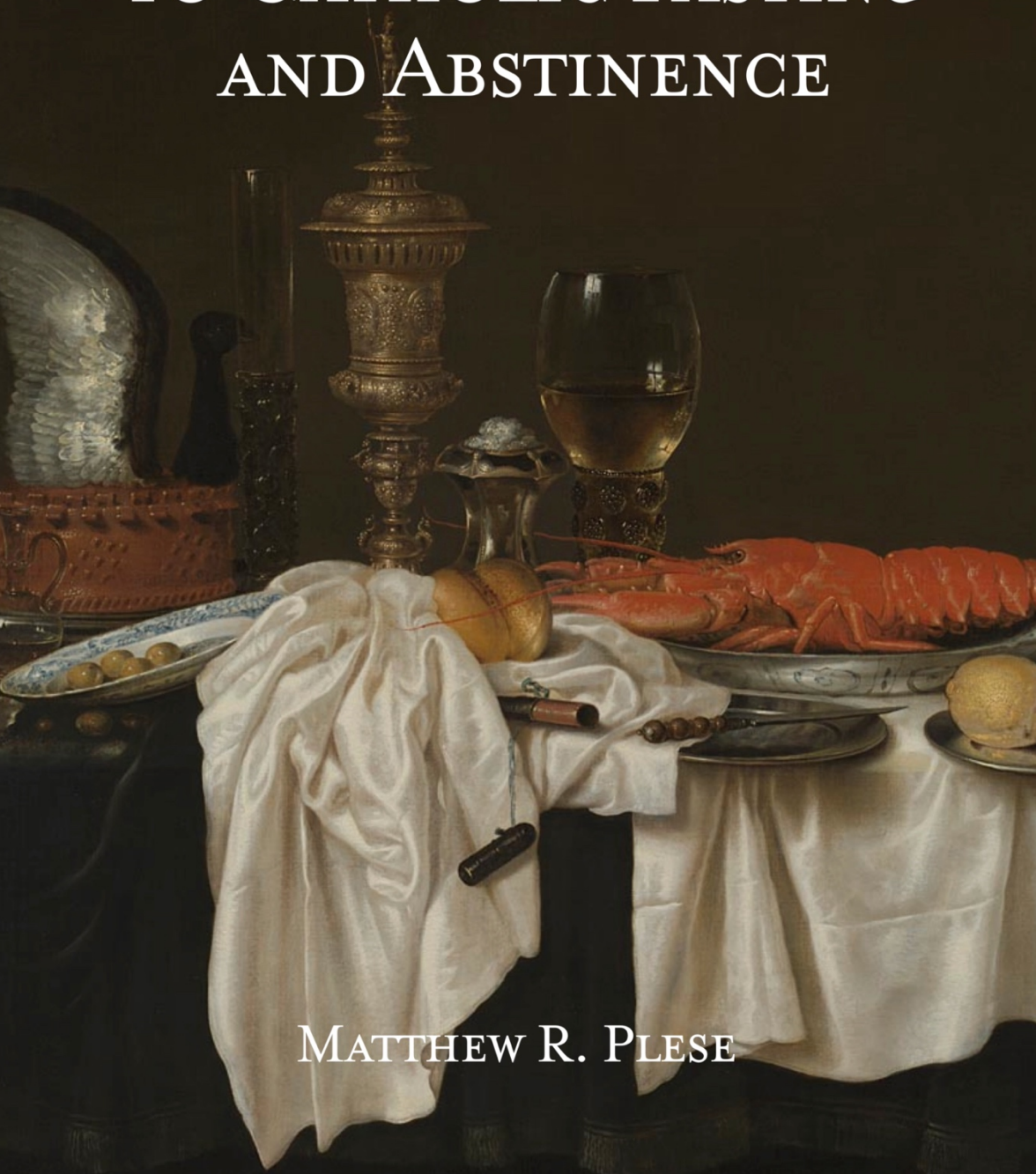


# THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO CATHOLIC FASTING AND ABSTINENCE



MATTHEW R. PLESE

## **Protestation**

In all that I shall say in this book I submit to what is taught by Our mother, the Holy Roman Church; if there is anything in it contrary to this, it will be without my knowledge. Therefore, for the love of Our Lord, I beg the learned men who are to read it to look at it very carefully and to make known to me any faults of this nature which there may be in it and the many others which it will have of other kinds.

If there is anything good in it, let this be to the glory and honor of God in the service of His most sacred Mother, our Patroness and Lady.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the protestation given by St. Teresa of Avila in *Way of Perfection*



The Definitive Guide  
to Catholic Fasting & Abstinence

By Matthew R. Plese



THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE  
TO CATHOLIC FASTING  
AND ABSTINENCE

Matthew R. Plese



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*Our Lady of Victory, pray for us!*

Medical disclaimer: any suggestions taken based on this book should be cleared by medical personnel, if necessary and appropriate.

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## FORWARD

I am pleased to be able to write this preface for what seems to be and what is a work of art, a work of love. Fasting, a great means of self-mastery and love of God, cannot be reduced in its importance for the spiritual life though many have tried to sever this connection by abrogating the requirement to fast either in part or in whole. It's history is like a romance where at first it leads you into friendship and then into a zealous love. However, not all romances have a happy ending or at least not all maintain that zeal which at first was on fire. This is also the case for fasting's history. While at first fasting was practiced with a zeal unheard of today, it was later lessened or abrogated. Sometimes it was truly a matter of mercy or of charity. Oftentimes however the reduction of fasting by the Church was a matter of pure acquiescence. It does not follow then that just because the Church requires you nowadays to fast twice a year that you should only fast twice a year or that it is okay to do so. It would not be the first case of imprudence on the part of the bishops to allow such a thing to develop.

If we are Catholic, truly Catholic, and love the Church, love Jesus Christ, and want to save our souls there will then be either implicitly or explicitly a desire for us to do everything we can to live in the fullest measure possible. However, this comes at a cost. It requires of us a great deal of work well beyond the minimum. Part of that cost is enduring the difficult fasts of antiquity. Part of that cost lies in research and studying. Here we have done that part for you. Living in the fullest measure possible in this regard is learning what is organic development in regard to fasting and what is the fullness of fasting. The only way one is going to be able to know these things is if he learns fasting's forgotten and untold history. This book is that story.

That being said, studying the history of fasting is only the first part. From there we must pray. We must pray to God that He

gives us a love for fasting that through it we may give our hearts and our bodies entirely to Him. We must pray for courage and temperance and when we fast, we must seek the will of God through it, since if we do not, we risk loving ourselves more than we love God. Knowing of the history of fasting is only that first step as the work to be done is great and it is hard. It is hard work to fast like Pope St. Leo the Great. It is hard work to fast like St. John Chrysostom. However hard it may be, it is worth it and it is a great joy, for in fasting heartily God gives us new flesh and a new heart. He takes away the stone and the rot. He gives us a clean heart. Don't neglect Him another day. Don't miss out on the opportunity to love Him more, and most importantly keep to the fullness of the Faith, to the fullness of tradition, for it is there that the love of God is on fire for men.

Tyler Gonzalez

# The Complete History of Catholic Fasting & Abstinence



## **Fasting in Biblical Times**

*In principio*, in the beginning, the very first Commandment of God<sup>2</sup> to Adam and Eve was one of fasting from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (cf. Genesis 2:16-17), and their failure to fast brought sin and disorder to all of creation. The second sin of mankind was gluttony. Both are intricately tied to fasting.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. St. Basil, *Sermo de jejuniis*, pp. 31, 163, 98

Both Elijah and Moses fasted for forty days in the Old Testament before seeing God. Until the Great Flood, man abstained entirely from the flesh meat of animals (cf. Genesis 9:2-3). Likewise, in the New Testament, St. John the Baptist, the greatest prophet (cf. Luke 7:28) fasted and his followers were characterized by their fasting. And our Blessed Lord also fasted for forty days (cf. Matthew 4:1-11) not for His own needs but to serve as an example for us. Our Redeemer said, “Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Fasting and abstinence from certain foods characterized the lives of man since the foundation of the world.

### **The Purpose of Fasting**

The Church has hallowed the practice of fasting, encourages it, and mandates it at certain times. Why? The Angelic Doctor writes that fasting is practiced for a threefold purpose:

First, in order to bridle the lusts of the flesh... Secondly, we have recourse to fasting in order that the mind may arise more freely to the contemplation of heavenly things: hence it is related of Daniel that he received a revelation from God after fasting for three weeks. Thirdly, in order to satisfy for sins: wherefore it is written: ‘Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting and in weeping and in mourning.’ The same is declared by Augustine in a sermon: ‘Fasting cleanses the soul, raises the mind, subjects one’s flesh to the spirit, renders the heart contrite and humble, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, kindles the true light of chastity.’<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 147, a. 1.

St. Basil the Great also affirmed the importance of fasting for protection against demonic forces: “The fast is the weapon of protection against demons. Our Guardian Angels more readily stay with those who have cleansed our souls through fasting.”

The Baltimore Catechism echoes these sentiments: “The Church commands us to fast and abstain, in order that we may mortify our passions and satisfy for our sins” (Baltimore Catechism #2 Q. 395). Concerning this rationale, Fr. Thomas Kinkead in *An Explanation Of The Baltimore Catechism of Christian Doctrine* published in 1891 writes, “Remember it is our bodies that generally lead us into sin; if therefore we punish the body by fasting and mortification, we atone for the sin, and thus God wipes out a part of the temporal punishment due to it.”

Pope St. Leo the Great in 461 wisely counseled that fasting is a means and not an end in itself. For those who could not observe the strictness of fasting, he sensibly said, “What we forego by fasting is to be given as alms to the poor.”<sup>4</sup> To simply forgo fasting completely, even when for legitimate health reasons, does not excuse a person from the universal command to do penance (cf. Luke 13:3).

### **To Love Fasting**

The Rule of St. Benedict written in 516 AD by the illustrious St. Benedict states in part: “O Lord, I place myself in your hands and dedicate myself to you. I pledge myself to do your will in all things: To love the Lord God with all my heart, all

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<sup>4</sup> It must be stated that we do not gain merits in the performance of penance, no matter how severe, if we are in the state of mortal sin. Staying in the state of grace is essential for meriting. For more information on this essential prerequisite to fasting, see <https://acatholiclife.blogspot.com/2020/03/in-state-of-mortal-sin-we-gain-no.html>.

my soul, all my strength. Not to kill. Not to steal... To chastise the body. Not to seek after pleasures. To love fasting..."

How can we love fasting? Fr. Adalbert de Vogue, OSB explains, "To love fasting one must experience it, but to experience it one must love it. The way to get out of this circle is easy: trust in the word of God, in the example of the saints, in the great voice of tradition, and trusting in this witness, try it."

To love fasting is our goal. Fasting should never be performed without an increase in prayer or almsgiving. It should not be performed grudgingly and in anger. Likewise, it should not be performed for the vain purpose of losing weight or even the natural good of improving one's health. Fasting must have God as its end.

### **Purpose of Studying Fasting & Abstinence**

Fasting is one of the chief means of penance we can perform to make satisfaction for sin, as our Lady of Fatima repeatedly called for. Understanding the decline of fasting over time in the Church should inspire us to observe these older customs and to encourage other Catholics to do so for the purpose of making satisfaction for sin.

The history of fasting in the Catholic Church, like other disciplines, has undergone considerable changes throughout the centuries. Unlike dogma, which is unchangeable, disciplines like fasting may change over time. However, in a modern Church that legislates fasting only two days a year, we find a woefully lacking answer to Heaven's incessant calls for penance and reparation.

While the purpose of fasting has remained the same, how fasting is observed has changed. As more Catholics seek to rediscover the traditions of earlier centuries and piously

observe these traditions, they are often confused by the changing disciplines and exceptions for certain times, places, and circumstances. St. Francis de Sales remarked, “If you’re able to fast, you will do well to observe some days beyond what are ordered by the Church.”

This book will explain fasting and how it has changed over the centuries in one of the most complete compilations yet written. Unfortunately, most summaries of fasting are either inaccurate or incomplete. However, rather than being a mere academic exercise, the purpose of studying the history of fasting is ultimately to help us rediscover these more ancient practices in an attempt to better observe our Lord and our Blessed Mother’s call for penance and reparation for sins.

### **Fasting in the Early Church Through the 5th Century**

*And the disciples of John and the Pharisees used to fast; and they come and say to him: Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast; but thy disciples do not fast? And Jesus saith to them: Can the children of the marriage fast, as long as the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them; and then they shall fast in those days (Mark 2:18-20).*

Fasting has been a part of the Catholic Church since the time of the Apostles who instituted fasting shortly after our Redeemer’s Ascension into Heaven. Fasting in the Apostolic Age constituted two primary fasting periods: the weekly devotional fasts and the Lenten Fast.

### **Weekly Fasting**

In the Early Church, fasting (which included abstinence as part of it) was widely observed each week on Wednesday and



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Friday.<sup>5</sup> This practice is kept by some pious Catholics and Eastern Catholics.

The *Didache*, the Teaching of the Apostles, written by the end of the first century states in chapter 8: “But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites; for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week; but fast on the fourth day and the Preparation.” Since Sunday is the first day of the week, the fourth day referred to Wednesday and the day of Preparation referred to Friday. The phrase “day of preparation” preceding the sabbath on Saturday occurs in the Scriptures in Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; and John 19:14,31,42. All such instances unequivocally confirm that it refers to Friday.

