



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

Office of Worship

2110 Broadway, Sacramento, CA 95818 - 916-733-0211 - gmcavoy-jensen@scd.org

Lenten Regulations 2026

Lent and Easter

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a season in which the faithful are called to reflect on the Paschal Mystery more intently. It is a time of spiritual renewal and to examine one's relationship with God and others more carefully. It is also a time in which catechumens prepare to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. The Church calls everyone, therefore, to a spirit of penance through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Ash Wednesday

"The blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday normally takes place during the celebration of Mass. However, when circumstances require, the blessing and distribution of ashes may take place apart from Mass, during a celebration of the word of God."¹ In this case the "rite may be celebrated by a priest or deacon who may be assisted by lay ministers in the distribution of the ashes. The blessing of the ashes, however, is reserved to a priest or deacon."² A description of this liturgy is found in the Roman Missal, at the end of the proper for Ash Wednesday.

Fasting and Abstinence

In order to foster a spirit of repentance and unite us more closely to Christ, Church law requires the observance of Abstinence and Fasting during Lent.³ (For further study, see Pope Paul VI's apostolic constitution on the subject.⁴)

Abstinence

All persons 14 years and older are obliged to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, all Fridays of Lent, and Good Friday. "...[Any] parish or diocesan institution or group which sponsors an event which includes a meal is not to serve meat on any Friday during the year".⁵ Other forms of abstinence, for example abstinence from alcoholic beverages, television, video games, the internet, and social media, are also beneficial.

Fasting

Everyone from ages 18 to 59 is obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Voluntary fasting on other weekdays of Lent, especially on Wednesdays and Fridays, is highly recommended. Fasting is understood to mean that one full meal may be eaten. Two other small meals may be eaten, but together they should not equal a full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted.

¹ *Book of Blessings* #1656

² *Book of Blessings* #1659

³ *Code of Canon Law* #1249-1253

⁴ *Apostolic Constitution Paenitemini of the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI on Fast and Abstinence*

⁵ *Diocesan Statutes* #127

When health or ability to work would be seriously affected, neither the law of fasting nor the law of abstinence obliges. If in doubt, one's parish priest or confessor should be consulted. Airport workers, travelers, and others while on board ships or airplanes are dispensed from the laws of fast and abstinence for the duration of their journey (except on Good Friday). It is desirable that they perform some other pious act instead.

Prayer

Catholics are urged to read and pray with Sacred Scripture more intently during Lent, and to deepen their faith by reading the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The faithful are encouraged to participate in special devotions offered by the parish, especially parish penance services, Eucharistic adoration, and Liturgy of the Hours. Other devotions such as the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and praying for vocations to the priesthood and religious life are also encouraged. Holy water remains available in the stoops throughout Lent, until the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper begins the Easter Triduum.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Lent is a privileged time for celebrating the Sacrament of Penance. The faithful are obliged to confess their grave sins at least once a year.⁶ To that end, parishes are encouraged to provide ample opportunity for the faithful to partake of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by expanding their confession schedule during Lent. You might consider, for example, adding an extra rite of reconciliation on a weekday evening. Public parish penance services are strongly encouraged and may be combined with the Roman "stations" with or without a procession.⁷ General absolution, however, is not permitted.

Lenten Mass Schedule

The faithful are urged to attend Mass on weekdays as often as possible, especially during Lent. Daily Masses during Lent should be scheduled to facilitate attendance.

The Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross are to be celebrated in each parish on Fridays during Lent and parishioners should be encouraged to participate.

Day of Reconciliation and Unity

The second Wednesday of March is to be observed as "[a] day of penance for negative attitudes and discrimination toward people of differing cultures, ethnicity and race; and prayer for unity in our diversity, for equality, mutual respect and peace among all peoples".⁸

Wedding Masses

Ritual Masses for the Celebration of Marriage may not take place on Ash Wednesday, on Sundays of Lent, during Holy Week, during the Paschal Triduum, or on Sundays of Easter.⁹ "The celebration of Marriage on Friday of the Passion of the Lord and on Holy Saturday is to be avoided altogether."¹⁰ Marriages may take place at other times during Lent according to the proper liturgical norms and provisions. It is contrary to the penitential spirit of the season to have elaborate weddings or lavish receptions. Those who need to have marriages convalidated before the Easter Vigil should do so prior to Holy Week, not on Holy Saturday or during the Vigil.

⁶ *Code of Canon Law* #989

⁷ *Roman Missal*, Proper of Time, Lent (introduction #1-2); see also *Rite of Penance* Appendix II, I

⁸ *Diocesan Statutes* #123 §3(c)

⁹ *Roman Missal*, 2011, Ritual Masses, V. For the Celebration of Marriage

¹⁰ *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 2016, #32

Funeral Masses

Funerals are not to be celebrated on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday, nor on the Sundays of Lent. When pastoral considerations necessitate that a funeral be celebrated on these days, the Liturgy of the Word with the Final Commendation and Farewell may be conducted.

Paschal Triduum

No Masses are to be offered on Good Friday nor on Holy Saturday except the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night. The Easter Vigil begins after nightfall which in our diocese is 8:30 p.m. this year.¹¹ There may be only one celebration of the Easter Vigil in a given parish each year. For additional helpful information beyond what is provided in the Roman Missal, see the related Circular Letter.¹² “It is unlawful to separate the Confirmation and reception of Eucharist of any adult or child of catechetical age from Baptism. (see CIC 866)”¹³

Easter Duty

All Catholics who have been initiated into the Holy Eucharist are bound to receive holy communion worthily at least once during the Easter Season. In the United States, the Easter duty may be fulfilled through the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. Catholics are encouraged to receive Communion as often as possible, not only during Eastertide, but throughout the year. However, “[anyone] conscious of a grave sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to Communion”.¹⁴

Almsgiving

From earliest times giving to the poor, or almsgiving, has been an invaluable spiritual practice, a religious duty, a form of penance, an expression of Christian charity, and an aid to interior conversion. Therefore, all Catholics are urged to give generously to assist the poor and support the charitable works of the Church, especially through their local parish and the Annual Catholic Appeal.

The faithful are also encouraged to visit the sick, the homebound, the aged, and those in prison, remembering the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, “whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Fasting and abstinence together with almsgiving and charitable works unite us to the crucified Christ reflected in the image of our brothers and sisters who suffer.

Covering Crosses and Images

*In the Dioceses of the United States the practice of covering crosses and images throughout the church from this [Fifth Sunday of Lent] may be observed. Crosses remain covered until the end of the Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, but images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.*¹⁵

Initiation

*The Christian Initiation of adults and children of catechetical age includes at one celebration: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. In accord with the ancient practice of the Church, these sacraments are to be received together and in their proper order.*¹⁶

¹¹ <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year-and-calendar/triduum/roman-missal-and-the-easter-vigil> (see footnote 1)

¹² *Circular Letter Concerning Preparation and Celebration of Easter Feasts*, Congregation for Divine Worship, 1988

¹³ *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for the Diocese of Sacramento*, October 2016, #103.6.2.

¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1385

¹⁵ *Roman Missal*, instruction for the Fifth Sunday of Lent

¹⁶ *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for the Diocese of Sacramento*, October 2016, #103.6.1