



## Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving The three traditional pillars of Lent

The origins of Catholic prayer, fasting and almsgiving can be traced back to early Christianity. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Saint Irenaeus mentioned a pre-Easter fast of various lengths. The forty days of Lent was established by the Council of Nicaea in 325AD, reflecting Jesus' forty days of fasting and praying in the wilderness symbolizing a period of spiritual preparation and testing recorded in the gospels of Matthew 4:1-2, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-2. The key to renewed appropriation of these practices is to see their link to baptism renewal.



**Prayer:** More time given to prayer during Lent should draw us closer to the Lord. We might pray especially for the grace to live out our baptismal promises more fully. We might pray for the elect who will be baptized at Easter and support their conversion journey by our prayer. We might pray for all those who will celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation with us during Lent that they will be truly renewed in their baptismal commitment.

**Fasting:** Fasting is one of the most ancient practices linked to Lent. In fact, the paschal fast predates Lent as we know it. The early Church fasted intensely for two days before the celebration of the Easter Vigil. This fast was later extended and became a 40-day period of fasting leading up to Easter. Vatican II called us to renew the observance of the ancient paschal fast: "...let the paschal 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 uplifted and clear mind" (# 110).



Fasting is more than a means of developing self-control. It is often an aid to prayer, as the pangs of hunger remind us of our hunger for God. The first reading on the Friday after Ash Wednesday points out another important dimension of fasting. The prophet Isaiah insists that fasting without changing our behavior is not pleasing to God. "This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own" (Isaiah 58:6-7).

Fasting should be linked to our concern for those who are forced to fast by their poverty, those who suffer from the injustices of our economic and political structures, those who are in need for any reason. Thus fasting, too, is linked to living out our baptismal promises. By our Baptism, we are charged with the responsibility of showing Christ's love to the world, especially to those in need. Fasting can help us realize the suffering that so many people in our world experience every day, and it should lead us to greater efforts to alleviate that suffering.

Abstaining from meat traditionally also linked us to the poor, who could seldom afford meat for their meals. It can do the same today if we remember the purpose of abstinence and embrace it as a spiritual link to those whose diets are sparse and simple. That should be the goal we set for ourselves—a sparse and simple meal. Avoiding meat while eating lobster misses the whole point!



**Almsgiving:** It should be obvious at this point that almsgiving, the third traditional pillar, is linked to our baptismal commitment in the same way. It is a sign of our care for those in need and an expression of our gratitude for all God has given to us. Works of charity and the promotion of justice are integral elements of the Christian way of life we began when we were baptized.

## Days of Fasting & Abstinence

**FASTING:** Limit yourself to one full meal and two smaller meals with no snacking between meals.

- Obligatory Days of Fasting are Ash Wednesday & Good Friday
- Catholics aged 18 to 59 are required to fast. When fasting, one full meal is permitted, along with two smaller meals that together do not equal a full meal.

**ABSTINENCE:** Catholics age 14 and older abstain from meat on Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent.

- Obligatory Days: Abstinence from meat is required on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all Fridays during Lent.
- Catholics aged 14 and older are required to abstain from meat.

Exemptions for certain individuals, such as those who are physically or mentally ill, pregnant or breastfeeding women, and others who may jeopardize their health, are exempt from fasting and abstinence requirements. They are encouraged to find alternative sacrifices.

If possible, the fast on Good Friday is continued until the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night as the "paschal fast" to honor the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus and to prepare ourselves to share more fully and to celebrate more readily his Resurrection.

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year-and-calendar/lent/catholic-information-on-lenten-fast-and-abstinence>

2/5/26 lm

Prayer  
Fasting ...  
Almsgiving ...



*"Do you wish your prayer  
to fly toward God?  
Make for it two wings:  
fasting and almsgiving."  
~ Saint Augustine of Hippo*

**Church of Saint Clare**  
**Join us on our Lenten Journey...**



**Ash Wednesday Ashes in Church**  
8:30am Mass, Noon Service and 7pm Mass

**Lenten Friday Fish Fries**  
February 20<sup>th</sup> through March 27<sup>th</sup>  
4-5pm Take out orders only  
5-7pm Dine In & Take out orders  
in the Corpus Christi Academy gym

**Stations of the Cross in Church, 7:30pm**  
Following the fish fry

**Confessions**  
**Weekly Confessions Saturdays, 3-4pm**  
**Wednesdays of Lent, Noon-1pm**  
(except Ash Wednesday & Holy Week)  
**Wednesday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 5-8pm**

**Eucharistic Adoration**  
**In our Adoration Chapel:**  
Monday-Tuesday, 9am-5pm,  
Wednesday-Thursday, 9am-4pm,  
Friday, 9am-3pm, and Saturday, 10a-Noon

**Wednesdays in Church, 9am-1pm**  
(except Ash Wednesday & Holy Week)