On the rationale for fasting on these days, St. Peter of Alexandria, Patriarch of Alexandria until his death in 311 AD, explains: “On Wednesday because on this day the council of the Jews was gathered to betray our Lord; on Friday because on this day He suffered death for our salvation.” Likewise, the 1875 Catechism of Father Michael Müller adds: “This practice began with Christianity itself, as we learn from St. Epiphanius, who says: ‘It is ordained, by the law of the Apostles, to fast two days of the week.’”<sup>6</sup>

Some places added Saturday fasting as well, as noted by St. Francis de Sales who writes, “The early Christians selected Wednesday, Friday and Saturday as days of abstinence.”<sup>7</sup>

Saturday fasting eventually became extended to the entire Church in the early 400s by Pope Innocent I who wrote:

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<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the traditional days for Jewish fasting were Thursdays and Mondays on account of the Tradition that Moses went up Mount Sinai on Thursday and returned on a Monday.

<sup>6</sup> This excellent catechism may be read at <https://archive.org/details/familiarexplana00mlgoog>.

<sup>7</sup> *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Chapter 23.

“Reason shows most clearly that we should fast on Saturday, because it stood between the sadness [of Good Friday] and the joy [of Easter Sunday].”<sup>8</sup> The Douay Catechism written in 1649 explains the rationale for Saturday abstinence, which was then still universally practiced, even though the weekly fast on Saturday had long ended by that time: “To prepare ourselves for a devout keeping of the Sunday, as also in honor of the blessed Virgin Mary, who stood firm in the faith on that day, the apostles themselves wavering.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Apostolic Origin of the Lenten Fast**

The great liturgical Dom Guéranger writes that the fast which precedes Easter originated with the Apostles themselves:

The forty days’ fast, which we call Lent, is the Church’s preparation for Easter, and was instituted at the very commencement of Christianity. Our blessed Lord Himself sanctioned it by fasting forty days and forty nights in the desert; and though He would not impose it on the world by an express commandment (which, in that case, could not have been open to the power of dispensation), yet He showed plainly enough, by His own example, that fasting, which God had so frequently ordered in the old Law, was to be also practiced by the children of the new... The apostles, therefore, legislated for our weakness, by instituting, at the very commencement of the

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<sup>8</sup> Epistola 25 ad Decentium 4; *Patrologia Latina* 20:555

<sup>9</sup> Douay Catechism Q. 554 “Why Abstinence on Saturdays?” available for reading at

<https://archive.org/details/The1649DouayCatechismTubervilleHenryD.4515/page/n55/mode/2up>.

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Christian Church, that the solemnity of Easter should be preceded by a universal fast.

The *Catechism of the Liturgy by a Religious of the Sacred Heart* published by The Paulist Press, New York, 1919<sup>10</sup> affirms the apostolic origin of the Lenten fast: “The Lenten fast dates back to Apostolic times as is attested by Saint Jerome, Saint Leo the Great, Saint Cyril of Alexandria and others.” In the 2nd century, St. Irenaeus wrote to Pope St. Victor I inquiring on how Easter should be celebrated, while mentioning the practice of fasting leading up to Easter.

Initially the Lenten fast was practiced by catechumens preparing for their Baptism<sup>11</sup> with a universal fast for all the faithful observed only during Holy Week, in addition to the weekly fasts that were devotionally practiced. But early on, the baptized Christians began to join the catechumens in fasting on the days immediately preceding Easter. The duration of the fast varied with some churches observing one day, others several days, and yet others observing intensive forty hour fasting, in honor of the forty hours that the Lord spent in the sepulcher. By the third and fourth centuries, the fast became forty days in most places. St. Athanasius in 339 AD referred to the Lenten fast as a forty day fast that “the whole world” observed.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after the legislation of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the bishops at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD fixed the date of Easter as the first Sunday after the first full moon

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<sup>10</sup> This excellent older Catechism may be read at <http://catholicsaints.mobi/ebooks/book-articles/catechism-of-the-liturgy-for-young-and-old.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* on the Sacrament of Baptism

<sup>12</sup> Weiser’s “Christian Feasts and Customs” available at <https://archive.org/details/handbookofchrist0000weis/>.

after the vernal equinox. The canons emerging from that council also referenced a forty-day Lenten season of fasting.

The Lenten fast was not a merely devotional fast but one of precept under penalty of sin. Father Stephen Keenan's Catechism from 1846 quotes St. Augustine (who lived from 354 – 430 AD) as saying: "Our fast at any other time is voluntary; but during Lent, we sin if we do not fast."<sup>13</sup>

### **One Meal A Day After Sunset**

To the Early Christians, fasting was performed until sundown, in imitation of the previous Jewish tradition. Dom Guéranger's writings affirm, "It was the custom with the Jews, in the Old Law, not to take the one meal, allowed on fasting days, till sunset. The Christian Church adopted the same custom. It was scrupulously practiced, for many centuries, even in our Western countries. But, about the 9th century, some relaxation began to be introduced in the Latin Church."

And notably in the early Church, fasting also included abstinence from wine, taking man back to the same diet that mankind practiced before God permitted Noah to eat meat and drink wine. As such, in apostolic times, the main meal was a small one, mainly of bread and vegetables. Fish, but not shellfish, became permitted on days of abstinence around the 6th century.<sup>14</sup> Hence, some Eastern Rite Catholics will abstain from meat, animal products, wine, oil, and fish on fasting days which harkens back to these ancient times.

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<sup>13</sup> *A Doctrinal Catechism* by Fr. Stephen Keenan, p. 179 available for reading at <http://www.catholicapologetics.info/apologetics/protestantism/catechism.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Alban Butler, *The Moveable Feasts, Fasts, and Other Annual Observances of the Catholic Church* (James Duffy, 1839), 146.

Remarkably, even water was forbidden during fasting times in the very ancient church. Fr. Alban Butler in his lives of the saints [provides testimony](#) of this when he writes: “St. Fructuosus, the holy bishop of Tarragon in Spain, in the persecution of Valerian in 259, being led to martyrdom on a Friday at ten o’clock in the morning, refused to drink, because it was not the hour to break the fast of the day, though fatigued with imprisonment, and standing in need of strength to sustain the conflict of his last agony. ‘It is a fast,’ said he: ‘I refuse to drink; it is not yet the ninth hour; death itself shall not oblige me to abridge my fast.’”

### **Advent Fast**

While not as ancient as the Holy Week fast, the Advent fast originated in the Early Church by at least the fourth century.<sup>15</sup> The *Catechism of the Liturgy* describes the fast leading up to Christmas: “In a passage of St. Gregory of Tours’ History of the Franks we find that St. Perpetuus, one of his predecessors in the See, had decreed in 480 AD that the faithful should fast three times a week from the feast of St. Martin (November 11th) [up] to Christmas... This period was called St. Martin’s Lent and his feast was kept with the same kind of rejoicing as Carnival.” In historical records Advent was originally called *Quadragesimal Sancti Martini* (Forty Days Fast of St. Martin).

The *Catechism of the Liturgy* notes that this observance of fasting likely lasted until the 12th century. Remnants of this fast remained in the Roman Rite through the 19th century when Wednesday and Friday fasting in Advent continued to be mandated in most countries.

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<sup>15</sup> *Catechism of the Liturgy* Q. 111: “The custom of keeping Advent originated in the fourth century in the churches of the East. It was only towards the end of that century that the date of Christmas was fixed for December 25th.”

## **The Apostles Fast**

The observance of a fast leading up to the Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul also originated in the Early Church under Pope St. Leo the Great around the year 461.<sup>16</sup> At the time of St. Jerome, it was known as “Summer Lent,” though it was not practiced under obligation like the fast of Lent itself. While it subsequently fell out of observance in the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Catholic Church still observes this fast to some extent.

The Roman Catholic Church though maintained the summer Ember Days during this time, in addition to the traditional fast on the Vigil of Saints Peter and Paul, until modern times. As a result, only a fragment of the fasting that was originally practiced persisted.

## **Lenten Fasting in the Medieval Church: 5th – 13th Century**

At the time of St. Gregory the Great at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the fast was universally established to begin on what we know as Ash Wednesday. While the name “Ash Wednesday” was not given to the day until Pope Urban II in 1099, the day was known as the “Beginning of the Fast.”

Regarding Holy Saturday’s fast in particular, Canon 89 of the Council in Trullo in 692 AD provides an account of the piety and devotion of the faithful of that time: “The faithful, spending the days of the Salutatory Passion in fasting, praying and compunction of heart, ought to fast until the midnight of the Great Sabbath: since the divine Evangelists, Matthew and Luke, have shewn us how late at night it was [that the resurrection took place].” That tradition of fasting on Holy Saturday until midnight would last for centuries.

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<sup>16</sup> [Pope Leo I of Rome, Sermon 78](#): “On the Whitsuntide Fast” confirms the existence of this fasting period at least back to 461 AD.

Historical records further indicate that Lent was not a merely regional practice observed only in Rome. It was part of the universality of the Church. Lenten fasting began in England, for instance, sometime during the reign of Earconberht, the king of Kent, who was converted by the missionary work of St. Augustine of Canterbury in England. During the Middle Ages, fasting in England, and many other then-Catholic nations, was required both by Church law and the civil law. Catholic missionaries brought fasting, which is an integral part of the Faith, to every land they visited.



### **Collations Are Introduced on Fasting Days**

The rules on fasting remained largely the same for hundreds of years. Food was to be taken once a day after sunset. By midnight, the fast resumed and was terminated only after the sun had once again set on the horizon. But relaxations were to soon begin.

By the eighth century, the time for the daily meal was moved to the time that the monks would pray the Office of None in the Divine Office. This office takes place around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. As a consequence of moving the meal up in the day, the practice of a collation was introduced. The well-researched Father Francis Xavier Weiser summarizes this major change with fasting:

It was not until the ninth century, however, that less rigid laws of fasting were introduced. It came about in 817 when the monks of the Benedictine order, who did much labor in the fields and on the farms, were allowed to take a little drink with a morsel of bread in the evening... Eventually the Church extended the new laws to the laity as well, and by the end of the medieval times they had become universal practice; everybody ate a little evening meal in addition to the main meal at noon.<sup>17</sup>

### **How was Lenten Abstinence Observed?**

In 604, in a letter to St. Augustine of Canterbury, Pope St. Gregory the Great announced the form that abstinence would take on fast days. This form would last for almost a thousand years: "We abstain from flesh meat and from all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese, and eggs."<sup>18</sup> When fasting was observed, abstinence was likewise always observed. Sometime between the time of St. Gregory the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas abstinence on non-Lenten days began to permit the consumption of animal products like eggs and dairy. Only flesh meat was prohibited. This change however did not impact Lenten days of abstinence.

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<sup>17</sup> Francis X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs* (New York: Harcourt, 1958), 171.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.



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Through the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, we can learn how Lent was practiced in his own time and attempt to willingly observe such practices in our own lives. The Lenten fast as mentioned by St. Thomas Aquinas constituted of the following:

- Monday through Saturday were days of fasting. The meal was taken at mid-day and a collation was allowed at night, except on days of the black fast
- All meat or animal products were prohibited throughout Lent.
- Abstinence from these foods remained even on Sundays of Lent, though fasting was not practiced on Sundays.<sup>19</sup>
- No food was to be eaten at all on either Ash Wednesday or Good Friday
- Holy Week was a more intense fast that consisted only of bread, salt, water, and herbs.

The Lenten fast included fasting from all *lacticinia* (Latin for milk products) which included butter, cheese, eggs, and animal products. From this tradition, Easter Eggs were introduced, and therefore the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday is when pancakes are traditionally eaten to use leftover *lacticinia*. And similarly, Fat Tuesday is known as Carnival, coming from the Latin words *carne levare* – literally the “farewell to meat.”

Regarding this point, there are important exceptions to note as the Church has always exercised common sense. Father Weiser notes that “Abstinence from *lacticinia* which included milk, butter, cheese, and eggs, was never strictly enforced in Britain, Ireland, and Scandinavia because of the lack of oil and other substitute foods in those countries. The Church using common sense granted many dispensations in this matter in all

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<sup>19</sup> Laetare Sunday would eventually become the one day of a reprieve during the Lenten observance when abstinence was relaxed.

countries of Europe. People who did eat the milk foods would often, when they could afford it, give alms for the building of churches or other pious endeavors.”

The words of Pope Innocent III who reigned during this era from January 1198 to July 1216 before the Fourth Lateran Council apply as much to us as to those who lived during the 13th century: “To your praying add fasting and almsgiving. It is on these wings that our prayers fly the more swiftly and effortlessly to the holy ears of God, that He may mercifully hear us in the time of need.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Rogation Days**

Besides the Lenten fast, the traditions of Rogation Days, Ember Days, and the Advent fast developed in the Church over the Middle Ages.

The Rogation Days occur on four days each year: the Major Rogation (i.e. Greater Litanies) on April 25th and the Minor Rogation Days (i.e. Lesser Litanies) on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Thursday. These days have virtually disappeared now as only Traditional Catholic priests keep them. However, for those who do keep these days, they are days to pray in a special way. The Litany of the Saints is especially prayed on these days and crops and field are blessed.

Concerning the Major Rogation, Dom Guéranger, writing in the late 1800s, mentions the ancient custom of abstinence but not fasting for the Major Rogation:

Abstinence from flesh meat has always been observed on this day at Rome; and when the Roman Liturgy was established in France by

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Pope John XXIII in *Paenitentiam Agere* issued on July 1, 1962.

