

Diocesan Lenten Regulations

The penitential days for the universal church are each Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent. Ash Wednesday (March 1st) marks the beginning of Lent. Lent is an opportunity to prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration of Easter. The following regulations are observed in this sacred season:

Abstinence

Catholics 14 years of age or older must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent. It is only on the other Fridays of the year that abstinence may be substituted by another form of penance.

Fasting

Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59 (inclusive) are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. There is a limit of one full meal and no food between meals on those days. Two smaller meals are permitted as needed to maintain one's strength.

Sacrament of Penance

All the faithful who have reached the age of reason are bound faithfully to confess their grave sins at least once a year. Lent is a good time to fulfill this precept of the Church. Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive holy communion without previously having been to sacramental confession (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1457).

Holy Communion

Catholics who have received their first holy communion are obliged to make a worthy reception of holy communion at least once a year during the Lenten or Easter seasons. In the United States, this reception of holy communion may take place from the first Sunday of Lent (March 5) through Trinity Sunday (June 11th).

Other Lenten Observances

Each weekday of Lent is also an obligatory day of penance. Some recommendations include the participation in daily Mass, increased prayer or spiritual study, self-imposed fasting or abstinence, works of charity and participation in traditional Lenten devotions (Parish missions, Stations of the Cross, Adoration, Rosary).

The proper context for all Lenten discipline is the conversion of our hearts. As the catechism states, however, "interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance." These penances help us to redirect our whole life to God and away from sin and the evil we have committed (CCC 1430-1439).

As we celebrate our Lenten penitential practices, may we experience this conversion of heart and be strengthened in our faith in God's mercy. May our discipline, through God's grace, lead us to full participation in the eternal Easter.