



## REGULATIONS ON FAST AND ABSTINENCE DURING LENT

Ash Wednesday is February 17, 2021. Below are some of the rules and regulations binding on Roman Catholics on Ash Wednesday and throughout the penitential season of Lent.

Summed up succinctly, **Roman Catholics must fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Wednesday, February 17, 2021 and Good Friday, April 2, 2021.** Ash Wednesday is one of two yearly days of obligatory fasting and abstinence for Roman Catholics, along with Good Friday. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the norms of fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59.

**FASTING** means a person is permitted to eat one full meal. Two smaller meals may also be taken, but they are not to equal that of a full meal.

**ABSTINENCE** means a person is not permitted to eat meat on all Fridays during Lent. The rule of abstinence from meat is binding upon Catholics aged 14 and onwards.

For those outside the age limits, Canon Law notes that "Pastors of souls and parents are to ensure that even those who by reason of their age are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence, are taught the true meaning of penance."

Additionally, the USCCB Questions and Answers about Lent page states the non-age related exemptions.

*"THOSE THAT ARE EXCUSED FROM FAST AND ABSTINENCE OUTSIDE THE AGE LIMITS INCLUDE THE PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY ILL INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS SUFFERING FROM CHRONIC ILLNESSES SUCH AS DIABETES. ALSO EXCLUDED ARE PREGNANT OR NURSING WOMEN. IN ALL CASES, COMMON SENSE SHOULD PREVAIL, AND ILL PERSONS SHOULD NOT FURTHER JEOPARDIZE THEIR HEALTH BY FASTING."*

The other obligatory day of fasting and abstinence is Good Friday, the day on which Catholics remember the death of Jesus on the cross. On the U.S. Bishops website, they explain the Good Friday fast should, when possible, last through the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night.

While those are the only two days of full fasting and abstinence required, all of Lent should be a time of spiritual formation and preparation for Easter.

"For all other weekdays of Lent, we strongly recommend participation in daily Mass and a self-imposed observance of fasting," the bishops wrote in the Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence. "In the light of grave human needs which weigh on the Christian conscience in all seasons, we urge, particularly during Lent, generosity to local, national, and world programs of sharing of all things needed to translate our duty to penance into a means of implementing the right of the poor to their part in our abundance. We also recommend spiritual studies, beginning with the Scriptures as well as the traditional Lenten Devotions (sermons, Stations of the Cross, and the rosary), and all the self-denial summed up in the Christian concept of 'mortification.'"

The Catholic tradition of "giving something up" for Lent is a pious tradition but it is not regulated by church law.