

Catholic Fasting Guide

Forms of Fasting

In Catholic tradition, fasting can take several forms, ranging from the Church’s minimum requirements to deeper, voluntary acts of self-denial.

Spiritual Fruits

Eucharistic Fasts

- **Minimum:** no food or drink (except water and medicine) for **1 hour** before Holy Communion.
- **Optional extended:** fasting from midnight before Communion.

Prepares the soul to receive Christ worthily and with reverence.

Required Fasts

- **Ash Wednesday & Good Friday:** Only one full meal is allowed, with two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal; no eating or snacking between meals.
- **Abstinence from meat** on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all Fridays of Lent (ages 14+).
- **Fasting age range:** Obligatory from ages 18–59, unless health or other serious reasons prevent it.

Recognizes key events of salvation history. Cultivates penitence and remembrance.

Traditional Seasonal Fasts

- **Lenten weekdays:** one main meal + two small meals; no meat on Fridays.
- **Ember Days & Vigils:** fasts tied to liturgical seasons and saints’ feasts.
- **Advent & other vigils:** lighter, anticipatory fasting before feasts.

Deepens connection to the Church year. Fosters spiritual discipline in tune with the liturgical calendar.

Voluntary & Devotional Fasts

- **Partial fasts:** limiting certain foods or beverages (i.e. sweets, caffeine, or specific indulgences).
- **Bread & water:** common for Marian devotional practices (e.g., First Fridays/Saturdays).
- **Technology/Media fast:** abstaining from social media, TV, or internet for spiritual silence and quiet prayer.
- **Daniel-fast:** simple, plant-based eating modeled after Daniel 10:3.

Personalizes fasting. Supports focused prayer, discipline, and solidarity with those who suffer.

Quick Tips for Fasting Well

- **Plan ahead** – Decide fasting type, prayer focus, and possible sacrificial offering (e.g., donation, volunteer time).
- **Stay healthy** – Modify fasting if you're pregnant, ill, elderly, or have medical needs.
- **Offer up the discomfort** – Combine fasting with **prayer**, **Scripture reading**, and **charity** for spiritual benefit.
- **Breaking fast prayerfully** – Whether it's breaking an extended fast or the Eucharistic fast, begin with prayer or gratitude.

