



FASTING

THE PASCHAL FAST

Let the Paschal Fast be kept sacred. Let it be observed everywhere

on Good Friday and, where possible, prolonged through Holy Saturday, as a way of coming to the joys of the Sunday of the Resurrection with uplifted and welcoming heart.

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #110)

What is the ***Paschal fast***? What makes it different from any other fast? What does it mean to keep such a fast “sacred”? What sort of fasting is called for? What kind of fasting over two days is capable of creating an “uplifted and welcoming heart”? Why do so many think of Good Friday as a day of fasting and abstinence, exactly like Ash Wednesday?

Perhaps for many of us the answer is the culture, the times. We do not imagine deeds that need the kind of preparation that the Three Days require if we are to enter into them deeply and receive from them fully. It may occur to us to skip some meals as a penitential or intercessory gesture, but we don’t intuitively feel that one cannot rise from the table after a grand meal and go to the Easter Vigil. We have not yet come, as a church, to such excitement and awe for what takes place

in the darkness between Saturday and Sunday that we have no appetite anyway. Yet, if we believe the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, it works the other way around. That is, it is the fasting itself that will bring us to the Vigil with a heart and mind that can know awe and excitement.

The fasting of Lent is penitential, an act of repenting of our sin. It begins on Ash Wednesday and it ends during the afternoon of Holy Thursday. There is a turning as we enter the Triduum on Thursday, when we let ourselves focus fully on what means to be at the Vigil. With that, the fasting of Friday and Saturday is not penitential, but anticipatory. It is a fasting that comes from the same part of us that has us fast before momentous events in our lives. Few are hungry on the morning of their wedding day. This is that sort of fast.

Such fasting is not only from food. Even more important may be the fasting from our normal work, the fasting from seeking ways to be entertained, the fasting from chatter, the stilling of our cultural hunger for diversion. Catholics are called to live these days unlike any other of the year — and this is so whatever economic condition we are in, whatever our work, whatever our family situation, whatever our educational background. It is a great leveler, like the Eucharist itself—this Paschal fast.

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