

**THE LENTEN SEASON**

When I was growing up, the Lenten Holy Fast was observed every day of the season, with the exception of Sundays. No meat was eaten on Ash Wednesday or any of the Fridays. Meat could be eaten only at the main meal on the other days. Together, the other two meatless meals of the day were not to equal the main meal.

The Church has relaxed those regulations; and, for a good reason. While those fasting rejoiced in the celebration of Easter Sunday, not much changed in most lives once Lent was over. For many, Easter was a time when one, simply, got back to life as usual.

Fasting is beneficial physically, as well as spiritually. So, please, understand that I am not discouraging the practice. However, the exercise of “giving up” should extend to other things, in addition to food. Bad habits come to the forefront as an example. But, giving up legitimate pleasures and activities also expresses our love for the God who gives all of that to us.

What the Church imposes are bare requirements for today’s observance of the Lenten Season. “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.” This applies only to Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and the Fridays of Lent.

The way that the law is worded can be subject to easy misinterpretation. What it means in practical terms is that everyone is obligated from the day after his or her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent. From the day after one’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday up to the day after one’s 59<sup>th</sup> birthday is the period when a person is obligated to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

However, there is much more that we can and should do in preparation for Easter. The Church leaves this up to us, as the adjustments needed in one’s Christian living vary with each person.

In my early Lenten years, my mother would tell me that if I did not straighten up, I would end up behaving for the rest of the year the way that I was acting at that particular moment. That did not seem to scare me all that much. I knew that she was simply trying to make life easier for herself. Nevertheless, her exhortation had a solid spiritual basis. The time of the Lenten Season is intended for self-reformation. Our focus during these days of opportunity should be upon the type of person we want to be (and ought to be) for the rest of our life.

My spiritual director counsels me on living the “present moment.” After all, that is the only portion of our life over which we have actual control. The question to ask, then, would be: Do we want others to know us as we are at any particular moment? More importantly: Do we intend to present ourselves to our God in the way that we are prone to behave? If not, we have the power to change whatever needs changing in this present moment, - in this Season of Lent.

This holy season of grace is something like a spiritual workshop. We can consider it to be a retreat. Looking at it as a “diet” or an “exercise regimen” is not bad, either. It is all about getting back into shape, - spiritual shape. So, how are you shaping up after a week of Lent?