

A Few Frequently Asked Questions About Lent

Q. What are the rules about fasting and abstinence?

A. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. The law of fasting allows one full meal and two smaller ones. The law of abstinence prohibits the eating of meat. Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence in the United States. The obligation of abstinence begins at age 14. The law of fasting obliges all between the ages of 18-59.

Pastors and parents are to see to it that minors, though not bound by the law of fast and abstinence, are educated in the authentic sense of penance and encouraged to do acts of penance suitable to their age. All members of the Christian faithful are encouraged to do acts of penance and charity beyond what is prescribed by the law.

Q. When we abstain from meat, what does that include?

A. All Catholics 14 years of age and older are to abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and each Friday of Lent. This is an act of penance in keeping with the Lenten season and Fridays are given special attention because it is the day of our Lord's death. In fact each Friday of the year retains a penitential character according to Church rules and some form of penance, such as abstaining from meat, should be practiced year round.

The rule of abstinence from meat includes all flesh and organs from mammals and fowl. This also includes soups and gravies made from them. Current practice in the Church is guided by the document "Paenitemini," given in 1966 by Pope Paul VI. In previous documents the question of soups and gravies was spoken of specifically. In "Paenitemini" the question is not specifically included. That has led to some discussion of the issue in Catholic circles. For the practice in the Diocese of Little Rock, Bishop Anthony B. Taylor has interpreted the practice to include abstaining from soups and gravies made from meat. By-products such as eggs and cheese are permitted. Fish and other cold-blooded animals have traditionally been the acceptable substitutes on days of abstinence.

Q. Why can't we eat meat on Fridays?

A. This practice is one of the disciplines of Lent that has the goal of love and surrender to God. It requires a break in the normal routine of our day and serves as a reminder that the basic needs of life should point us to the goodness of God. Scripture has a long record of abstaining from certain foods as part of religious practice. In our day that practice continues, not because eating meat is bad, but as a discipline to turn the mind more consciously to God.

Additional Lenten Questions and Answers can be found on the Diocese website at www.dolr.org/lent/qanda.php Check it out!

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