

Catholic Regulations for Lent

Ash Wednesday (March 1) and Good Friday (April 14) are days of **fasting and abstinence**, and all Fridays of Lent are days of **abstinence**.

Abstinence—requires all Catholics who have reached their 14th birthday to abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and on all Fridays during Lent (Code of Canon Law §1252). Meat is considered to be the flesh and organs of mammals and fowl. Salt and freshwater fish as well as shell fish are permitted; as well as products derived from animals such as dairy products and eggs.

Fasting—requires that a Catholic from the 18th birthday to the beginning of their 60th birthday reduce the amount of food eaten normally. The Church defines this as one meatless meal a day, and two smaller meatless meals which if added together would not exceed the main meal in quantity. Eating between meals is not permitted, but liquids, including milk and fruit juices, are allowed.

Dispensations—Besides those outside the age limits, those of unsound mind, the sick, the frail, pregnant or nursing women according to the need for meat or nourishment, manual laborers according to need, guests at a meal who cannot excuse themselves without giving great offense or causing enmity and other situations of moral or physical impossibility to observe the penitential discipline.

Furthermore, the faithful are encouraged to observe other penitential practices during Lent. The time of Lent offers three personal challenges:

1. Almsgiving—generously giving to those in need. By doing things to help others, such as offering an extra donation to the poor or helping those in need by providing food or clothing.
2. Fasting—practicing self-discipline and self-denial. By giving up things you hunger after, such as sweets or alcohol; or activities you desire, such as vacations, concerts, or movies.
3. Prayer—reading, hearing and reflecting on the Word of God. By adding to our normal routine, such as going to daily Mass, praying the Stations of the Cross and going to Confession.

The practice by which Holy Water is removed from the fonts for the entirety of the time of Lent and either kept empty or filled with ashes or sand is not permitted. The Congregation of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (CDW) in a letter dated March 14, 2000 (Prot. N. 569/00/L) states: “The ‘fast’ and ‘abstinence’ which the faithful embrace in this season does not extend to abstaining from the sacraments or sacramentals of the Church. The practice of the Church has been to empty the Holy Water fonts on the days of the Sacred Triduum in preparation of the blessing of the water at the Easter Vigil, and it corresponds to those days on which the Eucharist is not celebrated (i.e., Good Friday and Holy Saturday).”

Paschale Solemnitatis no. 26 allows the various Episcopal Conferences to determine the regulations regarding the covering of crosses and images. The rubrics of the Third Edition of the

Roman Missal indicate that in the United States this practice **may** be observed beginning on the vigil of the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Crosses remain covered until the celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday but images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil. **Covering crosses and images for the entire duration of Lent is not permitted.**

Also, please be aware that to preserve the penitential character of the time of Lent, the Ceremonial of Bishops (no. 252) asks that altars not be covered in flowers and that musical instruments be used to provide the necessary support for singing. Please try to keep a solemn and simple décor appropriate for this sacred time and encourage your music ministries to maintain the sacredness and solemnity of Lent through their choice of music.

Keep in mind that funeral Masses may NOT be celebrated on Holy Thursday morning or the Triduum. On days when the Funeral Mass may not be celebrated the funeral liturgy outside Mass may be celebrated.

In the event that the Passion narrative is read in the traditional way, that is in parts, the part of Christ is reserved to the priest (*PS 33*). And a homily, albeit brief, must take place after the reading of the Passion narrative.

Finally, as we approach the celebration of Easter, keep in mind that the Easter Vigil cannot begin before nightfall. In the Diocese of Laredo, the Easter Vigil should not begin before 8:00pm.

Priests are encouraged to look closely at the rubrics for the Triduum to ensure a faithful and solemn celebration of those Sacred days.