

Rules for penitential days under present/ current Church law (1983)

According to the **1983 Code of Canon Law**, Canons 1249-1253, there are two sets of laws that apply to the Church's penitential days:

- (1) The law of abstinence: this refers to abstaining from meat.
- (2) The law of fasting: this refers to the quantity of food taken, thus also refraining from eating between meals.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fasting and abstinence.

Who is bound to observe these laws?

- The law of abstinence binds all Catholics in the Western Church, beginning on their 14th birthday.
- The law of fasting binds all adults (beginning on their 18th birthday) until the midnight which completes their 59th birthday.

What is forbidden and allowed to be eaten?

The law of abstinence forbids the use of meat. This does not apply to dairy products, eggs, or condiments made from animal fat.

- The law of fasting allows only one full meal a day and two smaller meals. The two smaller meals combined should not equal the quantity of the main meal.
- Eating between meals is not permitted, but liquids are allowed, including milk and fruit juices.
- Fish and all cold-blooded animals may be eaten (e.g., clams, etc.).

Rules for traditional penitential practices in the former law of the Church

These traditional rules of fasting and abstinence were observed in the 1962 liturgical calendar and outlined in Canons 1250-1254 of the **1917 Code of Canon Law**:

Who was bound to observe these laws?

- The law of abstinence bound all Catholics, beginning on the day after their 7th birthday.
- The law of fasting bound all Catholics, beginning on the day after their 18th birthday and ending at the midnight which completed their 59th birthday.

What was forbidden and allowed to be eaten?

- The law of abstinence forbade the eating of flesh meat and of broth made of meat, but did not exclude the use of eggs, dairy products, or seasonings made from the fat of animals.
- The law of fasting prescribed that only one full meal a day was taken with two smaller meals that did not equal the main one.
- As to the kind of food and the amount that might be taken, the approved customs of the place were to be observed. It was not forbidden to eat both flesh meat and fish at the same meal, nor to interchange the midday and evening meals.