

CHURCH LAW REGARDING FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Here we provide the applicable portions from the 1917 Code of Canon Law, followed by the 1983 Code. Catholics will recognize the most significant changes to the Church's laws of fast and of abstinence by reading Canon 1252 (1917 Code). Another noted change regards the age of the person to whom these laws apply.

1917 Code of Canon Law (Pio-Benedictine)¹

Canon 1250

The law of abstinence prohibits meat and soups made of meat but not of eggs, milks, and other condiments, even if taken from animals.

Canon 1251

§1. The law of fast prescribes that there be only one meal a day; but it does not forbid that a little bit of food be taken in the morning and in the evening, observing, nevertheless, the approved custom of places concerning the quantity and the quality of the food.

§2. It is not forbidden to mix meat and fish in the same meal; or to exchange the evening meal with lunch.

Canon 1252

§1. The law of abstinence must be observed every Friday.

§2. The law of abstinence and the law of fast must be observed every Ash Wednesday, every Friday and Saturday of Lent, each of the Ember Days, and the vigils of the Pentecost, the Assumption of the God-bearer into Heaven, All the Saints, and the Nativity of the Lord.

§3. The law of fast is to be observed on all the other days of Lent.

§4. On Sundays or feasts of precept, the laws of abstinence and of fast cease, except for feasts during Lent, nor are vigils anticipated; likewise, it ceases on Holy Saturday afternoon.

Canon 1253

By these canons nothing is changed concerning particular indulgences or the vows of any physical or moral person or the constitutions and rules of any religious institute or other approved institute, whether of men or of women, living together in common even without vows.

Canon 1254

§1. The law of abstinence binds all those who have completed seven years of age.

§2. All those are bound by the law of fast from the completion of the twenty-first year of age until the beginning of the sixtieth.

¹ An official version of the 1917 Code was only approved in Latin. It can be viewed at: www.jgray.org/codes/1917CIC.txt. A good English translation is Dr. Edward N. Peters, *The 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law* (Ignatius Press, 2001).

1983 Code of Canon Law (Johanno-Pauline)

Taken from the [Vatican's website](#)

Canon 1249

The divine law binds all the Christian faithful to do penance each in his or her own way. In order for all to be united among themselves by some common observance of penance, however, penitential days are prescribed on which the Christian faithful devote themselves in a special way to prayer, perform works of piety and charity, and deny themselves by fulfilling their own obligations more faithfully and especially by observing fast and abstinence, according to the norm of the following canons.

Canon 1250

The penitential days and times in the universal Church are every Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.

Canon 1251

Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Canon 1252

The law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year. The law of fasting binds those who have attained their majority, until the beginning of their sixtieth year. Pastors of souls and parents are to ensure that even those who by reason of their age are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence, are taught the true meaning of penance.

Canon 1253

The conference of bishops can determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence as well as substitute other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety, in whole or in part, for abstinence and fast.