

PAGELLA OF FACULTIES

Regulations for Lenten Fast and Abstinence

1. In general, first of all, all members of the Christian faithful in their own way are bound to do penance in virtue of divine law. In order that all may be joined in a common observance of penance, penitential days are prescribed in which the Christian faithful in a special way pray, exercise works of piety and charity, and deny themselves by fulfilling their responsibilities more faithfully and especially by observing fast and abstinence (c. 1249).
2. More specifically, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. The current canonical discipline of penance for the United States, in addition to the general character of the Lenten season, is summed up as follows:
 - a. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of abstinence from meat and also of fast, that is, limited to a single full meal. With regard to Good Friday, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council should be recalled: "Let the paschal feast 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" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #110).
 - b. The other Fridays of the season of Lent are days of abstinence from meat.
 - c. Everyone from the fourteenth birthday is bound to observe the law of abstinence. Everyone from the eighteenth birthday up to the sixtieth birthday is bound to observe the law of fast.
3. There is frequent question about the degree of seriousness regarding the obligation of fast and abstinence on the designated days of Lent. The teaching of Pope Paul VI (Poenitemini, February 17, 1966), which the Code embraces, may be simply paraphrased as follows. The obligation to do penance is a serious one; the obligation to observe, as a whole or "substantially," the penitential days specified by the Church is also serious. No one should be scrupulous in this regard. Failure to observe individual days of penance is not considered serious. Rather, it is the failure to observe any penitential days at all or a substantial number of such days which must be considered serious. People should seek to do more rather than less. Fast and abstinence on the days prescribed in addition to works of religion and charity on the Fridays outside Lent should be considered a minimal response to the Lord's call to penance and conversion of life.