

Penitential Disciplines of Lent

The Christian faithful, during Lent, are clearly conscious of the need to turn the mind towards those realities which really count, which require Gospel commitment and integrity of life which, through self denial of those things which are superfluous, are translated into good works and solidarity with the poor and needy (Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, #125).

In addition to choosing their own penitential practices, Catholics are also asked to observe the practices of fast and abstinence during the 40 days of Lent. The Lenten Fast and Abstinence Regulations are as follows:

1. Everyone 14 years of age or over is bound to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and all the Fridays of Lent.
2. Everyone 18 years of age and under 59 years of age is bound to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. (The obligation of fasting ceases with the celebration of one's 59th birthday.)
3. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, only one full meatless meal is allowed. Two other smaller meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one's needs, but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted on these two days, but liquids, including milk and fruit juices are allowed. When health or ability to work would be seriously affected, the law does not oblige.
4. Catholics should not lightly excuse themselves from these prescribed minimal penitential practices.

Fasting during Lent

In the fifth century, St. Peter Chrysologus wrote: "Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you open God's ear to yourself." We take the initiative during Lent to curb our desires and exercise an opportunity to put aside what we may want so that we can be reminded of God. Every time we desire that from which we are fasting, we are reminded of why we chose to give up: to think about God. And, when we give something up, we have more to give away, to help a brother or sister in need because we are not using something for ourselves. Our Lenten fast is intimately connected to our Lenten sharing.

From Liturgical Publications, Inc.