



# SPIRITUALITY and THE OBLIGATIONS OF LENT

Lent is a 40-day season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at sundown on Holy Thursday. It is a period of preparation for the triumphant celebration of the Lord's Resurrection at Easter.

We are called not only to abstain from luxuries during Lent but to a true inner conversion of heart as we seek to follow Christ more faithfully. We recall the waters of Baptism in which we were also baptized into Christ's death, died to sin and evil, and began a new life in Christ.

During Lent, we seek the Lord in prayer by reading Sacred Scripture, seeking Him in the Sacraments, and practicing self-control through fasting.

We are also reminded of almsgiving. Almsgiving always makes one think of money. But, another kind of almsgiving gives of ourselves in an even deeper way. Giving our time to others. Giving kind compassion. The compassion taught us by Jesus when He walked among us. A call to someone we know is afraid, lonely, and worried. A smile is a gift all on its own. Tea with a newly bereaved widow. A card to someone who is ill or someone we know would be uplifted to know someone cares.... It is all so simple and yet it is worth its weight in gold. Lent can be a time to pay attention to how much compassion is in our hearts. Remember the Beatitudes so recently read to us at Mass.

A primer for the rules for fasting and abstinence is good for all of us, so here goes.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are the two yearly days of obligatory fasting and abstinence for Roman Catholics, obligatory for those 18 years 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 a full meal. The rule of abstinence from meat is binding upon Catholics aged 14 years and onward. Those that are excused from fasting and abstinence outside the age limits include the physically or mentally ill including individuals suffering from chronic illness. Also excluded are pregnant or nursing women. Common sense should prevail.

A rule that is often forgotten is that there is, at all times, a requirement to fast for an hour before Holy Communion. Exceptions are the elderly, the infirm, and those who care for them.

Lent is a time for renewal. A time to ponder what it means to be a Catholic today. A time to be a witness for Christ. Only 40 days....but it could mean allowing grace to enter our lives, a time for us to truly shine as followers of Christ in a darkening world.

To truly ponder the mystery of a Savior who thought of each of us as He underwent the agony of the cruel death He so willingly suffered, there are the Stations of the Cross. Each Friday throughout Lent the Stations are offered for our meditation and prayer. Each Friday evening we gather in remembrance and gratitude while growing in our understanding of the Great love of our God.

*By Sandy Pineault*