

We all make comparisons. The Pharisees and scribes compare the actions of Jesus and his disciples to those of John the Baptist. They are trying to find fault with Jesus by highlighting how they follow the rules and Jesus and his disciples do not. It happens in every family. One child will compare themselves to another as they plead with a parent for special treatment.

In his own subtle way without boasting, Jesus helps the Pharisees and scribes recognize that he is unique. He is the bridegroom, the honored guest, the Son of God come down from heaven. It is not a time for fasting.

Later on, there will be fasting. The jealousy and envy of the scribes and Pharisees will get the better of them and they will plot to have Jesus crucified. When Jesus dies on the cross, the bridegroom offers his life out of love for his bride the church. We are his modern-day disciples. The bridegroom died on Good Friday to set us free from sin. So, it is most appropriate for us to fast and pray especially on Fridays.

Those who grew up in the days prior to Vatican II remember every Friday of the year as a day to abstain from eating meat. A little over 50 years ago, the discipline was relaxed and the only Fridays that required fasting were the ones during Lent. In doing so, bishops invited Catholics to choose some other penitential practice on the Fridays outside of Lent since eating meat was now technically permissible. Unfortunately, people's memories are short. People do remember to abstain from meat during the Fridays of Lent, **but** on the other Fridays of the year the practice of some other sacrifice has largely been overlooked.

Our own sacrifice unites us to the redemptive suffering and death of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Each Friday, we should be very conscious of the sacrifice Jesus made for us and remember to sacrifice in our own way in memory of the death of the Lord. During Lent the practice of not eating meat is prescribed. Every other Friday of the year, with love in our hearts, and appreciation for the sacrifice Jesus made for us, we should be looking for opportunities to sacrifice in some way.

Voluntary sacrifice, "out of love for the Lord Jesus is a powerful action that can yield great graces. For these reasons, the bishops of the United States have encouraged Catholics to make every Friday a day of self-denial and penitential witness in memory of the Lord's ultimate sacrifice for us."ⁱ

Today is Friday, what act of self-denial might you freely choose? The thought that comes most readily to mind is to give up meat by free choice. Or perhaps you may want to put more thought into it. Giving something up that we most enjoy, or committing ourselves to works of charity, are additional ways to observe the Friday penitential practice. Certainly amidst the pandemic, as we see doctors and nurses making heroic efforts to care for others with the coronavirus, we might consider fasting in solidarity with their sacrifices as we pray to our Lord for an end to the pandemic. Others may wish to pray and fast and abstain as a way of calling for change in our society so that there is an end to racial discrimination and the unfair treatment of minorities. No sacrifice on our part goes unnoticed by our Lord.

To encourage us to put new wine into new wineskins, the bishops offer the following suggestions to consciously choose each Friday to pray and sacrifice:ⁱⁱ

- Either abstain from meat or choose some other food or beverage.
- We can give something up other than food or drink. Consider fasting from technology.
- Whatever annoys or inconveniences you, can be a source of sin if you let it well up into anger, or a source of grace if we offer it up to God.
- Go out of your way to help someone. Offer up a work of charity.

And in case you are worried that you might forget before next Friday, you can text FAST [F A S T] to 55000 [5 5 0 0 0] in order to get a friendly reminder to Pray and Fast each Friday.

ⁱ usccb.org/issues-and-action/take-action-now/call-to-prayer/call-to-prayer-fast

ⁱⁱ *ibid*