Pepin and Charlemagne, the Great Litany of April 25 was, of course, celebrated, and the abstinence kept by the faithful of that country. A Council of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 836, enjoined the additional obligation of resting from servile work on this day: the same enactment is found in the Capitularia of Charles the Bald. As regards fasting, properly so called, being contrary to the spirit of Paschal Time, it would seem never to have been observed on this day, at least not generally. Amalarius, who lived in the ninth century, asserts that it was not then practiced even in Rome.

Dom Guéranger likewise continues with an account of how fasting and abstinence were kept on the Minor Rogation Days:

Their observance is now similar in format to the Greater Litanies of April 25th, but these three days have a different origin, having been instituted in Gaul in the fifth century as days of fasting, abstinence and abstention from servile work in which all took part in an extensive penitential procession, often barefoot. The whole western Church soon adopted the Rogation days. They were introduced into England at an early period; as likewise into Spain and Germany. Rome herself sanctioned them by herself observing them; this she did in the eighth century, during the pontificate of St. Leo III. With regard to the fast which the Churches of Gaul observed during the Rogation days, Rome did not adopt that part of the institution. Fasting seemed to her to throw a gloom over the joyous forty days, which our risen Jesus grants to His disciples; she therefore

enjoined only abstinence from flesh-meat during the Rogation days.

While Rome never adopted fasting on Rogation days, fasting can certainly be done by the faithful. The Church did require abstinence from meat, illustrating that even during Paschaltide it is appropriate that we perform penance.

### **Ember Days**

Like Rogation Days, Ember Days developed early in these times, taking the form that would continue for centuries. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* explains:

At first the Church in Rome had fasts in June, September, and December; the exact days were not fixed but were announced by the priests. The "Liber Pontificalis" ascribes to Pope Callistus (217-222) a law ordering the fast, but probably it is older. Leo the Great (440-461) considers it an Apostolic institution.

By the time of Pope Gregory I, who died in 601 AD, they were observed for all four seasons though the date of each of them could vary. In the Roman Synod of 1078 under Pope Gregory VII, they were uniformly established for the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after December 13th (St. Lucia), after Ash Wednesday, after Pentecost Sunday, and after September 14th (Exaltation of the Cross).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Father Christopher Smith, a priest of the Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina has put together a truly beautiful and excellent illustrated guide explaining both the Rogations and Ember Days, with a number of very useful quotes from various liturgical sources. See: <https://acatholiclife.blogspot.com/2014/04/rogation-day-and-ember-day-manual.html>.

## Spirituality of the Ember Days

The purpose of Ember Days is to “thank God for the gifts of nature, to teach men to make use of them in moderation, and to assist the needy” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*). As a result, their focus differs from the precise focus of the Rogation Days to which they are often compared.

In addition, the author of Barefoot Abbey provides specific intentions for each of these seasons so that we can render thanks to Almighty God for the fruits of the earth which specifically become instruments of His grace through the Sacraments:

Winter or Advent Ember Days are after the Feast of St. Lucy (December 13th): Give thanks for the olives that make holy oils for Unction.

Spring or Lenten Ember Days are after Ash Wednesday: Give thanks for the flowers and bees that make blessed candles as in for Baptism and upon the alter.

Summer or Whit Ember Days are after the Solemnity of Pentecost: Give thanks for the wheat used to make the Eucharist hosts.

Autumn or Michaelmas Ember Days are after the Feast of Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14): Give thanks for the grapes that make wine for the Precious Blood of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See <<https://barefootabbey.com/2019/03/11/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-ember-days/>>.

## **Advent Fast**

As mentioned above, the Advent Fast began in the Early Church and developed over these centuries. The fast which appeared in 480 began to adopt the same rigor of Lent by the end of the 6th century when the fast was extended to the whole Church and priests were instructed to offer Mass during St. Martin's Lent, as it was then called, according to the Lenten rite.

By the 700s, the Lenten observance was shortened in the Roman Rite to four weeks, though other rites maintained the longer observance. By the 1100s, the fast had begun to be replaced by simple abstinence. In 1281, the Council of Salisbury held that only monks were expected to keep the fast; however, in a revival of the older practice, Pope Urban V in 1362 required abstinence for all members of the papal court during Advent.<sup>23</sup> However, the custom of fasting in Advent continued to decline as we will learn below.

We should do our part at rediscovering Advent by observing the Nativity Fast, as it is still practiced to some extent in the Byzantine Catholic Church, starting on the day after the Feast of St. Martin (i.e. Martinmas) on November 11th. Some Byzantine traditions will refer to the fast as the Quadragesima of Saint Philip, since it begins immediately after their feastday in honor of the Apostle St. Philip.

## **Fasting in the Renaissance: 13th – mid 18th Century**

As the Middle Ages ended and the Renaissance emerged, the piety and devotion of many souls likewise became tempered. The Church underwent significant trials in these centuries including the Protestant Revolt and the loss of hundreds of thousands of souls, yet She also found new children in lands

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<sup>23</sup> Dom Guéranger provides insightful commentary on the history of Advent and its fast in the Liturgical Year.

previously undiscovered. Yet even amid these changes, the Church did continue to indulge fast and encourage it – even on days beyond those mandated for the entire Church. For instance, as mentioned in *the Raccolta* for Corpus Christi:

Pope Urban IV... being desirous that all the faithful should give God due thanks for this inestimable benefit and be excited to meet their Lord's love in this most holy Sacrament with grateful hearts, granted in the said Constitution several Indulgences to the faithful, which were again augmented by Pope Martin V in his Constitution *Ineffabile* of May 26, 1429. Afterwards Pope Eugenius IV, in his Constitution *Excellentissimum* of May 20, 1433, confirmed the Indulgences of Martin V, and added others, as follows: An indulgence of 200 days, on the vigil of the Feast of Corpus Christi to all who, being truly contrite and having confessed, shall fast, or do some other good work enjoined them by their confessor...

### **Fasting in the New World<sup>24</sup>**

Fasting and abstinence, along with Holy Days of Obligation, were, in practice, highly varied depending on each nation and territory. We see this liturgical diversity in the various colonies.

For instance, Catholics in the colonies in Florida and Louisiana observed these fasting days:

The fasting days were all days in Lent; the Ember days; the eves of Christmas, Candlemas, Annunciation, Assumption, All Saints, the

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<sup>24</sup> Sources for this section are quoted from [The American Catholic Quarterly Review \(1886\), vol. 11](#).

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feasts of the Apostles except St Philip and St James and St John, nativity of St John the Baptist; all Fridays except within twelve days of Christmas and between Easter and Ascension, and the eve of Ascension.

For abstinence from meat, they would have observed:

All Sundays in Lent, all Saturdays throughout the year, Monday and Tuesday before Ascension, and St Mark's day were of abstinence from flesh meat.

The western colonies under Spanish rule in modern day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California observed as fast days:

...all days in Lent except Sunday; eves of Christmas, Whit Sunday, St Mathias, St John the Baptist, St Peter and St Paul, St James, St Lawrence, Assumption, St Bartholomew, St Matthew, St Simon and St Jude, All Saints, St Andrew, and St Thomas.

It should be noted that in 1089 Pope Urban II granted a dispensation to Spain from abstinence on Fridays, in virtue of the Spanish efforts in the Crusades. After the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, Pope St. Pius V expanded that privilege to all Spanish colonies. That dispensation remained in place in some places as late as 1951 when the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, the last territory to invoke it, rescinded the privilege.

There was a distinction made between Native Americans and European settlers. The papal bull "*Altitudo Divini Concilii*" of Pope Paul III in 1537 reduced the days of penance and those of hearing Mass for the Indians out of pastoral concern due to the physically demanding lifestyle that they lived and also largely due to the fact that they fasted so much already. As a result, the only fasting days required under sin for the Native



Americans were the Fridays in Lent, Holy Saturday, and Christmas Eve.

### **Lenten Fast is Altered**

As previously mentioned, the Lenten fast was originally observed as a single meal taken after sunset. By the 9th century, a small collation in the evening was introduced on account of the physical work done by the Benedictine monks. And the one meal was moved to 3 o'clock.

By the fourteenth century, the meal had begun to move up steadily until it began to take place even at 12 o'clock. The change became so common it became part of the Church's discipline. In one interesting but often unknown fact, because the monks would pray the liturgical hour of None before they would eat their meal, the custom of calling midday by the name of "noon" entered into our vocabulary. 12 PM is noon as a result of Catholic fasting. And while the time of the meal moved earlier, the collation remained in the evening.

### **The Protestant Attack on Penance**

In the Middle Ages, abstinence from meat on Fridays and during Lent was not only Church law – it was civil law as well. And people gladly obeyed these laws out of respect for the teaching authority of the Church. Yet after the Protestant revolt which began in 1517 and continued through the middle of the 1600s, this was to change.

The same occurred in England which followed the revolt of Luther and his peers. King Henry VIII, who was previously given the title "Defender of the Faith" by Pope Leo X for his defense against Luther, succumbed to heresy and schism when he broke from Lord's established Church on earth in 1533 to engage in adultery. Church property was seized. Catholics were killed. Catholicism was made illegal in England in 1559

under Queen Elizabeth I, and for 232 years, except during the brief reign of the Catholic King James II (1685-1688), the Catholic Mass was illegal until 1791. Yet the Anglicans at least kept the Catholic customs of abstinence for some years.

English Royalty proclamations supporting abstinence of meat continued to occur in England in 1563, 1619, 1625, 1627, and 1631. The same likewise occurred in 1687 under the King James II. After the Revolution in 1688 and the overthrow of Catholicism by William III and Mary II, the laws were no longer enforced and officially removed from the law books by the Statue Law Revision Act in 1863. Similar changes occurred throughout Europe as Protestants reviled the fast.<sup>25</sup>

But changes continued even in Catholic nations. As stated above, the twice weekly fast on Wednesday and Friday goes back to the Apostles. In Ireland for instance the use of meat on all Wednesdays of the year was prohibited until around the middle of the 17th century.<sup>26</sup> This harkened back to the vestige of those earlier times when Wednesdays were days of weekly fasting as Father Slater notes in “A Short History of Moral Theology” published in 1909:

The obligation of fasting on all Wednesdays and Fridays ceased almost entirely about the tenth century, but the fixing of those days by ecclesiastical authority for fasting, and the desire to substitute a Christian observance at Rome for certain pagan rites celebrated in connection with the seasons of the year, seem to have given rise to our Ember Days... About the tenth century the obligation of the Friday fast was reduced to one of abstinence from

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<sup>25</sup> The Affair of Sausage in 1522 by Zwingli launched the Reformation in Zurich as he falsely claimed that since *Sola Scriptura* was the only authority, sausages should be eaten publicly in Lent in defiance.

<sup>26</sup> [\*The Irish Ecclesiastical Record\* \(1868\), vol. 8, 221.](#)

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flesh meat, and the Wednesday fast after being similarly mitigated gradually disappeared altogether.



### **The Example of St. Charles Borromeo**

It was the saintly archbishop, St. Charles Borromeo (1538 – 1584), the champion of the Counter Reformation against the Protestants, who championed fasting and penance.

Rogation Days, which we covered above, have been observed for centuries even if the Catholic Church in our modern era has virtually forgotten them. A similar situation occurred before in the Diocese of Milan. It was St. Charles who restored them and enhanced them in the Diocese of Milan. Interestingly, even though Rome never mandated fasting on the Rogation Days, since they occur during the Easter Season, St. Charles Borromeo mandated them in his own diocese.

Dom Guéranger in the Liturgical Year provides us with a holy example which should show us the spirit of penance which should animate all of our lives on the Rogation Days:

St. Charles Borromeo, who restored in his diocese of Milan so many ancient practices of piety, was sure not to be indifferent about the Rogation days. He spared neither word nor example to reanimate this salutary devotion among his people. He ordered fasting to be observed during these three days; he fasted himself on bread and water. The procession, in which all the clergy of the city were obliged to join, and which began after the sprinkling of ashes, started from the cathedral at an early hour in the morning, and was not over till three or four o'clock in the afternoon. Thirteen churches were visited on the Monday; nine, on the Tuesday; and eleven, on the Wednesday. The saintly archbishop celebrated Mass and preached in one of these churches.

St. Charles Borromeo did not only encourage the Rogation Days. He ministered personally to thousands of plague-stricken victims when the civil authorities had fled Milan. He offered Masses, administered the Sacraments, consistently led processions, and offered an authentic Catholic response to a pandemic.<sup>27</sup>

The fast of Advent which had continued to decline had taken the form of only Wednesday and Friday penance. To stir the

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<sup>27</sup> The Life of St. Charles Borromeo by John Peter Giussano provides in depth accounts of his heroic life and the example of penance he reached, even in the midst of a devastating plague. It may be read at <https://archive.org/details/lifestcharlesbo01giusgoog/page/n8/mode/2up>.

people to observe the true spirit of penance, even beyond the letter of the law, St. Charles also strongly urged those in Milan to fast on the Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays of each week of Advent.<sup>28</sup> In one key distinction, Milan keeps the Ambrosian Rite, which differs in several aspects from the Roman Rite. One of those key differences is that Advent in the Ambrosian Rite always begins on the Sunday after the feast of Saint Martin of Tours, alluding back centuries before to St. Martin's Lent as it was practiced in the Roman Rite.

### **Fasting in the Early Modern Era**

By the Early Modern Era, the Church mandated three primary categories of fasts: the Lenten fast, the Ember Days, and the Vigils of certain feasts. Likewise, to these both Friday and Saturday abstinence was observed as the 1649 Douay Catechism affirms.

