



# Ten ways to Appreciate the value of Fasting

Fasting as a religious practice is valued for its prayerful power, its spiritual symbolism, its purifying effects, its capacity to draw us out of ourselves and into relationship with God and others. As Christians we fast as a form of penitential prayer. We fast as members of the body of Christ, opening ourselves to Jesus' way of sacrificial love. There are two days of the year when Catholics are obliged to fast: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Beyond this, fasting is an optional way of praying and deepening the selfless spirit so essential to Christian life.

## 1. Use analogies from life to explain fasting to others

Athletes make rigorous sacrifices to train their bodies and minds to peak fitness. People endure sacrifices and hardships for all kinds of worthy goals: an exam, a career, to lose weight, to raise a family. Likewise, Christians fast as a way of training themselves to be spiritually fit, other-centred and responsive to the challenges God that asks of them in life.

## 2. Honour the saints & martyrs

Our faith tradition is full of heroic personalities who were willing to endure any sacrifice, inconvenience or hardship for the sake of Christ and his Church. On the day that you fast, read a little about a saint's life to inspire your efforts and to remind you of your ancestry in faith.

## 3. Fast as an act of love

When you fast, focus your thoughts not on the discomfort or inconvenience but on your love for God and neighbour. Bring to mind specific people, names and faces for whom you are offering this prayerful fast.

## 4. Value your blessings

Going without food reminds us of the gifts we take for granted in life, and those who lack the basic necessities. Fast with gratitude to the Creator from whom comes all the earth's resources.

## 5. View Friday as a step towards Sunday

Just as every Sunday is our weekly remembrance of Easter, the Day of the Resurrection, so too does each Friday resonate with the spirit of Good Friday. Friday is traditionally a day of penance. If you choose to fast on a Friday, do so with your eye on the joy of Sunday.

## 6. Make meals special

A simplified family meal on a 'fast' day needn't be drab and boring. Add a creative touch, like a placard or menu at each seat which carries a spiritual message (e.g. a scripture quote, an appreciated virtue of the person seated.)

## 7. Choose a table topic

While sharing a simple meal (e.g., bread and cheese and water) on a fast day, engage in thoughtful and intelligent discussion about justice issues relating to world poverty and peace.

## 8. Fast as a community

Ask two other parishioners to join you in fasting on a specific day. Not only does this bolster your commitment, it is also an important expression of the unity of the body of Christ.

## 9. Find the right fast for you

If refraining from food is not appropriate for your situation, then fast from television, or from your favourite alcoholic beverage on a social night out, or whatever is a suitable challenge for you. Refraining from bad habits (e.g. gossip, criticism, junk reading) is also an effective exercise in self-mastery.

## 10. Pray as you go

Build some prayer-breaks into your fast. For example, a morning scripture reading. Or set your watch alarm for a 10.45 prayer-break. Or visit a church during your lunch hour. When you feel a hunger pang, take this as a reminder to pray! Whether you are fasting for world peace or for a personal intention, see your fast as a way of praying with your whole self: body, mind, soul.

### Helpful Hint

The purpose of fasting is to strengthen one's 'spiritual muscle' and align the whole person with positive values. When you fast, bring to mind all the positive reasons for your fast: the people for whom you fast, the example of Jesus, the kind of person you wish to become, the greatness of our Creator whose gifts—our bodies, our sustenance—we must not take for granted. Try a Friday fast and give your spiritual muscles a good work-out. .