

LENTEN GUIDELINES

The season of prayer, penance and almsgiving (works of charity) is an opportunity for the faithful to seek conversion in preparation for the Easter sacraments and personal spiritual growth.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. Catholics between the ages of 18-59 are obliged to abstain from meat and fast on these days by not eating between meals, consuming only one full meal a day and two small meals "sufficient to maintain strength". The two small meals should not equal the amount of food consumed in the full meal.

Catholics 14 years old and older are obliged to abstain from meat on the Fridays during Lent. Present law does not include milk or egg products under the category of meat.

The observance of the laws of fast and abstinence during lent is a serious obligation. The individual conscience can decide if there is proper cause to excuse, however a more serious reason should be present to excuse from observing the laws of fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Those whose work or health would be impaired are excused from fasting and abstaining.

Other forms of penance, such as acts of self-denial and works of charity and piety are appropriate as penitential acts. Fasting on other weekdays of Lent is recommended as well.

The Blessing and distribution of ashes take place during a Mass on Ash Wednesday. If the Eucharist is not celebrated, the ashes may be blessed and distributed within the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. The minister of blessing is a bishop, priest or deacon. If pastoral need requires it, others such as extraordinary ministers or deacons may distribute the blessed ashes. Blessed ashes may be brought to the sick and those confined to their homes.

"Since every sin is an offense against God that disrupts our friendship with him", the Sacrament of Reconciliation is encouraged during the season of Lent. This gift is offered to the faithful so that they may "obtain from God's mercy pardon for having offended him and at the same time reconciliation with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion." (Rites, Vol I page 528). Pastors should provide adequate time for the faithful to receive the sacrament of penance prior to Easter.

Funeral Masses are not allowed during the Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday). However, the Funeral Rite Outside of Mass can be held in church during these days with a celebration of a Funeral Mass later.

THE OBSERVANCE OF LENT

In chapter 49 of the Rule of St. Benedict, he exhorts his followers in this way:

The life of a monk ought to be a continuous Lent. However, since few have the strength for this, we urge the entire Community during these days of Lent to keep its manner of life most pure and to wash away... the negligences of other times.

I think Holy Mother Church exhorts all of us in this way, too. By setting up the normal observances of Lent in three categories: *Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving*, the Church gives us the opportunity "to keep our manner of life most pure and to wash away the negligences of other times."

We have had a number of explanations and suggestions for *Fasting*. There are also many ways in which we are invited to give of our time, talent and treasure. In this article I would like to reflect on types of prayer and devotions. Naturally, attending daily Mass whenever possible is giving the highest praise to the Father because we are joining Jesus in his great act of obedience. If daily Mass is impossible, Scripture Reading, especially the daily Mass readings, is another form of prayer.

THE PSALMS – If you were to open your Bible about in the center, you would probably be in the Book of Psalms. The Psalms are 150 inspired prayers. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this book of prayers contains many emotional experiences which are common to all human beings. We must make these psalms the expression of our own personal prayer-life. In the enemies of which David speaks so frequently, we can see our own spiritual enemies: satan, sin, temptation. The deep love for Jerusalem expressed by the psalmist can be taken over and applied to our love for the Church and for Christ. Is there a better way to pray to God than using God's inspired words?

Enclosed on a separate sheet are some lists and categories of the psalms. May you be enriched by praying these prayers.

THE ROSARY – Much has been discussed and written about the rosary, especially since our Holy Father asks us to pray the Luminous Mysteries every Thursday. Many Catholics know that The Rosary has been a long-established prayer, used either privately or in groups.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS – Especially during Lent, parishes pray the Stations as a parish family. Most parishes have Stations on Fridays. It is a good opportunity to offer these reflections on the sufferings and death of Jesus. Sometimes it also means "giving up" going to a basketball game. When we adults make sacrifices, our students see the example and can be led to pray the Stations with us.

THE DIVINE MERCY CHAPLET - A newer form of prayer has come to us from St. Faustina. Throughout this devotion, we pray "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world." Our Lord spoke strongly to St. Faustina: "*I demand from you deeds of mercy which are to arise out of love for me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse yourself from it.*" (742, taken from St. Faustina's Diary Divine Mercy in my Soul.) This can be quite a Lenten form of conversion.

There are many other forms of prayer and each of us is called to more and deeper prayer, especially during Lent. May each of us grow in our love of Jesus Christ, our merciful Redeemer.