### **Lenten Fast is Dramatically Changed**

Some of the most significant changes to fasting would occur under the reign of Pope Benedict XIV who reigned from 1740 – 1758.

On May 31, 1741, Pope Benedict XIV issued *Non Ambiginius* which granted permission to eat meat on some fasting days, while at the same time explicitly forbidding the consumption of both fish and flesh meat at the same meal on all fasting days during the year and on the Sundays of Lent. Beforehand, the forty days of Lent were always held as days of complete abstinence from meat. This is the origin of “partial abstinence,” even though the term would not appear until the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Yet even with these changes, Pope

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<sup>28</sup> Dom Guéranger testifies to this in *The Liturgical Year: Advent* published in 1910 by Burns & Oates, p. 24) and the Catholic Encyclopedia.

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Benedict XIV implored the faithful to return to the devotion of earlier eras:

The observance of Lent is the very badge of the Christian warfare. By it we prove ourselves not to be enemies of the cross of Christ. By it we avert the scourges of divine justice. By it we gain strength against the princes of darkness, for it shields us with heavenly help. Should mankind grow remiss in their observance of Lent, it would be a detriment to God's glory, a disgrace to the Catholic religion, and a danger to Christian souls. Neither can it be doubted that such negligence would become the source of misery to the world, of public calamity, and of private woe.

Yet changes continued during the 18th and 19th centuries as Antoine Villien's *History of the Commandments* from 1915 documents:

The use of meat on Sundays [of Lent] was at first tolerated, then expressly permitted, for the greater part of Lent. Old people still remember the time when its use was completely forbidden in France from the Friday of Passion week to Easter. Later, new dispensations allowed the gradual extension of the Sunday privilege to Tuesday and Thursday of each week, up to Thursday before Palm Sunday. About the beginning of the pontificate of Pius IX [c. 1846], Monday was added to the days on which abstinence need not be observed; a few years later the use of meat on those four days began to be permitted up to Wednesday of Holy Week. Lastly the Saturdays, except Ember

Saturday and Holy Saturday, were included in the dispensations.

### **Fasting & Abstinence Weaken throughout the 1800s**

Changes likewise occurred early on in America's history. At the time of America's founding, the fast days observed by the new Republic consisted of the Ember Days; the forty days Lent; Wednesdays and Fridays in Advent; and the vigils of Christmas, Whitsun Sunday (i.e. Pentecost), Saints Peter and Paul, and All Saints. Abstinence was practiced on all Fridays and Saturdays of the year, unless a Holy Day of Obligation were to occur on them.

The Third Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1837, with approval of Pope Gregory XVI, began to reduce these practices. The Council dispensed from fast and abstinence the Wednesdays of Advent, except for the Ember Wednesday in Advent.

At this time, complete abstinence was still observed on all Saturdays but over the course of the 19th century, the dispensations from Saturday abstinence became universal. Mara Morrow, author of [\*Sin in the Sixties\*](#), summarizes these changes:

In 1840 the Fourth Provincial Council of Baltimore asked for a perpetual renewal of an indult dispensing from abstinence on Saturdays, and this indult was renewed for twenty years by Pope Gregory XVI. In 1866, the Second Plenary Council asked that all dispensations granted to the diocese of Baltimore be extended to other American dioceses, but Pope Pius IX preferred individual requests from each bishop in the United States. In 1884, the U.S. bishops who were meeting at

the Third Plenary Council decided it would be difficult to pass uniform legislation on the subject of fast and abstinence and hence left it to the authority of provincial councils to determine what was best for their territories. Leo XIII in 1886 granted U.S. bishops the authority to dispense each year from abstinence on Saturdays.

Similarly, Pope Gregory XVI in a rescript from June 28, 1831, granted a dispensation to all Catholics of Scotland from abstinence on Saturdays throughout the year, except on Saturdays that were also days of fasting. Dispensations were granted in many nations, illustrating a weakening in discipline not only in America.

With the growing number of Irish immigrants to America in the early 1800s, special attention was given to dispense from the law of abstinence when St. Patrick's Day fell on a Friday. This was done for the members of the Charitable Irish Society of Boston in 1837 and would become customary in the United States.

### **Pope Leo XIII Continues the Relaxation of Discipline**

Throughout the centuries covered thus far, abstinence included not only abstinence from meat but also generally from eggs and dairy products, though exceptions were granted in various localities.

In 1886 Leo XIII allowed meat, eggs, and milk products on Sundays of Lent and at the main meal on every weekday [of Lent] except Wednesday and Friday in the [United States]. Holy Saturday was not included in the dispensation. A small piece of bread was permitted in the morning with coffee, tea, chocolate, or a similar beverage.



While the evening collation had been widespread since the 14th century, the practice of an additional morning snack (i.e. a frustulum) was introduced only around the 18th century as part of the gradual relaxation of discipline. Volume 12 of *The Jurist*, published by the Catholic University of America in 1952, writes, “It is stated that the two-ounce breakfast arose at the time of St. Alphonsus, since which time the usage of the popular two and eight-ounce standards for the breakfast and the collation, respectively, has been extant.”

Mara Morrow in *Sin in the Sixties* elaborates on the concessions given by Pope Leo XIII which in the late 19th century expanded the practice of the frustulum and further reduced strict abstinence:

It also allowed for the use of eggs and milk products at the evening collation daily during Lent and at the principal meal when meat was not allowed. [It] further allowed a small piece of bread in the morning with a beverage, the possibility of taking the principal meal at noon or in the evening, and the use of lard and meat drippings in the preparation of foods. Those exempt from the law of fasting were permitted to eat meat, eggs, and milk more than once a day.

Consequently, [\*The Baltimore Manual\*](#), published by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 states: “Only one full meal is allowed, to be taken about noon or later. Besides this full meal, a collation of eight ounces is allowed. If the full meal is taken about the middle of the day, the collation will naturally be taken in the evening; if the full meal is taken late in the day, the collation may be taken at noon. Besides the full meal and collation, the general custom has made it lawful to take up to two ounces of bread (without butter) and a cup of some warm liquid – as coffee or tea – in the morning. This is

important to observe, for by means of this many persons are enabled – and therefore obliged – the keep the fast who could not otherwise do so.”

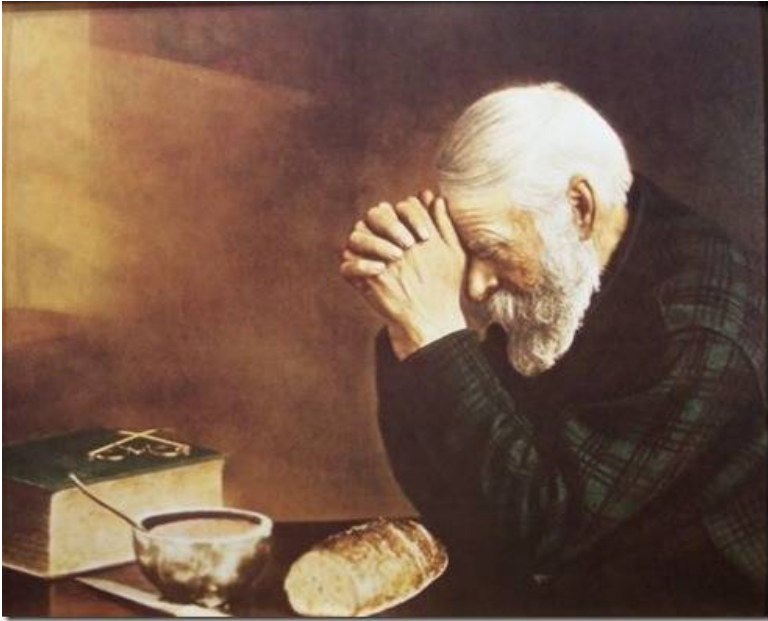
The Catechism of Father Patrick Powers published in Ireland in 1905 mentions that abstinence includes flesh meat and “anything produced from animals, as milk, butter, cheese, eggs.” However, Father Patrick notes, “In some countries, however, milk is allowed at collation.” The United States was one of those nations whereas Ireland and others were not granted such dispensations. The use of eggs and milk during Lent was to drastically change in a few years with the 1917 Code of Canon Law.

In 1895, the workingmen’s privilege gave bishops in the United States the ability to permit meat in some circumstances. Mara Morrow summarizes that these circumstances occurred when there was “difficulty in observing the common law of abstinence, excluding Fridays, Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, and the Vigil of Christmas. This workingmen’s privilege (or indult) allowed only for meat once a day during Lent, taken at the principal meal, and never taken in conjunction with fish. This particular indult was extended not only to the laborer but to his family, as well. The motivation of such an indult was no doubt to allow for enough sustenance such that the many Catholic immigrants to the United States who worked as manual laborers could perform their difficult, energy-demanding physical work without danger to their health.”

### **Fasting Wanes in Rome**

Fasting days were also slowly reduced in Rome as well. By 1893, the only fasting days kept in Rome were the forty days of Lent, the Ember Days, and the Vigils of the Purification, of Pentecost, of St. John the Baptist, of Ss. Peter and Paul, of the

Assumption, of All Saints, and of Christmas.<sup>29</sup> In just a few years, Rome would abrogate the fast on the Vigil of the Purification and of St. John the Baptist.



### **Fasting Changes in the Early 1900s**

The [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) from 1909 in describing that fast immediately before the changes to occur under St. Pius X enumerates them as follows: “In the United States of America all the days of Lent; the Fridays of Advent (generally); the Ember Days; the vigils of Christmas and Pentecost, as well as those (14 Aug.) of the Assumption; (31 Oct.) of All Saints, are now fasting days. In Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, and Canada, the days just indicated, together with the Wednesdays of Advent and (28 June) the vigil of Saints Peter and Paul, are fasting days.”

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<sup>29</sup> As stated in [The Handbook to Christian and Ecclesiastical Rome published](#) in 1897.

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While often held as an archetype for Tradition, the 1917 Code largely took the concessions granted to America and other nations and reduced fasting practices that were widely practiced elsewhere in the world. It was at this same time that our Blessed Mother appeared in Fatima and called for more penance, precisely at a time when fasting was quickly fading.

The days of obligatory fasting as listed in the 1917 Code of Canon Law were the forty days of Lent (including Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday until noon); the Ember Days; and the Vigils of Pentecost, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, All Saints, and Christmas. Partial abstinence, the eating of meat only at the principal meal, was obligatory on all weekdays of Lent (Monday through Thursday). And of course, complete abstinence was required on all Fridays, including Fridays of Lent, except when a holy day of obligation fell on a Friday outside of Lent. Saturdays in Lent were likewise days of complete abstinence. Fasting and abstinence were not observed should a vigil fall on a Sunday as stated in the code: “If a vigil that is a fast day falls on a Sunday the fast is not to be anticipated on Saturday, but is dropped altogether that year.”

Effective per the 1917 Code of Canon law, the Wednesdays and Fridays of Advent were no longer fast days for the Universal Church. Wednesdays of Advent had previously been abrogated as fast days in America in 1837. Now Fridays in Advent likewise ceased being required days of fast not only in America but universally. The Vigil of St. Peter and Paul also ceased as a fast day on the Universal Calendar, although it had already been abrogated in the United States. And eggs and milk (i.e. *lactinia*) became universally permitted.

But additional changes quickly ensued. Mara Morrow, writing on the fasting days around this time, states, “In 1917 Pope Benedict XV granted the faithful of countries in World War I the privilege of transferring Saturday Lenten abstinence to any

other day of the week, excepting Friday and Ash Wednesday. In 1919 Cardinal Gibbons was granted his request of transferring Saturday Lenten abstinence to Wednesday for all bishops' dioceses in the U.S. This permission, as well as the workingmen's privilege, were frequently renewed, but, after 1931, this permission was only on the basis of personal requests from individual bishops."

Further, in 1931 Cardinal Fumasoni Biondi, the Apostolic Delegate to the United States, addressed the following to the American Bishops: "The Sacred Congregation of the Council, in a letter dated 15 Oct 1931, informs me that, in view of the difficulties experienced by the faithful in observing the laws of fast and abstinence on civil holidays, His Holiness, Pius XI, in the audience of 5 Oct. 1931, granted to all the Ordinaries of the United States, ad quinquennium, the faculty to dispense their subjects from the laws in question whenever any of the civil holidays now observed occurs on a day of fast and abstinence, or of abstinence."<sup>30</sup>

### **Reductions in Fasting Intensify under Pope Pius XII**

Pope Pius XII accelerated the changes to fasting and abstinence as Father Ruff relates: "In 1941 Pope Pius XII allowed bishops worldwide to dispense entirely from fast and abstinence except on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, provided that there was abstinence from meat every Friday, and fast and abstinence on these two days and the vigil of the Assumption and Christmas. Eggs and milk products were permitted at breakfast and in the evening."<sup>31</sup>

On January 28, 1949, the United States bishops issued modified regulations on abstinence in America again after

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<sup>30</sup> *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, 32-416; E.R., 86-65, 190

<sup>31</sup> Quoted from "Fasting and Abstinence: The Story" available at <https://www.praytellig.com/index.php/2018/02/21/fasting-and-abstinence-the-story/>.

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receiving a ruling from the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Partial abstinence replaced complete abstinence for Ember Wednesdays, Ember Saturdays, and the Vigil of Pentecost.

