



Fasting and Abstinence

1. The new code of Canon Law reminds us that all of Christ's faithful are obliged to do penance. The obligation arises in imitation of Christ himself and in response to his call. During his life on earth, and during his public ministry, Our Lord undertook voluntary penance. He invited his followers to do the same. The penance he invited would be a participation in his own suffering, an expression of inner conversion and a form of reparation for sin. It would be a personal sacrifice made out of love for God and our neighbor. It follows that if we are to be true, as Christians, to the spirit of Christ, we must practice some form of penance.
2. So that all may be united with Christ and with one another in a common practice of penance, the Church sets aside certain penitential days. On these days the faithful are to devote themselves in a special way to prayer, self-denial and works of charity. Such days are not designed to confine or isolate penance but to intensify it in the life of the Christian throughout the year.
3. Lent is the traditional season of renewal and repentance in Christ. The code of Canon Law re-affirms this. It also prescribes that **Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are to be observed as days of fast and abstinence.** Fasting means that the amount of food we eat is considerably reduced. For members of the Latin Catholic Church, **the norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59.** When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. **The norms concerning abstinence from meat are binding upon members of the Latin Catholic Church from age 14 onwards.** Members of the Eastern Catholic Churches are to observe the particular law of their own *sui iuris* Church. Priests and parents are urged to foster the spirit of penance among those younger to be the subjects of either law.
4. Because each Friday recalls the crucifixion of Our Lord, it too is set aside as a special penitential day. The Church does not prescribe, however, that fish must be eaten on Fridays. It never did. Abstinence always meant the giving up of meat rather than the eating of fish as a substitute. What the

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Church does require, according to the code of Canon Law, is that its members abstain on Fridays from meat.

5. In accordance with the mind of the universal Church, we are all reminded of the obligation of Friday penance, and in addition during this season of Lent we may make an extra effort for our own spiritual welfare by:
 1. a) abstaining from some other food or drink of our liking;
 2. b) making the special effort involved in family prayer, taking part in the Mass, visiting the Blessed Sacrament or praying the Stations of the Cross;
 3. c) making a special effort to help the poor, sick, elderly or lonely.
 4. d) making a special effort to visit the sick in the hospital, the elderly and the incarcerated.
6. The form of penance we adopt each Friday is a matter of personal choice and does not have to take the same form every Friday. Failure to undertake this penance on a particular Friday would not constitute a sin. However, penance is part of the life of every Christian and the intention to do penance on Friday is of obligation in memory of the passion and death of Our Lord.