

LENT

THE BASICS

WHAT IS LENT?

Lent is the annual preparation for Easter observance—calling us to reform our lives and to open our hearts to the blessings God has promised to bestow on us. Lent begins Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday evening when the Triduum begins.

WHAT MUST I DO?

According to the Church's Canon Law, all healthy Catholics from age 18 to 59 are required to fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and to abstain from meat on all other Fridays of Lent. Fasting is a bodily way to remind ourselves that we need God above all things. Fasting is also a sacrifice, a gift back to God of our heart's intent to depend more completely on God.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Take the necessary steps to get yourself on the road to conversion and spiritual renewal. To help you do this, the three main Lenten disciplines urged are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We are invited during Lent to practice these disciplines often. But these aren't just chores we must do because the Church strongly urges them; they are above all opportunities to grow in faith and in love for God.

WHY PRAYER, FASTING AND ALMS?

The Lenten basic practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving are rooted in Jesus' original guidance about how to be his disciples that we find in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapter 5–7). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#1966–1972) also reminds us that Jesus here outlines for us the new law which, if we embrace and implement it, will lead us more surely to the interior renewal and growth in holiness and perfection that Jesus expects of us as his disciples.

SHOULD I SET LENTEN GOALS?

Yes. Reflect prayerfully about your Lenten resolutions before making them. Then make yourself a list. But be modest. You may be setting yourself up for disappointment if you set unrealistic goals. And doing a little with love and devotion is spiritually more beneficial than trying to do much but doing it halfheartedly.

