



The following information is taken from

“Lent: a guide for the perplexed”

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Lent is a season of **prayer, fasting and almsgiving** that begins with **Ash Wednesday - Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022** - and concludes at sundown on Holy Thursday, at which point the Easter Triduum begins and Catholics enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ's Passion before Easter.

### What is penance?

You might be surprised to learn that penance, in the Catholic tradition, is considered to be a virtue. What this means is that it is something that, when practiced enough, can become a *disposition* that exists in the person; a *habit*, a *natural tendency*, something that is *second-nature*. As a result, it is something we are called to live *outside* of the Sacrament of Penance.

### According to St Thomas Aquinas,

the virtue of penance is a species of justice and has two elements: contrition for sin, and the making of amends for sin.

Sin, by its nature, involves a turning *away* from God, our Ultimate Good, and towards a lesser good in place of Him. Since God's due is to be loved *totally* as the Ultimate Good who alone can satisfy our restless hearts, penance would involve turning *away* from sin and orienting ourselves *back* to God.

This is why prayer, even contemplative prayer, is a form of penance: Prayer, by its nature, involves the orienting of the self to God. And this process, ultimately, is a healing one; a "repairing" one.

Lent, as a penitential season, is the time for us to turn *radically* back to God; to experience true conversion and repentance. What this means is that Lent should be approached not simply as a hardened season of self-denial, but welcomed as a season of grace in which our hearts can be softened.

### Is Lent just about "giving something up"?

No. Giving something up—or fasting—is only one of three things we should be focussing on throughout Lent. The other two, prayer and almsgiving, are very much about the "taking up" of things. What all of these things have in common, however, is the experience of self-denial, which is so necessary for true conversion and repentance.

### What are our Lenten obligations?

**In Australia and New Zealand, the strict obligations for Lent are:**

1. Catholics aged 18-59 must fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
2. Catholics aged 14 and older must abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
3. Catholics aged 14 and over must abstain from meat on every Friday of the year, including Lent, or substitute with another form of penance, either in prayer, fasting or almsgiving.

Taking up some form of voluntary penance throughout the season of Lent is also expected.

### What is the difference between fasting and abstinence?

On a day of **fasting**, Christians are permitted only to have **one normal-sized meal** and **two “snacks”** (or “smaller meals”) that cannot, put together, equal a full meal.

On a day of **abstinence**, Christians are asked to abstain from meat. This does not include seafood.

### Are Sundays included in Lent?

Yes, Sundays *are* included in Lent.

**Why?** The Code of Canon Law prescribes ‘the season of Lent’ (no exceptions) as a period of daily penance (Can. 1250).