

LENTEN REGULATIONS

ASH WEDNESDAY & GOOD FRIDAY

- Days of fast and abstinence. The obligation to abstain from meat binds Catholics 14 years of age and older. The obligation to fast, limiting oneself to one full meal and two lighter meals, binds Catholics from the age of 18 to 59.

OTHER FRIDAYS OF LENT

- Also days of abstinence from meat.

THE FRIDAYS OF THE YEAR OUTSIDE OF LENT

- Abstaining from meat is the traditional way of observing these days of penance. Other sacrifices and penances are possible. While the season of lent is the primary period of Catholic penitential practices, these regulations are not intended to limit the occasions for Christian penance. The practice of spiritual discipline is always appropriate during periods of special need for the individual and the larger community.

Every Catholic, even children and older adults, should participate in some way in the spiritual disciplines and penitential practices of Lent in order to go up to Jerusalem with Jesus. These are the regulations for the Church in the United States.

- Good Friday Fast – the Second Vatican Council teaches: “Let the Easter fast be kept sacred. Let it be celebrated everywhere on Good Friday and, where possible, prolonged throughout Holy Saturday, so that the joys of the Sunday of the Resurrection may be attained with a clear and uplifted mind.”
- The Fridays of the year outside of Lent are also days of penance. Abstaining from meat is the traditional way of observing these days of penance. However, each person is free to replace the traditional abstinence from meat with some other practice of voluntary self-denial or personal penance. It is obvious that abstaining from meat is meaningless for vegetarians, who much choose some other form of abstinence. It is equally obvious that replacing meat with a gourmet seafood meal is not in keeping with the spirit of Lent. Abstaining from meat may be replaced on Fridays during the year with abstaining from some other food. It may also be replaced with time spend reading and studying the Scriptures, special prayers, such as the rosary or visits to the Blessed Sacrament, acts of thoughtfulness and charity to those in need, or acts of personal witness to ones faith, such as teaching a religious class or speaking out on the sinfulness of abortion, euthanasia, racism and other social evils.

The Catholic faithful should be reminded of the teaching of Pope Paul VI concerning the seriousness of being faithful to Lenten disciplines. He said that the obligation to follow these disciplines in solidarity within the Church is a serious one. However, Catholics should not become scrupulous in this regard. Failure to observe individual days of penance is not considered a serious matter. However, the faithful should look for ways to do more rather than less. Fast an abstinence on the days prescribed, and works of religious and charity on the Friday outside of Lent, should be considered a minimal response to the call of Jesus to go up to Jerusalem with Him in order that we might experience true Christian conversion in our lives.