

# FR. CLIFF'S NOTES

by Fr. Clifford Smith

## What Happened to Fridays as Penitential Days?

The Roman Catholic Church believes that all people are obliged by God to perform some penance for their sins, and for the remission of the sins of others, and that these acts of penance are both personal and social. The Church requires Catholics to perform some specific acts of penance, on all Fridays. This traditionally included fasting and abstaining at times each year, especially during Lent, up until the 1970's. The **Code of Canon Law** sets down the following rules concerning fast and abstinence:

**Canon 1250** - *All Fridays through the year and the time of Lent are penitential days and times throughout the entire Church.*

**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 (nisi) 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.*

In the Apostolic Constitution of 1966, *Paenitemini*, Pope Paul VI changed the strict regulation of fasting and abstinence on Fridays, as reflected in Canon Law. He recommended that fasting be appropriate to the local economic situation, and that all Catholics voluntarily fast and abstain. He further recommended that fasting and abstinence be replaced with prayer and works of charity.

**Canon 1253** - *It is for the conference of bishops to determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence and to substitute in whole or in part for fast and abstinence other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety.*

Now in the United States, the U.S. Bishops conference obtained the permission of the Holy See for Catholics in the US to substitute a penitential, or even a charitable practice of their own choosing for the weekly Friday observance. However, during the time of Lent, the law of abstinence is applied for Fridays. This rule is for all Catholics 14 years of age and older. In honor of Our Lord's Passion, one is asked to refrain from eating meat. Meat is considered to be the flesh and organs of mammals and fowl. Also forbidden are soups or gravies made from them. Salt and freshwater species of fish, amphibians, reptiles and shellfish are permitted, as are animal derived products such as butter, eggs and gelatin which do not have any meat taste.

Also, on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, Catholics from the ages of 18 to 59 are asked to fast. Fasting is defined as eating one regular sized meal a day, and two smaller meals which if added together would not exceed the main meal in quantity. The fast is broken by eating between meals and by drinks which could be considered food (milk shakes, but not milk). Alcoholic beverages do not break the fast; however, they seem to be contrary to the spirit of doing penance.

The key is to use common sense, and to remember that all Catholics are still obligated to some act of penitence on all Fridays, even outside of Lent, to show our love for God and to grow closer to the Creator.