as diabetes. Also excluded are pregnant or nursing women. In all cases, common sense should prevail, and ill persons should not further jeopardize their health by fasting.