

Make Fridays Your Good-for-the Soul Day!

Abstaining from meat on Fridays isn't just for Lent. Try it all year long to improve your spiritual life

by Peggy Bowes

 In our fast-paced modern world, Fridays are highly anticipated as the close of the work week and the beginning of the weekend. We look forward to a well-earned break from our weekday labors. But Catholics find a deeper meaning in Fridays by honoring the day Jesus died for our sins, Good Friday.

During Lent, we abstain from meat on Fridays as a form of penance, but many Catholics are not aware that abstinence is required on every Friday of the year except holy days of obligation or important feast days.

Catholics abstained from meat every Friday before Vatican II. However, in 1966, the U.S. Bishops conference obtained permission for American Catholics to substitute a penitential, or even a charitable, practice of their own choosing on Fridays *outside of Lent*. This substitution was not intended to diminish the practice of Friday penance, but to encourage U.S. Catholics to find a very personal way to honor Jesus' suffering and death.

Stop for a moment to reflect on the incomparable suffering that our Savior endured for our sins on Good Friday. No human in history suffered to the extent that Jesus did. He was innocent and free from sin Himself, yet he willingly took on the sins of all mankind.

By making small sacrifices or performing acts of charity on Fridays, we practice atonement and demonstrate that we are willing to take on a share of

the huge burden of our own sins. This practice can win us the grace to help us practice virtue and lead us to become more Christ-like.

During this season of Lent, we have established a habit of Friday abstinence, so this is a perfect time to resolve to



continue doing some sort of penance on every Friday of the year.

One choice is to return to the tradition of abstaining from meat every Friday. The idea is to eat simple, meat-free meals and snacks. Lobster Thermidor or Pecan-Crusted Chilean Sea Bass meet the criteria, but their consumption is not exactly penitential!

Some families extend their sacrifice to the community by donating the money saved in food costs to charity.

You might substitute a different form of penance such as fasting. Although fasting from food is customary, many Catholics fast from something they enjoy or are overly dependent upon such as TV or the internet. If I am not able to fast all day on a Friday, I at least try to fast

between 12:00 and 3:00 pm, the hours that Our Lord hung on the cross. My hunger during that time reminds me to pray and meditate on the Passion and Crucifixion.

Another option is to add a Friday devotion to your routine. Daily Mass, Stations of the Cross, the Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, or a visit to the Blessed Sacrament all place an emphasis on Christ.

Performing works of service on Fridays encourages humility and charity. Volunteer for a local shelter, donate food or clothing, or visit a nursing home, hospital or prison.

Friday penance should include the entire family. Although the laws of abstinence apply only to Catholics who are 14 and older, parents are encouraged to educate younger children in the practice of penance. Even very young children can abstain from meat once a week and be taught that this reminds us of Jesus' great sacrifice for our sins.

A Friday evening family Rosary or Bible reading will bring many blessings to your home.

We look forward to Fridays for many reasons. Make one of them the opportunity to improve your spiritual life.

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