Before 1951, Bishops were able to dispense laborers and their family members from the laws of abstinence, if necessary, under the workingmen's privilege that was introduced in 1895. This privilege of eating meat though excluded Fridays, Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, and the Vigil of Christmas. In 1951, the abstinence laws in America were again revised as Father Ruff summarizes:

In 1951 the U.S. bishops standardized regulations calling for complete abstinence from meat on Fridays, Ash Wednesday, the vigils of Assumption and Christmas, and Holy Saturday morning for everyone over age seven. On the vigils of Pentecost and All Saints, meat could be taken at just one meal. Fast days, applying to everyone between 21 and 59, were the weekdays of Lent, Ember days, and the vigils of Pentecost, Assumption, All Saints, and Christmas. On these fast days only one full meal was allowed, with two other meatless meals permitted which together did not make up one full meal. Eating between meals was not permitted, with milk and fruit juice permitted. Health or ability to work exempted one.

As a result, the Vigil of All Saints was reduced to partial abstinence for American Catholics only in 1951.

In 1954, Pope Pius XII issued a special decree granting bishops the permission to dispense from Friday abstinence for the Feast of St. Joseph which that year fell on a Friday. 1955 saw some of the most significant changes to the Church's

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Liturgy since the Council of Trent. Pope Pius XII in “*Cum nostra hac aetate*” on March 23, 1955, abolished fifteen Octaves in addition to the Octave for the Dedication of a Church, and particular octaves for patrons of various religious orders, countries, dioceses, etc. He also abolished roughly half of all vigils, leading to the removal of the liturgical vigils of the Immaculate Conception, Epiphany, All Saints, and All apostles except Ss. Peter and Paul. The total number of liturgical vigils was now reduced to 7.

Uncertainty existed on whether or not fasting was still required on October 31st, the Vigil of All Saints (commonly called Halloween). The US Bishops requested an official determination from Rome on whether the custom of fasting and abstinence on the suspended Vigil of All Saints had also been terminated. They received a pre-printed notice in a response dated March 15, 1957, stating: “The Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites... looks simply to the liturgical part of the day and does not touch the obligation of fast and abstinence that are a penitential preparation for the following feast day.” The US Bishop thereafter dispensed both the fast and partial abstinence law for the Vigil of All Saints.

In 1956, Holy Saturday was commuted from complete to partial abstinence. Furthermore, the fast which previously ended at noon was extended to the midnight between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, on account of the Holy Week changes enacted by Pius XII. In some places the previous ending at noon continued where custom or concession prevailed. And on July 25, 1957, Pope Pius XII commuted the fast in the Universal Church from the Vigil of the Assumption to the Vigil of the Immaculate Conception on December 7, even though he had previously abrogated the Mass for the Vigil of the Immaculate Conception.

## **Fasting Changes Under John XXIII**

On October 9, 1958, Pope Pius XII died. John XXIII was elected and under him, as under his predecessor, changes to Church discipline continued. In 1959, John XXIII permitted the Christmas Eve fast and abstinence to be transferred to the 23rd. While the United States, Great Britain, and Ireland kept the penance on December 24, other nations including Canada and the Philippines transferred it to December 23.

## **The Fasting Requirements of 1962**

By 1962, the laws of fasting and abstinence were as follows as described in *Moral Theology* by Rev. Heribert Jone and adapted by Rev. Urban Adelman for the “laws and customs of the United States of America” copyright 1961:

Complete abstinence is to be observed on all Fridays of the year, Ash Wednesday, the Vigils of Immaculate Conception and Christmas. Partial abstinence is to be observed on Ember Wednesdays and Saturdays and on the Vigil of Pentecost. Days of fast are all the weekdays of Lent, Ember Days, and the Vigil of Pentecost. If a vigil falls on a Sunday, the law of abstinence and fasting is dispensed that year and is not transferred to the preceding day.

Father Jone adds additional guidance for the Vigil of the Nativity fast: “General custom allows one who is fasting to take a double portion of food at the collation on Christmas Eve (*jejunium gaudiosum*).”

Thus, even before the Second Vatican Council opened, the fasting customs were drastically reduced within only a few hundred years.



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Characteristics of Lent	Nicene	Gregorian	High Medieval	Pre-Trent	Benedict XIII	Benedict XIV	Baltimorensis II	Leo XIII	Baltimorensis III	CIC/17	USA '62
	5th Century	7th Century	13th Century	15th Century	1724 - 1730	1740 - 1758	1866	1878 - 1903	1884	1917	1962
<b>Collation &amp; Frustulum</b>	No	No	Local Indults	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Collation	No	No	Local Indults	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Collation Size	N/A	N/A	Pint of liquid	2oz	8oz/1/4 meal	8oz/1/4 meal	1/4 meal	1/4 meal	8oz	8oz/1/4 meal	Less than a 2nd meal.
Morning Collation	N/A	N/A	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Animal Products at Collation	N/A	N/A	N/A	No	No	Local Indults	No	Local Indults	Yes	Yes	Yes
Warm Fish at Collation	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Frustulum	N/A	N/A	N/A	No	No.	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Food</b>											
Meal Time	Sundown	Sundown	3:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	N/A
Flesh Meat	No	No	No	No	No	Local Indults	No	Local Indults	Yes, on some days.	Yes, on some days	N/A
Fish & Flesh Meat at Meals	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Animal Products	No	No	No	No	No	Local Indults	No	Local Indults	Yes	Yes	Yes
Simple Fish	No	In necessity only.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rich Seafood	No	No.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Xerophagiae	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Passion Fast	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Sunday Abstinence	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Local Indults	Yes, from meat.	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Beverages</b>											
Liquids Other than Water and Wine	No	No	Local Indults	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wine	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Water Outside of Meal	No	No	Local Indults	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

## The Alleged Turkey Indult

A dispensation from meat on the day after Thanksgiving was granted in 1957 in the form of quinquennial faculties given to local ordinaries to dispense from abstinence on the Friday after Thanksgiving Day, as stated by Bouscaren in the *Canon Law Digest*. The quinquennial faculties last 5 years and must be renewed. In 1962 they were renewed but not afterward because of the changes that would ensue in the mid 1960s.

Before 1962, the Bishops in the United States did not generally dispense from Friday abstinence on the Friday after Thanksgiving. After the renewal in 1962, more Bishops began to exercise this. In 1963 the Bishop of Little Rock, Arkansas made use of these privileges and dispensed the faithful from meat on the Friday after Thanksgiving:

By reason of special faculties, His Excellency, the Most Reverend Bishop, grants herewith the following dispensations: from the Law of Fast on the Feast of St. Joseph, Tuesday, March 19; from the Law of Abstinence on Friday, November 29, (day after Thanksgiving) and from the Laws of Fast and Abstinence on Saturday, December 7, Vigil of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>32</sup>

Such a dispensation from the law of abstinence was not permanently part of Church law by virtue of it being the Friday after Thanksgiving. While bishops or priests will today dispense from meat on the Friday after Thanksgiving, Pope Pius XII did not permanently dispense meat on that day as many allege.

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<sup>32</sup> Decree printed in *The Arkansas Catholic* (March 1, 1963), <http://arc.stparchive.com/Archive/ARC/ARC03011963p09.php>.

## **Fasting Changes Post Vatican II**

Shortly after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI issued an apostolic constitution on fasting and abstaining on February 17, 1966, called *Paenitemini*, whose principles were later incorporated into the 1983 Code of Canon Law. *Paenitemini* allowed the commutation of the Friday abstinence to an act of penance at the discretion of the local ordinaries and gave authority to the episcopal conferences on how the universal rules would be applied in their region. Abstinence which previously began at age seven was modified to begin at age fourteen. Additionally, the obligation of fasting on the Ember Days and on the remaining Vigils was abolished. *Paenitemini* maintained the traditional practice that “abstinence is to be observed on every Friday which does not fall on a day of obligation.”

The NCCB (precursor to the current USCCB bishops’ conference of the United States) issued a statement on November 18, 1966. Abstinence was made obligatory on all Fridays of Lent, except Solemnities (i.e. First Class Feasts), on Ash Wednesday, and on Good Friday. Abstinence on all Fridays throughout the year was “especially recommended,” and the faithful who did choose to eat meat were directed to perform an alternative penance on those Fridays outside of Lent, even though the US Bishops removed the long-established precept of requiring Friday penance. The document stated in part: “Even though we hereby terminate the traditional law of abstinence binding under pain of sin, as the sole prescribed means of observing Friday, we... hope that the Catholic community will ordinarily continue to abstain from meat by free choice as formerly we did in obedience to church law.” And finally, fasting on all weekdays of Lent was “strongly recommended” but not made obligatory under penalty of sin.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law largely took Paul VI’s apostolic constitution aside from the modification of the age at which

fasting binds. Per the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the age of fast was changed to begin at 18 – previously it was 21 – and to still conclude at midnight when an individual completes his 59th birthday. Fasting and complete abstinence per these rules were made obligatory only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The notion of “partial abstinence,” introduced under Pope Benedict XIV in 1741, was also removed along with nearly all fast days.<sup>33</sup> Friday penance is required per these laws on all Fridays of the year except on Solemnities, a dramatic change from the previous exception being only on Holy Days of Obligation.

### **Historical Evidence Confirms Even Holy Days of Obligation in Lent were not Dispensed Automatically from the Laws of Either Fast or Abstinence**

Above we mentioned that in 1954, Pope Pius XII issued a decree granting bishops the permission to dispense from Friday abstinence for the Feast of St. Joseph which that year fell on a Friday. A March 26, 1954, article in *The Guardian* elaborates: “Bishops throughout the world have been granted the faculty to dispense their faithful from the law of abstinence on the Feast of St. Joseph, Friday, March 19. The power was granted in a decree issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Council, which said it acted at the special mandate of His Holiness Pope Pius XII. The decree was published in *L’Osservatore Romano* made no mention of a dispensation from the Lenten fast.”

As such, St. Joseph’s Day did not permit the faithful to eat meat on Fridays in Lent unless such a specific dispensation was offered, which was very rarely done. This was also at a time when there were many other fast days in the year outside of Lent. Likewise, to those who maintain the 1917 Code’s

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<sup>33</sup> For a chart comparing 1917 v. 1955 v. 1983 fasting, please see Catholic Candle: <<https://catholiccandle.neocities.org/faith/fast-abstinence-basics.html>>.

requirement to also fast all forty weekdays of Lent – which was observed since the early Church – St. Joseph’s Day remains a day of fast. Surely St. Joseph would want us to produce worthy fruits of penance during this holiest season as we prepare for the Pascal mystery. And surely the same can be said of our Lady, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, whose Annunciation we celebrate each year on March 25th.

Unfortunately, the 1983 Code of Canon Law which aligns with the many modernist changes in the Church weakly states:

The penitential days and times in the universal Church are every Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent. Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (Canons 1251 – 1252).

The notion that a solemnity that is not even a Holy Day of Obligation would trump Friday abstinence in Lent is absurd and a radical departure from all of our traditions. Such a notion comes from 1983 and never beforehand. For instance, even Christmas would not automatically dispense Friday abstinence in the Medieval Church – it required a direct dispensation from the pope – as Dom Guéranger writes in the *Liturgical Year* published in 1886:

To encourage her children in their Christmas joy, the Church has dispensed with the law of abstinence, if this Feast fall on a Friday. This dispensation was granted by Pope Honorius III, who ascended the Papal Throne in 1216. It is true that we find it mentioned by Pope St Nicholas I, in the ninth century; but the

dispensation was not universal; for the Pontiff is replying to the consultations of the Bulgarians, to whom he concedes this indulgence, in order to encourage them to celebrate these Feasts with solemnity and joy: Christmas Day, St Stephen, St John the Evangelist, the Epiphany, the Assumption of our Lady, St John the Baptist, and SS Peter and Paul. When the dispensation for Christmas Day was extended to the whole Church, these other Feasts were not mentioned.

Previously, a dispensation was required by the Holy Father even on Holy Days of Obligation that fell outside of Lent. Two examples indicating this are Pope Leo XIII's 1890 dispensation for Assumption Day and a 1907 dispensation issued for Canada for All Saints Day. All Saints Day was at that time a Holy Day of Obligation in Canada.

The Catholic Encyclopedia on St. Pius X's *Supremi disciplina* indicates that fasting was abolished *eo ipso* only starting in 1911 for all Holy Days of Obligation (which were at the same time reduced to only 8): "The present Motu Proprio institutes another important change in legislation. As feasting and fasting are incompatible Pius X has abolished the obligation of fasting as well as that of abstinence for the Universal Church, should such obligation coincide with any of the eight feasts, as above." In practice, we know that the exception was Lent. Lenten abstinence and fast always remained unless explicitly dispensed from even after the weakening changes in 1911.

**Year-Round Friday Abstinence is Required by the 1983 Code of Canon Law But Largely Ignored by Catholics.**

The following is quoted from the 1983 Code of Canon Law:

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Canon 1249: All Christ's faithful are obliged by divine law, each in his or her own way, to do penance. However, so that all may be joined together in a certain common practice of penance, days of penance are prescribed. On these days the faithful are in a special manner to devote themselves to prayer, to engage in works of piety and charity, and to deny themselves, by fulfilling their obligations more faithfully and especially by observing the fast and abstinence which the following canons prescribe.

Canon 1250: The days and times of penance for the universal Church are each Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.

Canon 1251: Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

And thus, Catholics are required without exception to abstain from meat on Fridays in Lent. Catholics are also required to abstain from meat on all Fridays of the year unless the Bishops Conference of that area allows an alternative penance to be performed. Many faithful Catholics however choose just to honor the tradition of fish on Fridays year-round instead of substituting an alternative. This is in line with Catholic Tradition and the 1917 Code of Canon Law which did not allow an alternative penance. If you cannot resist having meat on Friday, how can you possibly resist more insidious assaults from the devil?

