



LENT

The Three Traditional Pillars of Lenten Observance: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving

We have been taught to “give up something” for Lent and as we commence this Lenten journey we are concerned about what should I give up or how should I observe the Lenten fast and abstinence. The spirit of the season invites us to go beyond giving up to a time of penance aimed at renewal. **Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving** are placed before us by the Church as very useful tools in bringing about renewal. We focus on renewing our love for God and re-establishing a closer walk with God/re-orienting our life in the ways of the Lord according to the commandments of God.

A Statement Issued by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops says: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.... If we say that we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8-10). Thus Sacred Scriptures declare our guilt to be universal; hence the universal obligation to that repentance which Peter, in his sermon on Pentecost, declared necessary for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38). Hence, too, the Church's constant recognition that all the faithful are required by divine law to do penance. Observance of Lent is the principal season of penance in the Christian year because of those Easter mysteries for the understanding and enjoyment of which Lent is the ancient penitential preparation. Therefore we ask, urgently and prayerfully, that we, as people of God, make of the entire Lenten Season a period of special penitential observance.

The Law

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

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 from age 14 onwards.

Q. I understand that Catholics ages 18 to 59 should fast on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday, but what exactly are the rules for these fasts?

A. Fasting on these days means we can have only one full, meatless meal. Some food can be taken at the other regular meal times if necessary, but combined they should be less than a full meal. Liquids are allowed at any time, but no solid food should be consumed between meals.

Q. Are there exemptions other than for age from the requirement to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?

A. 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.

Prayer

Prayer may appear to be the easiest of the three. As Christians we are supposed to be praying anyway, so why make it a requirement? Because the sad truth is that many Christians do not pray, at least not with any regularity.

This lent find time to give praise to the God who created you and to adore His son who died for you. Kick the habit of keeping God as a divine security blanket, kept in the closet and only brought out when you are scared.

Fasting

Fasting reveals our dependence on God and not the resources of this world. It is a means of self-discipline, chastity, and the restraining of the appetites. On a very practical level it is a means of saving resources to give to the poor. Humanity's "Fall" away from God and into sin began with eating (Gen. 2:17). Christ began his ministry of buying us back by fasting 40 days and 40 nights (Mt. 4:4; Lk. 4:4). Following in the footsteps of Jesus we fast wanting to be liberated from total dependence on food, on matter, on the world. Thus, for the Christian, fasting is the only means by which humans recover their true spiritual nature.

Almsgiving

Almsgiving is "a witness to fraternal charity" and "a work of justice pleasing to God." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2462). The foundational call of Christians to charity is a frequent theme of the Gospels. During Lent, we are asked to focus more intently on "almsgiving," which means donating money or goods to the poor and performing other acts of charity.

There are several special opportunities for almsgiving through donations to Church ministries for which collections are conducted during the Lenten season. This Lenten season, besides the charitable work we normally do, I recommend setting aside a portion of your intended charity towards the replacing of carpets in Church, stairwells and sacristies which has been a major safety concern for some time.

Your pastor,

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