

SECTION 10: SPECIAL DAYS

The following policies shall be followed in regard to special days.

10.1 LENT AND EASTER REGULATIONS

A distinction is to be made between Lent and the Easter Triduum. Strictly speaking, Lent ends with the beginning of the Triduum on Holy Thursday. The *Universal Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* (paragraph 28) notes: " The forty days of Lent run from Ash Wednesday up to and excluding the Mass of the Lord's Supper."

Traditionally, Catholics fast on two sorts of occasions. One may be termed times of repentance (for example, Lent). The other occasion is by way of anticipation (for example, the one hour fast before Holy Communion, or the "paschal fast" during the Triduum in anticipation of the Easter event).

10.1.1 LENTEN FAST AND ABSTINENCE

- Fasting is to be observed on Ash Wednesday by all Catholics who are 18 years of age but not yet 59. Those who are bound to fast may take only one full meal. Two smaller meals are permitted if necessary to maintain strength according to each one's needs, but eating solid foods between meals is not permitted.
- Abstinence from meat is to be observed by all Catholics 14 years or older on Ash Wednesday and on all Fridays of Lent.
- The determination of certain days as obligatory days of penance should not be understood as limiting the occasions for Christian penance. The spirit of the season of Lent should be maintained throughout the weeks of Lent.
- The obligation to observe penitential days of the Church is serious. Failure to observe individual days of penance is not necessarily considered serious. No one should be scrupulous in this regard. People should seek to do more rather than less, since fast and abstinence on the days prescribed should be considered a minimal response to the Lord's call to penance and conversion of life.

10.1.2 THE PASCHAL FAST

- All Catholics of the appropriate age (see above) are to fast and abstain on Good Friday.
- The Second Vatican Council observed: "Let the paschal fast 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 attended with uplifted and clear mind.” (SC, 110)

10.1.3 ASH WEDNESDAY

- The blessing and imposition of ashes takes place only on Ash Wednesday ordinarily during the celebration of the Eucharist. *The Roman Missal* contains the Rite for the Blessing of Ashes within Mass. “The Order for the Blessing and Distribution of Ashes outside of Mass” is found in the *Book of Blessings*. If the Eucharist is not celebrated, the blessing and distribution is to take place within a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.
- The minister for the blessing of ashes within a Mass is a bishop or priest. In the absence of the bishop or priest, a deacon may bless ashes during the blessing and distribution of ashes that occurs within the celebration of a Liturgy of the Word.
- Other persons may be associated with the bishop or priest in the imposition of ashes; e.g., deacons, and special ministers of Communion or other lay persons when there is a true pastoral need. No lay person, however, may bless the ashes. (*Book of Blessings*, 1659)
- Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and deacons may bring blessed ashes to the sick and those confined to their home. If a minister is not available, a member of the family or another person may bring blessed ashes to a shut-in, using one of the formulas in *The Roman Missal* to impose the ashes.

10.1.4 EASTER VIGIL

The Roman Missal states that the entire celebration of the Easter Vigil takes place at night. The Vigil is not to begin before nightfall and is to end before daybreak on Easter Sunday. No Mass may precede the Easter Vigil.

- The *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts*, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1988, notes that “the very concept of the vigil has almost come to be forgotten in some places, with the result that it is celebrated as if it were an evening Mass, in the same way and at the same time as the Mass celebrated on Saturday evening in anticipation of the Sunday.”
- The *Circular Letter* repeats the norm of *The Roman Missal* and adds that “this rule is to be taken according to its strictest sense.”
- Pastors are reminded that daylight savings time will sometimes begin before Easter. The Easter Vigil should not be scheduled for at least forty-five minutes to one hour

after sunset on Holy Saturday.

10.2 HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

On December 13, 1991, the National Conference issued a decree indicating the Holy Days of Obligation to be observed in the United States (*in accord with Canon 1246*). These holy days are:

- Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1)
- Solemnity of the Ascension (celebrated on 7th Sunday of Easter)
- Solemnity of the Assumption (August 15)
- Solemnity of All Saints (November 1)
- Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8)
- Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ (December 25)

Whenever January 1, the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, or August 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption, or November 1, the Solemnity of All Saints, falls on a Saturday or a Monday, the precept to attend Mass is abrogated. This decree was reviewed and confirmed by the Apostolic See on July 4, 1992, and its effective date in the United States was January 1, 1993.

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