



BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE APOSTOLIC SEE

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Lenten penance & obligations

LENT 2020

The Church's Canon Law reaffirms our obligation to do penance. The special times of penance are all Fridays throughout the year, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and the season of Lent.

- We recall that St John the Baptist prepared for the coming of the Lord by “preaching a baptism of repentance.” Christ began his ministry on earth with the exhortation to repent: “Repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15)
- Repentance means the rejection of sin. It implies conversion to, and reconciliation with God.
- Penance is the concrete expression of repentance. It takes the forms of prayer, self-denial, and works of charity. Each of these identifies us more closely with our Saviour. By penance we make satisfaction for our sins, and take real steps in the renewal of our lives. Penance is the proof of our repentance.
- Repentance and conversion are central, ongoing features of Christian living. Penance has to be a constant, even daily, practice in our lives. In nominating special times of penance, the Church encourages and promotes in all of us the habit of penance.
- Furthermore, observance of these special times by all Catholics throughout the universal Church emphasises what we call “the social dimension of sin”. The sin of the individual member always in some measure infects the whole body. Therefore during Lent and on the Fridays of the year, we do penance, not only on our own account, but also in the name of the Church and of the world.
- We must take very seriously our penitential obligations and be sure to carry them out. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has not restricted our penance to fast and abstinence in all cases, it has left room for our own responsible choice. Where we make the choice, we should carefully select the form of penance that we consider most appropriate for our own circumstances and growth in the Christian life.

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Paschal Precept

Each of the faithful is obliged to receive Holy Communion at least once a year. This is to be done between Ash Wednesday (26 February 2020) and Trinity Sunday (7 June 2020) unless for a good reason it is done at another time during the year.

All the faithful are obliged to confess their grave sins at least once a year.

Days of Penance

AGE OBLIGATION

Under 14	No abstaining or fasting obliged.
14–17	Abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. <i>No fasting obliged.</i>
18–59	Abstain from meat on on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. <i>Fasting obliged.</i>
60+	No abstaining or fasting obliged, while maintaining the spirit of Lent.

On all other Fridays of the year the law of the common practice of penance is fulfilled by performing any one of the following:

- a) **Prayer** — for example, Mass attendance; family prayer; a visit to a church or chapel; reading the Bible; making the Stations of the Cross; praying the Rosary.
- b) **Self-denial** — for example, not eating meat; not eating sweets or dessert; giving up entertainment to spend time with the family; limiting food and drink so as to give to the poor of one's own country (eg, Project Compassion).
- c) **Helping others** — for example, special attention to someone who is poor, physically or mentally ill, elderly, lonely, bereaved, depressed, addicted or overburdened.

With the Royal Commission concluded, our country and our Church enter into a new moment. Bishops are calling upon the Catholic community in Australia to embrace this new moment by beginning the penitential season of Lent with four days of fasting and reparation. These are spiritual practices which express our desire for God's reconciling and healing grace.

Through fasting, we stand in solidarity with the victims and survivors of abuse whose much deeper hunger is for healing and peace in their lives. Through reparation, we make amends for the sin of those in the Church who abused children or failed to listen and act when they should have.

The days of fasting and reparation in sorrow for child sexual abuse and for the healing of victims and survivors will be marked by prayer – in our homes and in our Catholic communities.

Please take to heart the importance of these days in preparing the Church to respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission and to make the journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter. We cannot undo the past. With God's help, we can make the future better.

Liturgical and other prayer resources can be accessed at:

www.catholic.org.au/fastandingreparation