

**In Today's Gospel**

Throughout salvation history, God established covenants with his people. In the first reading today, we see the establishment of the Noahic Covenant, the covenant that God made with Noah after the great flood. God would go on to establish covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David. In the book of Jeremiah, he promises to establish a new covenant, a promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

We have begun the season of Lent, a season that culminates with Christ establishing that new covenant on Holy Thursday and sealing it with his blood on the cross. In today's gospel, Jesus tells us that, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." The promises of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. Let us renew our covenant with God. Repent from sin, proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and together, we will enter the kingdom of God.

**Fasting and Abstinence**

Every year, as we enter the season of Lent, I inevitably get questions about the requirements for fasting and abstinence during Lent. What do they mean, fasting and abstinence? Who is required to fast? What are the days of absence?

According to the Church's Code of Canon Law, fasting is required for anyone over the age of 17 but below 60. Abstinence is required for anyone over the age of 14. (Canon 1252) We must, however, avoid taking an overly legalistic view of the canons. Canon 1252 further states, "pastors of souls and parents are to take care that minors not bound by the law of fast and abstinence are also educated in a genuine sense of penance."

We fast not simply because the Church tells us to fast but as a sign of penance. In writing its laws, the Church considers the health effects of fasting and abstinence on people, both young and old. As you consider your penitential practice during Lent, please keep in mind that all we do should be oriented towards developing a "genuine sense of penance." Do not put your health at risk to fast, but at the same time, if you can fast safely, it is a good penitential practice regardless of your age.

There are two days in which we are called to both fasting and abstinence. (Canon 1250) One of those days, Ash Wednesday, is already past. The other day is Good Friday. The Church defines fasting as eating only one full meal during the day and two light meals to maintain strength, according to one's means. Eating between meals is not permitted, but liquids are allowed.

In addition, we are called to abstinence on all Fridays during Lent. In this context, abstinence refers to the prohibition from eating the flesh of mammals, birds, and other warm-blooded animals. The flesh of the fish and cold-blooded animals may be eaten. The reason for these distinctions is in part due to thousands of years of tradition and the influence of Jewish dietary laws. Ultimately, however, these laws are made by men and so can be changed by men. That is why it is okay to have a muskrat dinner Downriver, although I'm not sure why you would want to.

In addition to the fasting and abstinence required on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and Fridays during Lent, we should also embrace these practices by choosing to "give something up" during Lent. Whatever we decide to give up, it should be something meaningful for us and should be a sacrifice. We must remember that we do this not merely to get credit for giving something up but to develop a "genuine sense of penance."

We increase that genuine sense of penance not just by what we give up but also by what we do. In addition to fasting, we should also embrace the spiritual practices of prayer and almsgiving during Lent.

View this full bulletin under the *HOME (Bulletin)* tab on our webpage [stmarywayne.org](http://stmarywayne.org).