

BEST CHRISTIAN LENT DISCIPLINES

The Way of Christ for bringing together mind and heart, body and soul, and making material realities serve the spiritual ones.

EUCCHARISTIC FAST & PREPARATION

In order to appreciate the dignity of the Eucharist, and to prepare to receive the Lord with joy, the Christian community has recommended, since the early centuries, a time of fast from food and drink taken for nutrition. This ancient tradition of receiving the Eucharist before any food shows the importance of sacramental food. A time of silence and recollection is also desirable before Mass and communion.

Normal Rules: The general Eucharistic fast is one hour from food and from beverages. Water and medicine do not break the fast.

For the dying: No Eucharistic fast is necessary.

For the sick (at home or in hospital, even if not confined to bed); for the elderly; and for those who care for them: water and medicine at any time; may receive communion even if they have had something to eat or drink within the previous hour.

ASH WEDNESDAY, LENT, & PENITENTIAL DISCIPLINES

Law of the gospel: The Church wants new emphasis to be given to the evangelical law that a follower of Christ must do penance. While the heart of penance is hatred for sin as an offence against God, external forms of penance are required to deepen and encourage internal virtue.

The penitential character of Lent is to be experienced. On these days, **penance** is to be considered an important requirement of the Christian life. Fulfilment of this duty involves **prayer**, **works of piety** and **charity**, and **self-denial** by fulfilling one's obligations **more faithfully** and especially by observing the prescribed **fast** and **abstinence**.

The paschal fast for **Good Friday** should be observed everywhere and continued, where possible, on **Holy Saturday**. In this way, the people of God will receive the joys of the Lord's resurrection with uplifted and responsive hearts. In the Roman rite, including Canada, **ASH WEDNESDAY AND GOOD FRIDAY ARE DAYS OF FASTING AND OF ABSTINENCE FROM MEAT**. It is in the best interests of the Church that these days be proclaimed and practised in the parish community as days of **true penance**.

Fridays are days of abstinence from meat, but Catholics may substitute special acts of charity or piety requiring a penitential effort on this day.

Privileged forms of penance are to be recommended to the faithful, especially during Lent. These forms are privileged because they are based on the teaching of the gospels (**fasting, almsgiving, prayer, works of mercy**), or because of their traditional value among the people of God (**abstinence from meat**) to enhance our hunger for God.

Christian fasting obtains its full meaning when we deprive ourselves of food in order to be **more open for prayer**, to **share more** in the suffering of those who are starving, and to save money to **give** to the poor. Fasting among Christians is a penitential discipline intended to open our hearts to God and others, a means of purification and spiritual liberation, a witness of the depth of our faith and attachment to God.

The law of **abstinence** from meat binds those who are 14 and older; the law of **fasting** binds those from 18 to 59 years of age. Parents and educators are reminded of their duty to introduce children gradually to the understanding and practice of penance. **Adult example will be the greatest influence in this matter.** All are called to mentor the young.

SEASON OF LENT

Lent is the yearly celebration by the Church of its corporate conversion in Jesus Christ. During this season, the liturgy prepares catechumens to celebrate the paschal mystery by the various stages of Christian initiation. Lent also prepares the faithful for Easter as they recall their baptism and do penance in preparation for the greatest feast of the year. **Lent** has two major purposes; it **recalls baptism**, or **prepares** for it, and it emphasizes a **spirit of penance**. Through forty days of **closer attention to God's word** and of **more fervent prayer**, believers are prepared to celebrate the **paschal mystery**. At all times but especially during Lent, it is important to teach the social consequences of sin as well as the fact that **the heart of the virtue of penance is hatred of sin as an offence against God**. People can **pray and do penance for sinners**. Lenten penance should be **external and social** as well as **internal and individual**. In encouraging penitential practices, consider the wide possibilities in modern life, as well as the circumstances of individuals and communities. **Employing these Christian disciplines allows disciples to walk with Christ in the desert, listen with an undivided heart, and obey the Holy Spirit.**