

Ash Wednesday, Lent and Easter regulations

ASH WEDNESDAY

The blessing and imposition of ashes takes place only on Ash Wednesday, ordinarily during the celebration of the Eucharist. If the Eucharist is not celebrated, the blessing and distribution is to take place within the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

LENT AND EASTER REGULATIONS

A distinction is to be made between Lent and the Easter Triduum. Strictly speaking, Lent ends with the beginning of the Triduum on Holy Thursday. The Ordo notes: "Lent runs from Ash Wednesday until the Mass of the Lord's Supper of Holy Thursday."

Fasting is to be observed on Ash Wednesday by all Catholics who are 18 years of age but not yet 59. Those who are bound to fast may take only one full meal. Two smaller meals are permitted if necessary to maintain strength according to each one's needs, but eating solid foods between meals is not permitted.

Abstinence from meat is to be observed by all Catholics 14 years or older on Ash Wednesday and on all Fridays of Lent. The determination of certain days as obligatory days of penance should not be understood as limiting the occasions for Christian penance. The spirit of the season of Lent should be maintained throughout the weeks of Lent. The obligation to observe penitential days of the Church is serious.

Failure to observe individual days of penance is not necessarily considered serious. No one should be scrupulous in this regard. People should seek to do more rather than less, since fast and abstinence on the days prescribed should be considered a minimal response to the Lord's call to penance and conversion of life.

THE PASCHAL FAST

All Catholics of the appropriate age (see above) are to fast and abstain on Good Friday. The Second Vatican Council observed: "Let the paschal fast be kept sacred. Let it be celebrated everywhere on Good Friday and, where possible, prolonged throughout Holy Saturday, so that the joys of the Sunday of the Resurrection may be attended with uplifted and clear mind."

TIME FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE EASTER VIGIL

The Roman missal states that the entire celebration of the Easter Vigil takes place at night. The Vigil is not to begin before nightfall and is to end before daybreak on Easter Sunday. No Mass may precede the Easter Vigil. The "Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Vigil," issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1988, notes that "the very concept of the vigil has almost come to be forgotten in some places with the result that it is celebrated as if it were an evening Mass, in the same way and at the same time as the Mass celebrated on Saturday evening in anticipation of the Sunday." The "Circular Letter" repeats the norm of the Roman Missal and adds that "this rule is to be taken according to its strictest sense."

Pastors are reminded that Daylight Savings Time this year will begin at 2 a.m. on Sunday, March 14, which is the Fourth Sunday of Lent. This year, the Vigil will take place during Central Daylight Savings Time. The United States Weather Service states that on Holy Saturday, April 3, the sun will set at **7:20 p.m. C.D.T. Complete darkness occurs at 7:44 p.m. The Easter Vigil liturgy may not begin before 8 p.m. C.D.T.**

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