

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The second precept of the Church is to observe the days of fasting and abstinence. 'Fasting' means having only one full meal a day. 'Abstinence' means giving something up—usually meat. Both fasting and abstinence are required on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday of all Catholics over 18. Abstinence from meat is required every Friday in Lent for Catholics over the age of 14. Fasting in some way is also required on every Friday in honor of the Lord's passion. While giving up meat is still recommended as the easiest way to observe abstinence on Fridays, other forms of 'giving something up' are also permitted.

What is the point of fasting and abstinence? First of all, we don't fast and abstain because we think food and drink and physical things are wicked in some way. God has given us the physical world and the gifts of food and drink to enjoy and share. We fast and abstain in order to do penance for our sins, to discipline ourselves, to become more alert in prayer and to identify with Christ the Lord who recommended fasting and himself went out into the desert to fast.

The practice of fasting and abstinence helps us know how to keep Lent and remember the Lord's passion on Fridays properly.

Observing the rules for fasting and prayer is really only a start to a whole life of discipline, penance and prayer. It's a bit like a piano student who is given scales to do for practice. The scales are necessary, but they are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Likewise, fasting and prayer are the means to a more powerful life of prayer and a closer relationship with Christ.

All the saints made great spiritual progress by taking the call to prayer seriously, and along with the call to prayer is always a call to the self discipline of fasting and abstinence. If it works for the saints, and is recommended by Jesus himself, and commanded by the church, then it will benefit us to take this precept seriously. Believe me, there will be far greater benefits as a result than you can now imagine!

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker