



Lent 2023

Lent, in Christian tradition, is the period of the liturgical year leading up to Easter. The traditional purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer — through prayer, penitence, almsgiving and self-denial — for the annual commemoration during Holy Week of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, which recalls the events linked to the Passion of Christ and culminates in Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Preparation for Baptism and for renewing baptismal commitment lies at the heart of the season. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has reemphasized the baptismal character of Lent, especially through the restoration of the Catechumenate and its Lenten rituals. Our challenge today is to renew our understanding of this important season of the Church year and to see how we can integrate our personal practices into this renewed perspective.

ASHES

Ashes are an ancient symbol of repentance (sackcloth and ashes). They also remind us of our mortality ("remember that you are dust") and thus of the day when we will stand before God and be judged.

PENANCE

Penitential practices take many forms: apologizing to an injured party, healing divisions within our families, fasting during the Lenten season, or graciously accepting the menial tasks of life. The purpose of penance is not to diminish life but to enrich it.

At the heart of all penance is the call to conversion. Jesus' imperative "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15) makes explicit this connection between authentic discipleship and penitential discipline. Discipleship, our following of Jesus, embraces discipline, a firm commitment to do whatever is demanded in furthering God's kingdom. Viewed in this way, the virtue of penance is not optional, just as weeding a garden is not optional for a responsible caretaker. The gardener is concerned with a bountiful harvest; the disciple is concerned about greater conformity to the person of Jesus Christ.

If we are serious about embracing the penitential discipline that is rooted in the call to discipleship, then we will identify specific times and places for prayer, penance, and works of charity. Growth in spiritual maturity demands a certain level of specificity, for it shows that we take seriously God's call to discipline and are willing to hold ourselves accountable. In our Catholic tradition we specify certain days and seasons for special works of penance: Fridays, on which we commemorate the death of the Lord, and Lent, our forty days of preparation for the Easter mysteries.

THE CHURCH'S LAWS OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

THE EUCHARISTIC FAST is a fast of one hour *all throughout the year* before Holy Communion.

ABSTINENCE requires a Catholic 14 years of age until death to abstain from eating meat on **all Fridays of the year** in honor of the Passion of Our Lord on Good Friday.

On the Fridays outside of Lent the U.S. Bishops Conference obtained the permission of the Holy See for Catholics in the US to substitute a penitential, or even a charitable, practice of their own choosing. They must do some penitential/charitable practice on these Fridays.

On Fridays during Lent abstinence from meat on Fridays is obligatory in the United States as elsewhere.

Meat is considered to be the flesh of mammals and fowl. Also forbidden are soups or gravies made from them. Salt and freshwater species of fish, amphibians, reptiles and shellfish are permitted, as are animal derived products such as dairy products.

FASTING is obligatory on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

The law of fasting requires a Catholic from the 18th Birthday (Canon 97) to the 59th Birthday to reduce the amount of food eaten from normal.

The Church defines this as one meal a day, and two smaller meals which if added together would not exceed the main meal in quantity. Eating between meals breaks the fast.

LENTEN EMBER DAYS

As the Season of Lent begins, His Excellency, Most Reverend Alfred A. Schlert asks the clergy and faithful of the Diocese of Allentown to celebrate the Ember Days for the Season as a sign of reparation and healing for the Church. Ember Days are quarterly observances with three days set aside (Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday) to pray in gratitude for the blessings of the season and human labor, to thank God publicly. There are twelve Ember Days in all.

Holy Mother Church provides many opportunities to refresh and renew. The Lenten Ember Days blends with the season of Lent, providing reminders to continue and persevere in the spirit of conversion and penance. The fasting and abstinence would follow the current laws of the Church, with abstaining being from all meat, and fasting would be one full meal a day, with the allowance of two smaller meals that do not equal the main meal, and no eating between meals.

The Church no longer regularly ordains priests during the Quarterly Ember Days, but traditionally this is a special time, particularly Ember Saturday, to pray for priests and for seminarians.

The Lenten Ember Days for 2023 are as follows: Wednesday, March 1, 2023, Friday, March 3, 2023, and Saturday, March 4, 2023.

