

Ash
Wednesday



Ash Wednesday and the Lenten Season

Today is Ash Wednesday and marks the start of the Lenten Season. Today is a day of fasting as we prepare ourselves for our Lenten journey. Also every Friday is a day of abstinence during Lent. So what does this all mean? Well the rules are pretty clear and fall under two sets. First there is the Canon Law which states, “The current practice of fast and abstinence is regulated by Canons 1250–1253 of the 1983 code.[22] They specify that all Fridays throughout the year, and the time of Lent are penitential times throughout the entire Church. Everyone from the age of 14 to the age of 60 is bound by law to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. All persons who have completed their fourteenth year are bound by the law of abstinence on all Fridays unless they are solemnities, and again on Ash Wednesday; but in practice, this requirement has been greatly reduced by the Episcopal Conferences because under Canon 1253, it is these Conferences that have the authority to set down the local norms for fasting and abstinence in their territories. (However, the precept to both fast and abstain on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday is usually not dispensed from.)

Absent any specification of the nature of "fasting" in the current Canon Law, the traditional definition is obviously applicable here which is that on the days of mandatory fasting, Catholics may eat only one full meal during the day. Additionally, they may have two collations,[23] known as "collations". Church requirements on fasting only relate to solid food, not to drink, so Church law does not restrict the amount of water or other beverages – even alcoholic drinks – which may be consumed.

In some Western countries, Catholics have been encouraged to adopt non-dietary forms of abstinence during Lent. For example, in 2009 Monsignor Benito Cocchi, Archbishop of Modena, urged young Catholics to give up text messaging for Lent.”

And the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops produced a statement in 1966 called *Pastoral Statement of Penance and Abstinence* which was modified in 1983 includes rules set for us living in the U.S. and those are:

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence.

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.

A summary of current practice:

On Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all Fridays of Lent: Everyone of age 14 and up must abstain from consuming meat.

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday: Everyone of age 18 to 59 must fast, unless exempt due to usually a medical reason.

The USCCB also states that:

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.

Although some years past the USCCB declared that "the age of fasting is from the completion of the twenty-second year to the beginning of the sixtieth.", the USCCB page quoted above also references a "Complementary Norm" in its "More Information" section explaining the lower minimum age of 18.

In accordance with canon 1253 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the USCCB has also allowed[32] that some other form of penance for the traditional abstinence on all of the Fridays of the year, except for those Fridays in Lent, fulfills the obligation of penance.[32]

Also, according to the USCCB:

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.[33]

Because of this, many Catholic parishes in the United States sponsor a fish fry during Lent.[34] In predominantly Catholic areas, restaurants may adjust their menus during Lent by adding seafood items to the menu in an attempt to appeal to Catholics.[35] However, the same USCCB website says that:

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.

So What Else Do I Do During Lent?

First you pray. Pray daily. You may be doing it already. You may not. However you can do more of it! Start when you wake up. It doesn't have to be a long prepared prayer. Just start a conversation with God. Try it before falling asleep. Thank God for the blessings you received that day. Pray for someone who is in need of help. As you go through your day you can pray for a teacher, a family member, anyone who may need help.



Set aside some time during the day to pray. Over time add a few minutes a day. Maybe start doing the Rosary or read a chapter in the bible. Pray the Stations of the Cross or Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Pray for our priests, Bishop Ricken or Pope Francis. God is always listening and loves to hear from us his children.

Next thing we do during Lent is fast. We discussed that earlier. We noticed that they talked about fasting and abstaining. When we do this we are preparing ourselves as Jesus did when he went into the desert for 40 days without food to pray to purify himself. Now we can't go out into the desert ourselves but we can fast and as a personal symbol of sacrifice we give up something that is important to us during Lent. This way we give up some small pleasure or indulgence as a sacrifice to God. Some people go farther and give up bad habits which is a way of not only giving up a pleasure but also positively turning their life back towards what God wants for them. Many people in abstaining then turn that money saved into the third pillar of Lent and that is Almsgiving. Almsgiving is giving to those in need. If you think about the money saved by giving up a doughnut a day. That's \$40 that if donated to the local food pantry could feed a family of 4 for 2 weeks. \$40 for the Bishop's Appeal or the charity of your choice. Any amount given to any charity goes a long way and that shows your love for others as Jesus told us to. By making a small but meaningful sacrifice to help others in need.

Also during the Lenten Season we should also perform at least one Act of Contrition or Confession. So we should all make it a point to try to schedule a time to get that done.

So What's Coming Up In Class?

There is a Mass on Ash Wednesday. It starts at 4:30 p.m. and class will end at the regularly scheduled time.

On March 3, 2021 we will be doing a Stations of the Cross led by Fr. Joel and then Confessions.

I will attempt to live stream the Stations of the Cross for those who are attending class virtually. I hope you will attend that!

God Bless Everyone and let us enter this Lenten Season with Joy, Prayer and Reflection.