

CATHOLIC CONDITIONS OF FAST & ABSTINENCE POST VATICAN II

Fast and Abstinence for modern day Catholics is often a confusing issue following Vatican II, simply because so little is taught either by Clergy or Educators as part of our Catholic faith formation.

Before Vatican II, the rules were taught in schools and regularly from the Pulpit, everyone understood what was expected of Catholics young and old, like so much more Vatican II muddied the waters by passing the regulation down to the Bishop Conferences to control in their own countries or jurisdictions.

The results can be found on the Internet (Google etc), however we must be careful to avoid relying on the rules say of Boston or London or various other entries on the Internet, because they may not apply to Australian Catholics.

What is Fast? What is Abstinence?

Fasting means not eating as much food during the fasting period as you would on non-fasting days; for Catholics mainly during Lent. Originally, fasting meant abstaining entirely from food for whole or part of the fast day. Over the Centuries the rules have been modified due to such as wars, famines, natural disasters and so on; changing the rules is not new but a lack of information has found its way into our culture.

**“In current Catholic practice, fasting means having only one full meal a day. Smaller quantities of food may be eaten at two other meals, but no food should be consumed at any other time during the day.”
(Australia)**

Who should fast? **The law of fasting applies to people from 18 to 59 years old.**

“Abstinence is the practice of abstaining from the use of certain kinds of food. From early Christian times hermits practised abstinence. St Anthony and his followers, for example, abstained from all food except bread, salt and water. The Eastern Church continues the strict ancient rule of abstinence from meat, eggs, dairy products, oil and wine during the whole of Lent. Catholics were once well known for their practice of abstaining from meat on Fridays.” Brisbane Diocese

Everyone aged 14 years and older is bound by the law of abstinence from meat.

“The spirit of the law ... invites us to extend the fast to things other than food - television or computer games, gambling or gossiping. The minimum fasting requirements make most sense when they are combined with prayer and almsgiving. These age-old disciplines reflect our most fundamental concerns: our relationship with God (prayer), with our bodies (fasting) and with others (almsgiving)” Brisbane Diocese

The purpose of fasting and abstinence is not to punish but to teach us a detachment from whatever may keep us from God. Turning our hearts more toward God and less toward food helps make us more disciplined and more charitable. In addition, the practice helps us imitate the example of Jesus who fasted for 40 days in preparation for his ministry and provides a means of expressing our common repentance.” Brisbane Diocese

The sixth-century Rule of Benedict still holds true: "During these days of Lent let us all deny ourselves some food, drink, sleep, needless talking and idle jesting, and look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing" (Chapter 49)

Canon 1251: Abstinence from eating meat or another food according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops is to be observed on Fridays throughout the year unless they are solemnities; **abstinence and fast are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on the Friday of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Canon 1252: All persons who have completed their fourteenth year are bound by the law of abstinence; all adults are bound by the law of fast up to the beginning of their sixtieth year. Nevertheless, pastors and parents are to see to it that minors who are not bound by the law of fast and abstinence are educated in an authentic sense of penance.

And there we have it, clear as mud? I hope not. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday FAST & ABSTINENCE; otherwise, voluntary as penance on other days of Lent and Fridays throughout the year. PJC