In Lent, there is no substituting allowed. You also cannot transfer your abstinence from Friday to a different day like Thursday or Saturday. It must take place on Friday. To ignore the law of Friday abstinence is a mortal sin and not merely a venial sin. This was made clear by both Pope Innocent III in the 13th century and Pope Alexander VII in the 17th century.

### **Shared Days of Penance Matter**

What is even more concerning than losing these traditions and connections with the Faith as it has been practiced for centuries is that the Church has taught that days of communal penance are more efficacious than mere private penances. The trend to encourage private fasting and penances and reduce Church-wide fasting to only Ash Wednesday and Good Friday is deplorable.

As Dom Guéranger writes in his article on Ember Wednesday for September contained in his 15 volume series on the Liturgical Year:

We have already spoken of the necessity of private penance for the Christian who is at all desirous to make progress in the path of salvation. But in this, as in all spiritual exercises, a private work of devotion has neither the merit nor the efficacy of one that is done in company with the Church, and in communion with her public act; for the Church, as bride of Christ, communicates an exceptional worth and power to works of penance done, in her name, in the unity of the social body.

He continues by quoting the following passage from Pope St. Leo the Great:



God has sanctioned this privilege, that what is celebrated in virtue of a public law is more sacred than that which depends on a private regulation. The exercise of self-restraint which an individual Christian practices by his own will is for the advantage of that single member; but a fast undertaken by the Church at large includes everyone in the general purification. God's people never is so powerful as when the hearts of all the faithful join together in the unity of holy obedience, and when, in the Christian camp, one and the same preparation is made by all, and one and the same bulwark protects all...

### **What We Have Lost**

Today the number of fasting days in the Universal Church, including in the United States, is sadly only two: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Where has the rhythm and rhyme of the Catholic life gone?

While no authority in the Church may change or alter any established dogmas of the Faith, the discipline of both Holy Days of Obligation and fast days may change. The days of obligation and the days of penance are matters of discipline, not matters of dogma. Lawful authorities in the Church do have the power to change these practices.

In the observance of the two precepts, namely attending Holy Mass on prescribed days and fasting and abstaining on commanded days, we obey them because the Church has the power by Christ to command such things. We do not abstain from meat on Fridays for instance because the meat is unclean or evil. It is the act of disobedience which is evil. As Fr. Michael Müller remarks in his familiar *Explanation of Christian Doctrine* from 1874: "It is not the food, but the

disobedience that defiles a man.” To eat meat on a forbidden day unintentionally, for instance, is no sin. As the Scriptures affirm it is not what goes into one’s mouth that defiles a man but that disobedience which comes from the soul (cf. Matthew 15:11).

Yet, even with such a distinction, the Church has historically been wise to change disciplines only very slowly and carefully. As Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen once remarked, “It is a long-established principle of the Church never to completely drop from her public worship any ceremony, object or prayer which once occupied a place in that worship.” The same may be said for matters concerning either Holy Days of Obligation or fast days. What our forefathers held sacred should remain sacred to us in an effort to preserve our catholicity not only with ourselves but with our ancestors who see God now in Heaven.

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves and our own families what we can do, even if not mandated by Church law, to recover these former holy days of obligation and fasting days. Fasting and/or abstaining from meat and animal products on the forty days of Lent, the days of Advent, the Vigils of feasts, Ember Days, Rogation Days, and Saturdays year-round would be commendable. In a similar manner, observing the Apostles Fast or the Assumption Fast, which are still kept in the Eastern Churches, would also be praiseworthy for a Roman Catholic.<sup>34</sup>

For Traditional Catholics, the following Lenten fasting plan would help restore Lenten fasting discipline:

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<sup>34</sup> While much of the Eastern Churches have adopted the watered down fasting in the Latin Rite, the traditional Eastern fasting schedule can give us additional inspiration for how to incorporate ancient periods of fasting in our own lives. See the traditional fasting in place for the Eastern Catholics as of 1922 here:

<http://holyunia.blogspot.com/2010/08/traditional-byzantine-rite-fast-and.html>.

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- Fasting applies for those age 18 or older (but not obligatory for those 60 years of age or older)
- Ash Wednesday and Good Friday: No solid food. Only black coffee, tea, or water.
- Mondays through Saturdays: Only one meal preferably after sunset. A morning *frustulum* and evening collation are permitted but not required. No meat or animal products are allowed for anyone, regardless of age – that includes fish. No olive oil.
- Sundays: No meat or animal products allowed except on Laetare Sunday. Exceptions for Palm Sunday are mentioned below.
- Annunciation Day (March 25) and Palm Sunday: Fish and olive oil permitted.
- Holy Week (except Good Friday): Only Bread, Salt, and Herbs are permitted for the main meal. *Frustulum* and *collation* permitted (of bread, herbs, and salt) but omitted if possible
- Holy Saturday: No food until Noon. Abstinence including from all animal products continues until Easter begins.

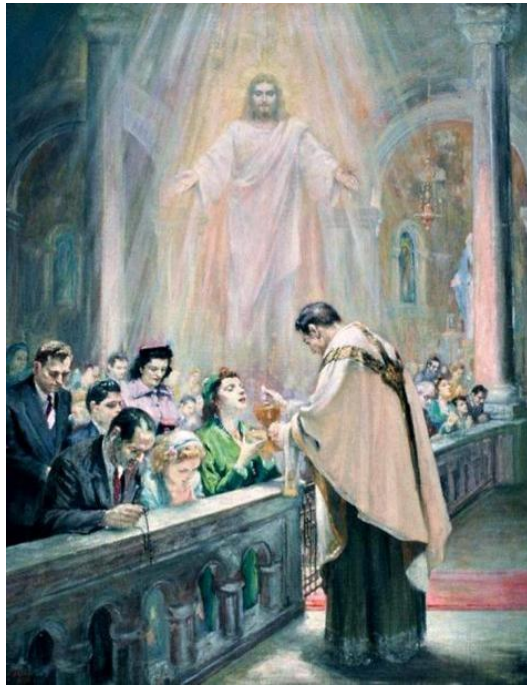
### **Rediscover A Love of Fasting**

The Church has over time reduced the requirements required under penalty sin, but She still implores the faithful to do more than the mere minimum. But in reality, are we? St. Francis de Sales remarked in the 16th / early 17th century, “If you’re able to fast, you will do well to observe some days beyond what are ordered by the Church.”

What days can you add? How can you better observe the feast days of the Apostles or the feasts of Our Lord or Our Lady? How can we fast better – both in terms of the number of days as well as by limiting the food we consume on fast days?



# The Complete History of the Eucharistic Fast in the Catholic Church



St. Augustine observes that “...it is clear that when the disciples first received the body and blood of the Lord they had not been fasting” (*Epis. 54*). But early on, the Church adopted the practice, later enriched into law, of a fast from all food and water in preparation for Holy Communion. This fast is known as the Eucharistic Fast. While fasting is usually described in terms of refraining from eating a certain amount, eating once a day, and breaking the fast at only certain times, this is quite distinct from the Eucharistic Fast which has its own history.

## **The Early Church Practiced A Eucharistic Fast from All Food Whatsoever**

The oldest record we have of the Eucharistic Fast as a midnight fast is from Tertullian (c. 160 – 220 AD), who in Book II, Chapter 5 of *Ad Uxorem* references a fast from all other food before receiving the Eucharist: “Will your husband not know what it is which you secretly eat before taking any food?” In the same era, St. Hippolytus (c. 170 – 235 AD), in the *Apostolic Tradition*, writes, “The faithful shall be careful to partake of the Eucharist before eating anything else” (ch 36).

St. Basil the Great (329 – 379 AD) similarly admonished the faithful who approached the Holy Eucharist to observe a period of fasting though he does not cite it as originating at midnight:

The Lord receives the faster within the holy chancel. He receives not him that is full of excess, as profane and unholy. For if you come tomorrow smelling of wine, and that rancid, how shall I reckon your crapula for fasting? Do not think it is because you have not just poured in unmixed wine, but because you are not pure from wine.<sup>35</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the Synod of Hippo in 393 codified the Eucharistic Fast as a complete fast from all food: “The Sacrament of the Altar shall be received only by those who are fasting, except on Maundy Thursday (*cena Domini*).” It was likewise codified in Canon 41 at the Council of Carthage in 419 AD:

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<sup>35</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Homilia De Jejunio II*, § 4, ed. Gaume, tom. ii, p. 17.

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That the Sacraments of the Altar are not to be celebrated except by those who are fasting, except on the one anniversary of the celebration of the Lord's Supper; for if the commemoration of some of the dead, whether bishops or others, is to be made in the afternoon, let it be only with prayers, if those who officiate have already breakfasted.<sup>36</sup>

Centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas references this decree noting that the exception for Holy Thursday had been abrogated by the time of St. Augustine:

The wording of this decree is in accordance with the former custom observed by some of receiving the body of Christ on that day after breaking their fast, so as to represent the Lord's Supper. But this is now abrogated, because as Augustine says it is customary throughout the whole world for Christ's body to be received before breaking the fast ([III q80 a8 ad 3](#)).

St. Augustine bears further witness to the universality of a complete and total fast before Holy Communion – in both East and West – in his [letter 54 to Januarius](#) from 400 AD:

Must we therefore censure the universal Church because the Sacrament is everywhere partaken of by persons fasting? Nay, verily, for from that time it pleased the Holy Ghost to appoint, for the honor of so great a Sacrament, that the Body of the Lord should take the precedence of all other food entering the mouth of a Christian; and it is for this reason that the custom referred to is universally observed.

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<sup>36</sup> Henry Robert Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church* (Parker, 1900), 461.

The writings of St. Ambrose around the same time (cf. *De Elia et Jejunio* 10, 33, 34) concur to this universality. Similarly, St. John Chrysostom alludes to the severity of this fast when, in defending himself against a charge that he gave Holy Communion to someone who was not fasting, writes:

If I have done this, then let my name be erased from the list of bishops and no longer stand in the book of the orthodox faith; for certainly, if I have done this, Christ will cast me out of His kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

By the time of the [Council of Trullo](#) in 691 AD, the exception for breaking the fast on Holy Thursday was abolished as decreed in Canon 29:

A canon of the Synod of Carthage says that the holy mysteries of the altar are not to be performed but by men who are fasting, except on one day in the year on which the Supper of the Lord is celebrated. At that time, on account perhaps of certain occasions in those places useful to the Church, even the holy Fathers themselves made use of this dispensation. But since nothing leads us to abandon exact observance, we decree that the Apostolic and Patristic tradition shall be followed; and define that it is not right to break the fast on the fifth feria of the last week of Lent, and thus to dishonour to the whole of Lent (Canon 29).

The Council of Trullo was never accepted as one of the Ecumenical Councils. Two canons of the council (e.g. Canons 13 and 55) condemned certain Roman practices but by 711

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<sup>37</sup> Gerhard Rauschen, *Eucharist and Penance in the First Six Centuries of the Church* (B. Herder, 1913), 150.



AD, Pope Constantine, in a compromise, accepted the canons in the East as valid but allowed differing practices in the Western Church to continue. A subsequent letter by Pope Hardrian I in 785 quoted Tarasios of Constantinople as approving the canons, and the letter was thereby taken as Pope Hadrian's own approval. The letter was read at the Second Council of Nicaea and in the aftermath, by the 12th century, some of the canons of the Council were incorporated in Gratian's *Decretum Gratiani*, known more commonly as the *Decretum*, which was the main source of law of the Roman Catholic Church until the *Decretals*, promulgated by Pope Gregory IX in 1234, obtained legal force.

Between St. Augustine and St. Thomas it is said that Pope St. Nicholas I in c. 850 AD reviled the idea of faithful eating before the liturgy, as the *American Ecclesiastical Review* relates: "St. Nicholas I categorically laid it down that it was wrong and unheard of, for good Christians, not only in Lenten seasons but even on high festivals, to allow any food to pass their lips before the public Mass was ended."<sup>38</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas in the Summa further appeals to the testimony of St. Augustine showing that while the Lord gave His Body and Blood to His disciples after a meal, it was appointed to the government of the Church under the Apostles to establish the law of fasting before Communion. And they did so:

The fact that our Lord gave this sacrament after taking food is no reason why the brethren should assemble after dinner or supper in order to partake of it, or receive it at meal-time, as did those whom the Apostle reproves and corrects. For our Saviour, in order the more strongly to commend the depth of this mystery, wished to

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<sup>38</sup> Rev. Herbert Thurston SJ, *American Ecclesiastical Review* (Catholic University of America Press, 1934), vol. 91, 577.

fix it closely in the hearts and memories of the disciples and on that account He gave no command for it to be received in that order, leaving this to the apostles, to whom He was about to entrust the government of the churches (*loc. cit.*, ad 1).

### **The Eucharistic Fast in the Eastern Church**

Before and after 1054, the East similarly continued to enjoin a fast before the reception of Holy Communion, which stretched back to before the time of St. Augustine. This is attested to in various decrees compiled in the Byzantine nomocanons, which are a collection of both civil and canon law.<sup>39</sup> The Nomocanon of Photios from 883 AD included earlier councils and Fathers in addition to the 102 canons of the Council of Trullo, the 17 canons of the Council of Constantinople from 861, and three canons substituted by Photios for those of the Council of Constantinople from 869. The Nomocanon of Photios supplemented *The Rudder*, a body of law for the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which was published in 1800 by Patriarch Neophytos VII, compiled by St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite. He named it after “*pedalion*” which means “rudder” to denote that just as a rudder guides the ship so too must the Church’s canons be a guide for the life of a Christian. Just as a captain turns the rudder either to the left or to the right, so should the spiritual father use it accordingly with a given person. So while the canons may be what they are, they are not to be understood in a purely legalistic way, but rather as guidelines towards growing in God and cultivating the likeness of God which we were created with.

