

Dear People of Saint Joseph Parish,

Lent is a time for fasting and abstaining from meat. The diocesan directive states:

Lenten fast and abstinence regulations for the Diocese of Worcester are as follows:

- Abstinence from meat is to be observed by all Catholics fourteen (14) years of age and older on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all the Fridays of Lent.
- Fasting is to be observed by all Catholics who are eighteen (18) years of age but not yet fifty-nine (59) years of age on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Those who are bound to fast may take only one full meal. Two smaller meals are permitted if necessary to maintain strength according to one's needs, but eating solid foods between meals is not permitted. Catholics should not lightly excuse themselves from these prescribed Lenten penitential practices.

This directive is the same for the Universal Catholic Church. It is the minimal observance of fasting and abstinence. Being minimal, anyone may increase their observance if they wish. For example, some people choose to observe two meatless days during the week. Others choose to fast and abstain on all Fridays of Lent. The choice is yours.

Many years ago, as Catholics observed abstinence from meat on every Friday, they became known as “mackerel snappers.” The phrase was usually used in a derogatory fashion about a person or group of Catholic people who ate fish on Friday. Fortunately, some Catholics refused to let the label upset them and even adopted it to describe themselves.



The practice of abstinence on Friday was a way that people used to align themselves with the suffering of Christ on the cross. It was a way of denying themselves a luxury and offering their penance to God. Fish was allowed because it was not considered in the same category as poultry and other meats. Even in today's large markets, fish is separated from other meats.



For centuries fish was considered to be the food of the poor. Anyone could bring a fish out of a river with a line, bait, and hook. Not everyone could hunt game or raise farm stock.

How things have changed! Fish is priced as high or higher than beef. Nutritionists praise the benefits of eating fish. Diets that are heavy in red meat are detrimental to cardiac wellness. Remember that abstinence from meat does not mean you must eat fish. It means you may eat a vegetarian meal and still abstain from meat.

Nutrition aside, fasting and abstinence are practiced for their spiritual benefits. We fast and abstain from meat to give glory to God in gratitude for the gift of Jesus, his Son.

Operation Rice Bowl adds another dimension to this practice. It publishes a number of recipes that it gathered from around the world that are meatless for us to try. One that I recently found appealing comes from Kenya, called Mukimo. It is a boiled dinner with potatoes and other vegetables that are boiled and mashed together. If you would like to try some of the Rice Bowl recipes <https://www.crsricebowl.org/recipe/> will take you to a large selection for a culinary adventure.

Sincerely, Fr. Paul Bomba