




Fasting 101 for Teens

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Fasting is an important spiritual discipline in the Catholic faith, helping you grow closer to God, develop self-discipline, and unite your sacrifices with Christ. While fasting is most common during Lent, it can be practiced throughout the year as part of your spiritual journey. This is a guide to help Catholic teens understand and engage in fasting meaningfully and prayerfully.

Here in Montana, our Bishops have asked us to take up some form of fasting on Wednesdays to defeat CI-128, a constitutional initiative that will be on our ballots in November. If passed, abortion would be enshrined in our state constitution, and as people who respect life from conception to natural death, we are adamantly opposed to this and are doing our part to educate others on the implications of this bill. Your sacrifice joined with thousands of others throughout the state, country and world in this critical time can truly make a difference.



**Defeat
CI-128**

1. What is Fasting?

Traditional fasting means abstaining from food or limiting your intake as an offering to God. The purpose is to detach yourself from worldly pleasures and focus more on prayer, self-reflection, spiritual growth, and the intention you are offering your fasting for.

In the Catholic Church, traditional fasting from food often involves:

- One full meal and two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal.
- Abstaining from snacks between meals.
- Drinking water and non-alcoholic beverages are allowed.
- Fasting is traditionally practiced on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday for those age 18-59.

As a teen, while you're not obligated to follow these rules until you turn 18, many teens choose to start earlier as a form of spiritual preparation. Keep in mind that fasting does not just have to be about food—it is about offering your heart to God, making some type of sacrifice and in turn, transforming your soul.

2. The Spiritual Purpose of Fasting

- [Grow Closer to God](#)

By denying yourself, you create more space for God to work in your life.

- [Strengthen Self-Discipline](#)

Fasting helps you practice saying “no” to desires and distractions, allowing you to focus on what truly matters.

- [Unite with Jesus’ Sacrifice on the Cross](#)

Fasting helps you unite your sacrifices with Christ’s suffering and death on the Cross.

- [Cultivate Gratitude](#)

Fasting helps you appreciate the blessings you may take for granted.

3. Biblical Inspiration for Fasting

- [Matthew 6:16-18](#)

Jesus teaches that fasting should be done with a joyful heart, not to show off or look miserable in front of others. It is a private prayer/sacrifice between you and God.

- [Isaiah 58:6-7](#)

This passage reminds us that true fasting is about justice and compassion. It is not just about giving up food or your phone for a few hours, but also doing good, helping those in need, and those who cannot help themselves (such as unborn babies).

4. Types of Fasting

1. [Traditional Food Fasting](#)

- Traditional Fasting

Following the Church's guidelines for fasting on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and during Lent.

- Skipping a Meal

Offering up breakfast, lunch, or dinner as a sacrifice on a specific day.

2. [Abstaining](#)

- Meatless Fridays (or any day for your intention)

Even outside Lent, many Catholics abstain from meat on Fridays and Wednesdays.

- Giving Up Certain Foods

Like sweets, snacks, or drinks you enjoy, as a way to practice self-control.

3. [Non-Food Fasting](#)

Fasting from food is not necessarily for everyone, especially those with health conditions. Consider fasting from:

- Media and Technology

Limiting your use of social media, video games, or TV to spend more time in prayer and reflection.

- Entertainment

Skipping activities like movies or music and using that time for Bible reading or helping/serving others.

5. How to Fast Well

- Start Small

If you're new to fasting, you don't need to do something drastic. Begin by skipping one meal or fasting from technology for a few hours. Say "no" to that soda or candy bar and have just water instead. Gradually increase as you grow.

- Pray During Fasting

Fasting is meant to draw you closer to God, so spend the time you would have spent eating or using your phone in prayer, contemplation and/or service to others.. Ask God for strength, and offer your fast for specific intentions (e.g., for the defeat of CI-128, for a family member, your parish, or for peace in the world).

- Stay Focused on the Spiritual

It's easy to get caught up in the discomfort of fasting, whether you are fasting from food or something else. Remember that the purpose is spiritual. Offer your struggles to Jesus and invite Him into your moment of suffering. This is what it is about. In the Gospel of Mark 9:29, Jesus references that some demons are only driven out by prayer and fasting.

- Pair Fasting with Almsgiving

Traditionally, fasting goes hand-in-hand with giving to the poor. Consider donating the money you save by skipping a meal to a charity or using your free time to serve someone in need.

6. When Not to Fast

- Health Conditions

If fasting would harm your health or if you have a medical condition (like diabetes), talk to your parents and a doctor before fasting. There are other ways to sacrifice, like giving up sweets or TV. Your health is important!

- Spiritual Overload

Fasting is not a punishment and should not be viewed as such. It should draw you closer to God, not make you feel discouraged or overly burdened. If you feel anxious or stressed, take a break and try again another time.

7. Fasting as a Way to Imitate Christ

Jesus Himself fasted, and the Church calls all believers to follow His example. The Catechism emphasizes the importance of this imitation of Christ.

- CCC 538: "The Gospels speak of a time of solitude for Jesus in the desert immediately after his baptism by John. Driven by the Spirit into the desert, Jesus remains there for forty days without eating; he lives among wild beasts, and angels minister to him. At the end of this time, Satan tempts him three times, seeking to compromise his filial attitude toward God. Jesus rebuffs these attacks, which recapitulate the temptations of Adam in Paradise and of Israel in the desert, and the devil leaves him 'until an opportune time.'"

Jesus' time of fasting in the desert before beginning His public ministry serves as a model, reminding us that fasting strengthens us for the spiritual battles we face.

8. Fasting Tips for Teens

- Fast as a Group

Consider fasting with a group of friends or as part of your youth group. You can encourage and support one another throughout the process.

- Set an Intention

Each time you fast, set a specific intention. Maybe you're fasting for a friend who's struggling, for your own growth in virtue, or for the end of a social issue like poverty or violence.

- Pray for Strength

Fasting can be hard, especially if you're not used to it. Pray for the strength to persevere and rely on God during moments of hunger or discomfort.

- Stay Positive

Remember, fasting isn't about deprivation. It's about growth, discipline, and being more open to God. Approach it with a positive heart, knowing it's helping you to become stronger spiritually.

9. Breaking Your Fast

Breaking a spiritual fast is a significant moment, and it should be done mindfully and prayerfully to honor the spiritual purpose of your fast.

- Pray

Begin with a prayer of gratitude to God for the strength to complete the fast and for any insights or graces received. Reflect on the purpose of your fast and the spiritual fruits it may have yielded.

- Start Small

If you have fasted from food, don't dive headfirst into a huge pizza or full meal. Break your fast with light, simple foods such as fruits, vegetables, or soup to ease your body back into digestion.

If you have fasted from technology, set a timer for 5-10 minutes so you don't get pulled in and then waste the next 3 hours "catching up". You likely did not miss much!

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that fasting is one of the primary ways we can participate in acts of penance, which are necessary for personal conversion, spiritual growth and the salvation of souls.

- CCC 1434: "The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others."

Fasting can be a powerful way to grow closer to God as a Catholic teen. Through small sacrifices, you learn to trust in God's strength, grow in holiness, and unite yourself with Christ's suffering for the salvation of the world.

Pray, Hope, Don't Worry
~St. Padre Pio