These canons are fully Catholic in everything that does not contradict Roman decrees and customs. Therefore Latin and

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<sup>39</sup> James Morton, *Byzantine Religious Law in Medieval Italy* (OUP Oxford, 2021), 17 – 22.

Greek Catholics alike can gain wisdom from the Fathers from the Rudder.

These Eastern canons assert that fasting – just like all other ascetic practices – must only be followed according to the strength and health of each person. For instance, the 69th Apostolic Canon forbids fasting with harsh punishments (i.e., laicization for clerics and excommunication for laity) for those who are sick or have serious health problems. St. Basil the Great noted in his canons for the monks under his care that fasts “can be either made harsher or be relaxed by the confessor/spiritual father according to the person.”

The Rudder, which quotes the Council of Carthage as decreeing that priests must offer the Sacrifice while fasting, nevertheless adds as commentary on the previously mentioned remarks of St. John Chrysostom:

Note, however, that not only this Canon XLVIII of Carthage decrees that priests must officiate on an empty stomach [as we say in English, though in Greek the same idea is expressed differently by saying “fastingly”] but Canon LVI of the same Synod states that this is also confirmed by the Synod held in Nicaea. Nevertheless, if anyone is in danger of dying, he must commune even after having eaten, according to Canon IX of Nicephorus. When St. Chrysostom was blamed for having administered the Communion to some persons after they had eaten, he wrote in a letter to Bishop Kyriakos: ‘If it is true that I did this, may my name be stricken from the book of bishops. But if they say this to me once, and start quarreling, let them consider St. Paul, who baptized a whole household right after supper. Let them also consider Christ Himself, who

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gave the Communion to the Apostles right after supper.’ Hence it is evidence that those who are about to commune has permission up to midnight to drink water, and thereafter they must not put anything in their mouth until they have communed.<sup>40</sup>

The whole concept of fasting falls within the concept of a Christian way of life. When St. Nikodemos and Agaprios were compiling the *Pedalion* from all the canons, their main purpose for doing this was to provide Christians with a guideline for their lives in the late 18th century. When fasting is mentioned in the canons it evokes the implicit concept of preparation which ties in with the general concept of the interdependence of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. By fasting one is creating in the body what already exists in the soul (i.e., as the soul hungers for Christ and to come in communion with the Holy Trinity, so you are imitating that hunger in the body by fasting and its desire for sustenance), but at the same time it also becomes a confession of faith by proclaiming that our true sustenance is God. This coincides with the ancient understanding of the connection between food and knowledge which we gain knowledge of something by partaking of it.

Hippocrates had famously said we are what we eat, but even from a modern viewpoint think of the concept of nutrition, we are nourished by what we “commune” with. Such a mindset still persists in practice among Eastern Christians to this day. In the Byzantine Tradition, the custom of fasting from midnight to the reception of Holy Communion remained until the mid 20th century.

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<sup>40</sup> *The Pedalion*, trans. Denver Cummings, J Masterjohn, ed. (The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 2005), 711.

## **The Middle Ages & the Eucharistic Fast**

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church maintained the obligation of fasting from all food and water throughout the night until the reception of the Most Holy Eucharist. The fast as originating from midnight to the time of Holy Communion is attested to by St. Thomas Aquinas who in the Summa writes:

That this sacrament ought to enter into the mouth of a Christian before any other food must not be understood absolutely of all time, otherwise he who had once eaten or drunk could never afterwards take this sacrament: but it must be understood of the same day; and although the beginning of the day varies according to different systems of reckoning (for some begin their day at noon, some at sunset, others at midnight, and others at sunrise), the Roman Church begins it at midnight. Consequently, if any person takes anything by way of food or drink after midnight, he may not receive this sacrament on that day; but he can do so if the food was taken before midnight (*loc. cit.* ad 4).

The Angelic Doctor continues by further affirming that neither water nor medicine – even in small quantities – may be intentionally consumed without violating the Eucharistic Fast:

First, there is the natural fast, which implies privation of everything taken before-hand by way of food or drink: and such fast is required for this sacrament... And therefore it is never lawful to take this sacrament after taking water, or other food or drink, or even medicine, no matter how small the quantity be (*loc. cit.* ad 5).

By the time of the Council of Constance (1414 – 1418 AD) the exception for Holy Thursday was no longer observed as affirmed at Session XIII on June 15, 1415:

...it is for this reason that this present Council... declares, decides, and defines, that, although Christ instituted that venerable sacrament after supper and administered it to His disciples under both species of bread and wine; yet, notwithstanding this, the laudable authority of the sacred canons and the approved custom of the Church have maintained and still maintain that a sacrament of this kind should not be consecrated after supper, nor be received by the faithful who are not fasting, except in case of sickness or of another necessity granted or admitted by law or Church...<sup>41</sup>

### **Trent Affirms A Midnight Fast**

The Catechism of the Council of Trent published under the order of Pope St. Pius V in 1566 further teaches a complete fast from all food and water: “We are to approach the Holy Table fasting, having neither eaten nor drunk anything at least from the preceding midnight until the moment of Communion.”<sup>42</sup>

While we know that this was the universal rule, Tradition shows that over time various exceptions were gradually eliminated, as similarly seen in the Liturgy through organic development. Even at this time, the unintentional consumption of food or water before receiving the Sacrament was not sinful.

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<sup>41</sup> Denzinger 626 taken from *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (Preserving Christian Publications, 2020), 211.

<sup>42</sup> *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests* (Joseph F. Wagner, 1947), 248.

And neither was receiving Holy Communion as Viaticum without having observed the strict Eucharistic Fast in force.

### **The 1917 Code of Canon Law**

By the turn of the 20th century, the Eucharistic Fast as practiced under the reign of Pope St. Pius X remained one of complete abstinence from all “food or drink” as the [\*Catholic Encyclopedia\*](#) published in 1910 testifies to:

That Holy Communion may be received not only validly, but also fruitfully, certain dispositions both of body and of soul are required. For the former, a person must be fasting from the previous midnight from everything in the nature of food or drink. The general exception to this rule is the Viaticum, and, within certain limits, communion of the sick. In addition to the fast it is recommended with a view to greater worthiness, to observe bodily continence and exterior modesty in dress and appearance. The principal disposition of soul required is freedom from at least mortal sin and ecclesiastical censure. For those in a state of grievous sin confession is necessary. This is the proving oneself referred to by St. Paul (1 Corinthians 11:28).

The traditional Eucharistic fast of abstinence from all food and water, with limited exceptions, was enshrined in the 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code in Canon 858. Such a fast applied to priests as well as anyone approaching Holy Communion:

Those who have not kept the natural fast from midnight are not allowed to receive, except in danger of death, or in case it should become

necessary to consume the Blessed Sacrament to safeguard it against irreverence.<sup>43</sup>

Father Dominic Prümmer in his *Handbook of Moral Theology* writes in commentary on this law:

The eucharistic fast, i.e. abstinence from all food and drink from midnight immediately preceding reception. This is a universal and most ancient custom which has been confirmed by many Councils in the Code of Canon Law, cc. 808 and 858. The law of fasting admits of no parity of matter either in the quantity of food and drink taken or in time. Three conditions are required in order that what is taken have the character of food or drink:

a) it must be digestible, and accordingly such things as small bones, human nails or human hair do not violate the fast;

b) it must be taken exteriorly, because what is taken interiorly is not eaten or drunk in the proper sense of the word. This is not a violation of the fast to swallow saliva or blood from the teeth or nasal cavities;

c) it must be taken by the action of eating or drinking. Therefore the fast is not violated by anything received into the stomach a) mixed with saliva, such as a few drops of water swallowed while cleaning the teeth, b) through the action of breathing, v.g. when a man

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<sup>43</sup> Stanislaus Woywod, *The New Canon Law: A Commentary and Summary of the New Code of Canon Law* (Joseph F Wagner, 1918), 172.



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smokes or inhales tobacco smoke, c) through the injection of a nutritive substance.<sup>44</sup>

He adds how the fast should be calculated by noting concerning midnight:

Midnight may be computed in accordance with solar or legal time (whether this be regional or otherwise).<sup>45</sup>

And most importantly he notes six exceptions from the eucharistic fast:

1. In order to complete the sacrifice of the Mass (after the consecration of at least the bread or the wine)
2. In order to preserve the Blessed Sacrament from irreverence;
3. In order to avoid public scandal (when, for instance, ill-repute would be incurred if the priest did not celebrate Mass);
4. In order to receive Viaticum;
5. In order that Holy Communion may be given to the sick who have been confined to bed for a month without any certain hope of speedy recovery. These may receive Holy Communion twice a week though they have taken medicine or liquid food (c. 858, § 2). The words “liquid food” include anything that is drunk even though it is nutritive food, such as raw eggs (but not cooked eggs);

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<sup>44</sup> Rev. Dominic M. Prümmer, *Handbook of Moral Theology* (The Mercier Press, Limited, 1949), 270 – 271.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

6. In order that catechumens may receive Holy Communion after tasting salt during their Baptisms.<sup>46</sup>

Hence, while the law requiring abstinence from all food and drink from midnight was one of universal law, there were several exceptions permitted in 1917, though the most common of which was Viaticum. As a result, even in the centuries before the time of Pope Pius XII, the Church mandated a strict fast before reception of the Holy Eucharist but did prudently permit various unique exceptions. Yet even beyond the letter of the law, the spirit of the law always shone. And this is seen in particular by the counsel given in the 1946 book “Questions of Catholics Answers” by Father Windfrid Herbst on Holy Communion at Midnight Mass:

There is no special universal law for the Christmas midnight Mass. If there were any good reason for it, one might take food or drink just before twelve o'clock and yet receive Communion during the Mass. No sin would thereby be committed. However, it is to be strongly recommended that those who receive Holy Communion during the midnight Mass be fasting from at least 8:00 PM out of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. One should have enough spirit of sacrifice to offer the Eucharistic Savior this little tribute of respect.<sup>47</sup>

Why eight PM? Father Herbst explains:

We say 8:00 PM because when permission was granted some years ago that a Mass beginning at midnight might be regularly said at a certain famous European shrine, at which Mass the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Rev. Windfrid Herbst, *Questions of Catholics Answers* (1946), 82.

faithful might also receive Holy Communion, it was expressly prescribed that they be fasting from 8:00 o'clock on. We here see the mind of the Church, legislating in a particular instance; and we say that this is at least the earnest wish of the Church in all instances, unless otherwise specified.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Historic Changes to the Eucharistic Fast in the 20th Century**

In 1953, before changing the immemorial Eucharistic Fast, Pope Pius XII referenced both the aforementioned Synod of Hippo and St. Augustine as testimony of this ancient discipline when he wrote in "*Christus Dominus*":

From the very earliest time the custom was observed of administering the Eucharist to the faithful who were fasting. Toward the end of the fourth century fasting was prescribed by many Councils for those who were going to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice. So it was that the Council of Hippo in the year 393 issued this decree: *'The Sacrament of the altar shall be offered only by those who are fasting.'* Shortly afterward, in the year 397, the Third Council of Carthage issued this same command, using the very same words. At the beginning of the fifth century this custom can be called quite common and immemorial. Hence St. Augustine affirms that the Holy Eucharist is always received by people who are fasting and likewise that this custom is observed throughout the entire world.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 82 – 83.

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Doubtless this way of doing things was based upon very serious reasons, among which there can be mentioned first of all the one the Apostle of the Gentiles deploras when he is dealing with the brotherly love-feast of the Christians. Abstinence from food and drink is in accord with that supreme reverence we owe to the supreme majesty of Jesus Christ when we are going to receive Him hidden under the veils of the Eucharist. And moreover, when we receive His precious Body and Blood before we take any food, we show clearly that this is the first and loftiest nourishment by which our soul is fed and its holiness increased. Hence the same St. Augustine gives this warning: ‘It has pleased the Holy Ghost that, to honor so great a Sacrament, the Lord’s Body should enter the mouth of the Christian before other food.’

Not only does the Eucharistic fast pay due honor to our Divine Redeemer, it fosters piety also; and hence it can help to increase in us those most salutary fruits of holiness which Christ, the Source and Author of all good, wishes us who are enriched by His Grace to bring forth.<sup>49</sup>

Effective with the promulgation of *Christus Dominus*, Pope Pius XII declared: “In the future it shall be a general and common principle for all, both priests and faithful, that natural water does not break the Eucharistic fast.” Four years later on March 25, 1957, Pope Pius XII issued *Sacram Communionem* which mitigated the midnight fast from all solid food and all alcoholic beverages to merely three hours before Holy Communion. Nonalcoholic beverages were subject to a one

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<sup>49</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Christus Dominus: Concerning the Discipline to be Observed with Respect to the Eucharistic Fast* (January 6, 1953).

hour fast, though water was permitted as stated in *Christus Dominus*. Yet even with these unprecedented alterations to a discipline that stretched back to the subapostolic age, the Holy Father counseled the faithful, if possible, to keep the former fast:

We strongly exhort priests and faithful who are able to do so to observe the old and venerable form of the Eucharistic fast before Mass and Holy Communion. All those who will make use of these concessions must compensate for the good received by becoming shining examples of a Christian life and principally with works of penance and charity.<sup>50</sup>

Yet far from returning to these practices, the faithful have forgotten them altogether and even monastic communities have adopted the minimums imposed by the subsequent changes enriched in the 1983 code. This code incorporated further changes made by Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, and January 29, 1973. Canon 919 of the 1983 provides as a minimum:

§1 Whoever is to receive the blessed Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before holy communion from all food and drink, with the sole exception of water and medicine

§2 A priest who, on the same day, celebrates the blessed Eucharist twice or three times may consume something before the second or third celebration, even though there is not an hour's interval.

