

RULES OF THE LENTEN FAST

Only one full meal may be taken. Two other light meatless meals may be taken, but which together do not constitute the quantity of a full meal. On Friday no meat may be taken at all. No solid food may be eaten between meals. According to the traditional law, those who have achieved their 21st birthday are bound, and those who have achieved their 59th birthday are no longer bound. All, from seven years on up, are bound to the abstinence (partial or full, depending on the day) on the Ember Days of Lent. There is no fasting on Sundays, or on St. Patrick's Day. The fast ends at 12:00 noon on Holy Saturday.

The two light meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one's needs; together they may not equal another full meal.

Eating between meals is forbidden. Liquids, including milk and fruit juices, are allowed. Malted milk and milk shakes are forbidden. Ordinary chocolate milk, however, is permitted. The use of egg and milk foods is permitted on all days of both fast and abstinence. Alcoholic drinks are permitted. In order that a drink may not be injurious, a small quantity of food may be taken with it (e.g., two small cookies with a cup of coffee).

When health or the ability to work would be seriously affected, the law does not oblige. One who is not obliged to fast may eat meat as often as he wills on days when fasting alone is prescribed. In Lent, there is a special law of abstinence, apart from that of the fast, on the following days: Ash Wednesday, the Ember Days, and Fridays. This law of abstinence applies to all from age seven until death.

To interrupt the principal meal for more than a half an hour without reason would be a venial sin; should the interruption last more than one hour — without reason — it would constitute a mortal sin.

In determining the amount which one may take at the light meals, the following things must be considered: a person's physical constitution, the kind of work he does, the length of the fast, and the severity of the climate. In general, a person may eat enough to enable him to do his work well and to continue the fast without considerable detriment to himself.

If one — deliberately or by mistake — has eaten two full meals on a fast day, one can no longer observe the fast and therefore may eat to satiety again.

Soup with meat stocks or gravies made from meat are forbidden whenever one must abstain from meat. (In restaurants, always ask if the soup has a meat stock).

He who has once eaten meat on a day of abstinence may still observe the law, and is therefore not free to eat meat again that day. On a day, however, on which only the fast obliges, the eating of meat outside of the main meal constitutes a break in the fast, and therefore one would be free to eat meat again for the rest of the day, even if the violation was deliberate.

The laws of fast and abstinence have been always binding under grave sin. However they do admit of slight violations, which are only venial. It would not be mortally sinful to eat, for example, two ounces of food outside of the meal times. More than four ounces (total during the day) would constitute grave matter. Two ounces of meat would constitute a grave violation of the abstinence law.

Reasons excusing from the law of fasting: (1) Those who are ill or convalescent persons in delicate health; (2) those subject to significant headaches or lack of sleep from fasting; (3) pregnant and nursing women; (4) the poor, if they lack enough to eat at one time to satisfy their hunger; (5) people who do manual labor, e.g., farmers, millworkers, stone masons, etc., provided that they actually work a great part of the day; (6) professors, teachers, students, preachers, confessors, physicians, judges, lawyers, etc., are excused if fasting would hinder them in their work; (7) those who must make a strenuous journey on foot or by car. Traveling by train or airplane does not excuse, unless it becomes impossible to observe the normal order of meals, e.g., on a long flight or series of flights. One may not undertake manual labor purely in order to avoid the law of fast.

Other counseled practices in Lent: To attend Mass daily, to receive Holy Communion often, to take part frequently in exercises of piety, to give generously to the works of religion and charity, to perform acts of kindness towards the sick, the aged, and the poor, and to practice voluntary self-denial with regard to alcoholic drink and worldly amusements, to pray more fervently.

Custom forbids public festivities during Lent (and Advent). In determining the sinfulness of these one must consider the time (e.g., Good Friday), the kind of entertainment, the opinions of conscientious Catholics, and the possibility of scandal.