

Abstinence



Fasting

Lent is the time before Easter during which the faithful abstain and fast in remembrance of the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made on Calvary. It is a 40-day time of preparation before Easter, the memorial of the death and resurrection of Jesus. There are two main ways that Catholics use to focus on growing closer to God during the Lenten season: abstinence and fasting.

Abstinence

Abstinence is the act of “doing without” or avoiding something. For example, someone may abstain from chocolate or alcohol by not consuming them. Particular days of abstinence during Lent are Fridays, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. As canon law states, Catholics over the age of 14 are expected to abstain from the eating of meat on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays throughout the Lenten Season .

During Lent, Catholics are also encouraged to undertake some sort of personal penance or abstinence. Examples include giving up sweets, a favourite TV show or not listening to the radio in the car on the way to work. Giving up these things isn't some sort of endurance test, but these acts are done to draw the faithful closer to Christ.

For example, a person may give up his favourite TV show, but if he simply turns the television to another channel, the Lenten penance really does not mean as much. Instead, the person should consider devoting the spare time to prayer or doing something for someone, with no expectation of reward.

As always, when considering acts of penance that are stricter than the norm, motivation is key. Why are you giving something up? Is it just to make you feel better, with an element of pride, or superiority?

If you don't eat meat regularly or at all, though, don't write abstinence off. Consider choosing an alternative sacrifice for these days of Lent. It is a tangible way to remember that Jesus suffered and died for us — it's a small way to connect our sacrifice with His.

Fasting

Fasting is the act of doing with less. In the Catholic Church, those ages 18 - 59 must fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On such days, those fasting may eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals, sufficient to maintain strength. However, together, the smaller meals should not equal a full meal. Eating between meals is not encouraged, but liquids are allowed.

It is important to understand that the Church excuses certain people from these obligations. Examples include those who are frail, pregnant or manual laborers. The Church understands that certain people are not able to commit to the Lenten fast.

Fasting is really about your heart. Our hearts are distracted with so many things — social media, work projects, finances — that we can easily forget about God.

When we fast ,we feel a lack — a desire for more — and this creates space for our hearts to remember and refocus on God.

The time of Lent, through fasting and abstaining, may be an important reminder of what it means to suffer. This small suffering should not be met with misery but with great joy as we better understand the incredible sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for humanity.