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<sup>50</sup> Pope Pius XII, [\*Sacram Communionem: On Laws of Fasting and the Evening Mass\*](#) (March 25, 1957).

§3 The elderly and those who are suffering from some illness, as well as those who care for them, may receive the blessed Eucharist even if within the preceding hour they have consumed something.

Hence the changes to the Eucharistic Fast initiated under Pope Pius XII were accelerated, leaving the Church with a virtually non-existent fast. Such a reality stands in sharp contrast to the testimony of the Fathers, the decrees of the Synods of old, and the example of saints like St. Fructuosus who would not even drink water on the day of his martyrdom.

If the fast preceding the reception of the Sacrament of the Altar was based on divine law, then not even the Pope could dispense from it. But as seen in practice, this is not the case. Father Francisco Suárez (1548 – 1617), a Spanish Jesuit who was the leading figure of the School of Salamanca movement at this time, and regarded as one of the greatest scholastics after St. Thomas Aquinas, adds: “One thing is certain: the precept concerning the receiving of the Eucharist before all food and drink is not imposed *jure divino*.” *Jure Divino* (Latin for “by divine law”) was distinct from the precepts instituted by the Church which could be changed. Yet, even if the Church *could* change such a fast, which unmistakably stretched back to the Early Church, *why* would she do so?

### **The Allowance and Prevalence of Evening Masses Cemented A Change in the Immemorial Eucharistic Fast**

The time of day in which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass may take place is governed by the Church’s law. As codified in Canon 821 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law: “The beginning of the celebration of Mass shall not occur earlier than one hour before dawn or later than one hour after noon.” This law was based on the practice of the Apostolic Fathers who generally celebrated the Sacrifice of the Mass in the morning. Tertullian,

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writing before his death c. 220 AD bears witness to the Mass taking place very early in the morning: “We take also, in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike” (*De Corona*). Such a practice persisted for centuries and eventually became Church Law.

Father Shawn Tunink summarized this development in his dissertation on the topic of evening Masses:

Looking back over the development regarding the day and time of Mass throughout history, the following can be summarized. The first Mass was celebrated in the evening hours on a Thursday. Very quickly thereafter the focus shifted to celebrating Mass in commemoration of the resurrection rather than connecting back to the historical time and day of the Last Supper. This consisted principally in the shift to the placing of the weekly assembly on Sunday. The time for Mass still seems to have varied from place to place and no written restrictions to the morning hours can be found until the time of Pius V in 1566. By 1917, although the law then allowed Mass to be celebrated on every day of the week, the time for Mass was entirely restricted to the morning. This was somewhat of a break with the more fluid history, but seems to have been aimed primarily at maintaining a connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and the morning appearances of Jesus after the resurrection.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Rev. Shawn Turnick, *Evening Masses and Days of Obligation: Historical Development and Modern Norms*, (Thesis, The Catholic

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Christmas midnight Mass, in particular as we said, was governed by an exception. Hence, while the time in which Mass may traditionally be said is specified in the 1917 Code of Canon Law as no earlier than one hour before dawn, Canon 821 §2 provided the specific exception for the time of midnight Mass: “On the night of Christmas, the conventual or parochial Mass alone can be started at midnight, but not otherwise without apostolic indult.”

Amid the turmoil of the Second World War, further exceptions were instituted in nations affected by the War as Father Tunink adds:

In 1941 German bishops were given permission for evening Masses on Sundays and weekdays ‘as need dictated.’ The previously mentioned indult given to Cardinal Suhard was applied to prisoners of war. Finally, American priests who were serving as military chaplains and other priests serving those in the military were given the special permission of celebrating Mass up to 7:30 pm on Sunday and weekdays without exception.<sup>52</sup>

And in the years after World War II, more prelates sought permission from the Holy See to continue offering Masses in the evening. Such changes were in part a reason for Pope Pius XII universally changing the Eucharistic Fast. Yet, it was not until the mid-1960s that, expanding upon this, various bishops began to seek permission for the faithful to satisfy their Sunday obligation of Mass attendance at a Mass celebrated on Saturday evening. Even after clarification was issued in 1964 that Sunday must still be kept as a day free of servile work, the

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University of America, 2016),  
<[https://archive.ccwatershed.org/media/pdfs/17/11/25/19-25-37\\_0.pdf](https://archive.ccwatershed.org/media/pdfs/17/11/25/19-25-37_0.pdf)>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



practice of many Catholics no longer matched this reality when Vigil Masses offered on Saturday evenings became widely practiced.

This indulgent existed in the United States up until the 1983 Code of Canon Law, which states in Canon 931: “The celebration and distribution of the Eucharist can be done at any day and hour except those which the liturgical norms exclude.” The 1983 Law also stated: “A person who assists at a Mass celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the feast day itself or in the evening of the preceding day satisfies the obligation of participating in the Mass.” In practice, the prevalence of evening Masses – anticipatory or otherwise – which occurred nearly simultaneously with the change to the immemorial Eucharistic Fast imposes immense difficulties on the faithful who strive to observe the midnight Eucharistic Fast.

The goal of the reduced Eucharistic fast was to allow for the proliferation of evening Masses. It was the goal of Pius XII and several bishops to account for the new developments of the industrial age, in a time when people began to work different hours than in the past. While this was a reasonable goal in theory, it is another example of the acquiescence of the Papacy and of the bishops to the weakness of modern man.

Evening Masses were common in the 1st millennium at least from 200 AD until around 1000 AD. It was the practice of the early church to have evening Masses every day in Lent and Advent except on Sundays, and the faithful fasted sometimes from sunset to sunset and sometimes from midnight to sunset, even without a single drop of water. They prayed earnestly and received our Blessed Lord in Holy Communion daily throughout Lent and Advent.

Tertullian is explicit about this along with the afternoon Masses that were common on Wednesdays, Fridays,

Saturdays, and on vigils. And yet for 800 years the whole Church joyously fasted from everything for the whole day before receiving the Lord in Holy Communion.

### **Return to Tradition**

The Eucharistic Fast is set by the Church so that those who are to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion are more consciously aware of this sublime encounter. While the specifics of the Eucharistic Fast have undergone considerable changes in the past century, the fast remains a matter of grave obligation. To intentionally violate the Eucharistic fast is a mortal sin.

Let us endeavor to observe in our own lives the strictness of the traditional discipline of all fasting – including the Eucharistic Fast – in a time when so few do penance and in keeping with the admonishment of Pope Pius XII who, even while altering the ancient fast, implored “[all] who are able to do so to observe the old and venerable form of the Eucharistic Fast before Mass and Holy Communion.”

## The Fellowship of St. Nicholas



The Fellowship of St. Nicholas is a lay sodality championed by *A Catholic Life* in partnership with *OnePeterFive* and *Sensus Fidelium*. It is committed to putting into practice concrete means to save one's soul and assist the souls of our brethren.

Under the patronage of St. Nicholas, this fellowship intends to serve as a means for Catholic Traditionalists to band together and **make communal penance in reparation** for the sins of the clergy, for the conversion of sinners, for the restoration of the Catholic Faith, and the triumph of Christendom in every country, home, and heart.

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While St. Nicholas is well known for his charity and generosity, it is seldom mentioned how strictly he observed the laws of fast and abstinence from his infancy, as the traditional Roman Breviary remarks in the lessons at Matins:

Nicolas was born at the famous city of Patara in Lycia. His parents obtained him from God by prayer, and the holiness of his life was marked even from the cradle. When he was at the breast, he never would suck more than once on Wednesdays and Fridays, and that always after sunset, though he sucked freely on other days. This custom of fasting he never broke through during his whole life.

Using the Church's venerable history of fasting and abstinence as our guide, we band together to hold each other accountable and to earn greater merits for souls. As St. Leo the Great affirmed:

The exercise of self-restraint which an individual Christian practices by his own will is for the advantage of that single member; but a fast undertaken by the Church at large includes everyone in the general purification. God's people never is so powerful as when the hearts of all the faithful join together in the unity of holy obedience, and when, in the Christian camp, one and the same preparation is made by all, and one and the same bulwark protects all...

### **Rule of Traditional Catholic Fasting for the Fellowship**

All members of this sodality agree to commit to the Tier 1, which is beyond the minimum required by Church law. Members may also privately commit to Tier Two or Tier Three at their own or their spiritual director's discretion. This is open to Catholics of any Rite.

## **TIER 1**

This Tier takes the 1917 Code of Canon Law as a minimum (adding a few extra changes that occurred in the decades following its promulgation)

### **ABSTINENCE**

- No flesh meat (i.e., meat from mammals or fowl) is to be consumed on any Friday in the year with no exceptions<sup>53</sup>
- No flesh meat is to be consumed throughout all of Lent from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday inclusive (including Sundays)
- No flesh meat is to be consumed on any Ember Day, the Vigil of Ss. Peter and Paul (June 28), Vigil of the Assumption (August 14), the Vigil of All Saints (October 31), the Vigil of the Immaculate Conception (December 7), the Vigil of Christmas (December 24), the Vigil of Pentecost, and January 22 (transferred to January 23 when the 22<sup>nd</sup> falls on a Sunday) for the National Day of Penance for Human Life.
- No sweets may be consumed for the duration of Lent (e.g., cake, cookies, pie, candies, gummies, chocolate/candy bars, pastries, cupcakes, chocolate muffins, pudding/custard, ice cream, Nutella, fudge, truffles, pralines, bonbons, mochi)

### **FASTING**

- Fasting is defined as one meal only a day that may not be consumed earlier than noon but preferably is

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<sup>53</sup> “Flesh meat” is defined as all meats other than fish and seafood.

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consumed after 3 PM or even after sunset. If necessary, an optional evening *collation* and an optional morning *frustulum* is allowed.<sup>54</sup>

- Fasting is to be observed for the entirety of Lent (except for Sundays), the Ember Days, the Vigil of Ss. Peter and Paul (June 28), Vigil of the Assumption (August 14), the Vigil of All Saints (October 31), the Vigil of the Immaculate Conception (December 7), the Vigil of Christmas (December 24), the Vigil of Pentecost, and January 22 (transferred to January 23 when the 22<sup>nd</sup> falls on a Sunday) for the National Day of Penance for Human Life.

### **TIER 2**

#### **ABSTINENCE**

- Everything as above in Tier 1 with the following additions:
- No flesh meat (i.e., meat from mammals or fowl) is to be consumed on any Saturday in the year unless that day is a First-Class Feast or a former Holy Day of Obligation
- Abstinence for all of Lent (including Sundays) includes abstaining from all seafood (e.g., fish, shellfish) eggs, and all dairy products (e.g., milk, butter, cheese). Hence, Lent is a vegan fast – not a vegetarian one.
- Abstinence on the Minor and Major Rogation Days.

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<sup>54</sup> Fr. Hardon defines a *frustulum* as “The small portion of food, a few ounces, formerly permitted at breakfast on fast days. This was provided by canon law (Canon 1251), which permitted taking some food, morning and evening, in addition to the one full meal per day.” A collation is “A light meal that is allowed in addition to a full meal on fasting days.” Generally a frustulum is 2 ounces and a collation is 8 ounces.

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- No flesh meat is to be consumed during St. Martin's Lent from November 12 until Christmas Day – except for Sundays, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (unless it falls on a Friday), and Thanksgiving Day in the United States of America

### **FASTING**

- Everything as above in Tier 1 with the following additions: The entirety of St. Martin's Lent in Advent (except for Sundays) are days of abstinence from flesh meat.

In this tier, the fast and abstinence that is omitted in years when a day falls on a Sunday is transferred to the preceding Saturday (as it was done before the 1917 Code of Canon Law changes).

### **TIER 3**

#### **ABSTINENCE**

- Everything as above in Tier 1 & 2 with the following additions:
- Abstinence for the Vigil of the Purification of our Lady (February 1), the Vigil of Corpus Christi, the Vigil of St. Lawrence (August 9), the Vigil of St. Bartholomew (August 23), the Vigil of Ss. Simon and Jude (October 27), and for the duration of the Apostles Fast (except on Sundays) and the Assumption Fast (except on Sundays).

#### **FASTING**

- Everything as above in Tier 1 & 2 with the following additions: Fasting for the duration of Apostles Fast in June (except on Sundays) and the Assumption Fast in August (except on Sundays) along with the Vigil of St.

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Lawrence (August 9), the Vigil of St. Bartholomew (August 23), the Vigil of Ss. Simon and Jude (October 27).

In this tier, like the one above, the fast and abstinence that is omitted in years a day falls on a Sunday is transferred to the preceding Saturday (as it was done before the 1917 Code of Canon Law changes).

### HOW TO JOIN

Any member of the lay faithful can freely commit to Tier 1, the base requirement for the fellowship. This commitment is a voluntary penance and failure to fulfill this commitment does not bind under pain even of venial sin. To join, join the Telegram group here: <https://t.me/+aXEK-WgNzL42NmJh>.

Go to <https://onepeterfive.com/fast> for these rules and an annual fasting calendar published every year.

Image: Simple Fasting