

Lent Fasting and Abstinence Guidelines

The time of Lent is to be observed by Catholics as a special season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving and going to confession preferably in a communal penance service.

Rules for Fasting

The rule of fasting states that only one full meal a day may be eaten. Two smaller meals “sufficient to maintain strength”, are allowed, but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals breaks the fast but drinking liquids does not. The rule of fasting applies to all Catholics ages 18-59.

Abstinence Guidelines

Abstinence refers to the eating of meat. Under the present law, it does not include egg or milk products, meat stock, soups or gravies. The rule of abstinence binds Catholics ages 14 years and older. Catholics observe fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. ALL Fridays in Lent are days of Abstinence.

The observance of the laws of fast and abstinence is a serious obligation. Those whose work or health would be impaired are excused from fasting and abstaining. Here the individual conscience can decide if there is a proper cause to excuse.

Self-imposed fasting on other weekdays of Lent is recommended. Abstinence on all Friday of the year is also highly recommended. The Peace Pastoral of the American Bishops, stating that prayer is incomplete without penance, urges Friday abstinence as something all American Catholics should offer up for the sake of world peace.

Parents and teachers should see to it that even those who are not bound by the laws of fast and abstinence because of age are brought up in an atmosphere that is conducive to a sense of penance.

