



February 25, 2014

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“These forty days of Lent, O Lord, with you we fast and pray.” This line from a popular hymn we sing in our parishes during the season of Lent contains a very important truth. During the days and weeks of penance that lie ahead --- from **Ash Wednesday, March 5th until Holy Thursday, April 17th** --- it is with YOU, Lord, with YOU we fast and pray. The model Jesus gave us for “these forty days” was his own experience of the desert and the temptations that followed him there where he encountered Satan face to face. And yet, Jesus, there in the desert --- alone, fasting and in intense prayer --- beat back the devil and triumphed over temptation, as strong and as unrelenting as it was throughout those forty days.

We enter the desert of Lent like Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, to face our devils, our temptations head on. But we are not alone. “With YOU we fast and pray” is our song. The Lord Jesus Christ is with us. And so, too, is the Church, the entire community of faith observing Lent. “With YOU, too, we fast and pray.” Here is what the Catholic Church in the United States asks of us as baptized Catholics:

1. The days of **fast (only one full meal) and abstinence (no meat)** are **Ash Wednesday and Good Friday**.
2. All other **Fridays of Lent** are **days of abstinence (no meat)**.

Those between the ages of 18 and 59 are obliged to fast (only one full meal) as above. From the age of 14, people are also obliged to abstain (no meat: this obligation prohibits the eating of meat, but not eggs, milk products or condiments of any kind, even though made from animal fat).

The obligation to observe the laws of fast and abstinence is a serious one for Catholics. Failure to observe one penitential day in itself is not considered a serious sin. It is the failure to observe any penitential days at all, or a substantial number of days, which must be considered serious.

The obligation, the privilege really, of receiving the Eucharist at least once a year --- often called “Easter duty” --- for those in the state of grace should still be fulfilled during the period from the **First Sunday of Lent, March 9th to Trinity Sunday, June 15th**. However, the Church’s law does permit this precept to be fulfilled at another time during the year when there is a just cause.

I want to encourage Catholics to get to confession and to make use of the sacrifices and traditions that have always been part of our Lenten practices in the Church.

We do, indeed, fast and pray with the Lord Jesus and with our fellow Catholics. May this Lent be a time of penance, grace and joy for us all.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David M. O'Connell, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend David M. O'Connell, C.M.
Bishop of Trenton

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