

Friday in Our Homes

For Friday to come alive once more as a day of penance and good works, it must be kept in our homes. Parents and children, adults living alone, students and teachers, clergy and religious: all of us are invited to listen to Jesus' invitation to carry the cross and to do penance for the good of the Church and the world.

Acts of penance: We can do at least one of these good actions each Friday:

Penance. Abstain from meat, or some other form of food, drink or entertainment.

Prayer. Take part in a service of worship with others, or pray with our family, or spend some extra time in personal prayer.

Good works. Do good to others by visiting the sick or aged, helping those in any need, or by contributing time or money to a work of charity.

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When each Christian home keeps Friday as a day of prayer and penance, the whole believing community carries on the saving work of the Lord Jesus in our time. If we are generous, we may wish to do more for our Lord and his Church, and do some penance and some good work every week on the day when he died to bring us life.

Other days for penance: As well as Fridays, we observe Ash Wednesday and the weekdays of Lent as days of special penance. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the Church invites us to continue the ancient tradition of the paschal fast: we prepare by penance and prayer to renew our baptismal promises and to enter more fully into the joys of the Easter season.

Keeping Friday

The law of Friday abstinence obliges Catholics who are 14 years of age or older. Parents and pastors are to help younger children grow in their understanding of the meaning and practice of Christian penance.

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On Good Friday, Jesus obeyed the Father's will, obedient even to dying on the cross for us (*Phil* 2.8). The Father raised him up and proclaimed him the king of glory.

Each day, God calls us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus as we live out the promise of our baptism.

Each Friday, we share in the Lord's cross, learning to obey with him, joining in his death to sin and evil.

Each Sunday, we celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death, and our eventual victory with him.

Every Friday is a promise from God that we who are baptized will rise again with Christ. We suffer and carry our crosses now, but we will share in Jesus' glory if we are faithful by his grace.

*Lord Jesus, our brother,
we praise you for saving us
by dying on the cross
and by rising from the dead.*

*Help us to share
in your cross today,
and to come to glory with you,
for you are our Lord for ever. Amen!*

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KEEPING FRIDAY

A day for penance and prayer
A day for good works

In accordance with the prescriptions of canon 1253, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops decrees that the days of fast and abstinence in Canada are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Fridays are days of abstinence, but Catholics can substitute special acts of charity or piety on this day.

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Called to Penance

Our Lord: Jesus invited us to follow him by carrying our cross with him each day (*Lk 9.23*). He indicated that his followers would fast and do penance after he returned to heaven (*Lk 5.33-35*). We are to go hungry and thirsty for the sake of justice (*Mt 5.6*) and to do our praying, fasting and almsgiving without showing off (*Mt 6.1-6, 16-17*).

Christians: From the earliest centuries, Jesus' followers have tried to follow these commands. Since it was on a Friday that Jesus freely died to save us from our sins, believers made a special effort to do some form of penance on this day: going without food for most of the day, spending extra time in prayer, doing good works, refraining from eating meat. Like St. Paul, they wanted to offer their penances for Christ's body, the Church (*Col 1.24*).

In today's Church: Over the centuries, these forms of penance have varied, and sometimes have been neglected. Today, we are being invited once more to obey our Saviour: we are to do penance for our sins and those of others, for the people of God, for peace in the world, and for the building up of God's kingdom on earth.

When we were baptized, we were made sharers in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. By our penance, we share with Jesus in his work of saving the world. We continue to die with him to sin and self, and to live with him for God.

For everyone: All who believe in Christ – young and old, sick and healthy, lay and religious – are invited to make Friday a special day. It is a day when we seek to share more fully in Christ's sufferings, and to work with him to help save the world by our prayer, penance, and good works.

A Day of Penance

Doing penance is not a form of self-punishment, or an unhealthy desire to inflict pain on ourselves. Rather, we do penance in order to discipline ourselves (*1 Cor 9.24-27*) and to live in union with Jesus who suffered to save the world. We offer our penitential actions in obedience to the gospel commands, so that our Lord may purify our love for him and make us stronger in the service of God and the people of God. We freely offer our penances to help make up for sin in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Different kinds of penance: There are various types of penance that we can offer to our God:

Doing God's will. We can try to keep the commandments because they are God's will for us. We can start cutting down on our disobedience to God's will: our gossiping, or lying, or laziness; our petty thefts, or selfishness, or failure to pray. We can begin to do our daily work as well as we can, with more cheerfulness and less grumbling.

Giving up things we enjoy. We can cut down on the amount of our food, candy, treats or snacks. We can give up meat or dessert, or be less picky in our eating. At times we can turn off the radio or TV, give up a movie or a party, stay away from newspapers and magazines.

Jesus is asking each of us to choose one or two of these forms of penance, and to do them at least each Friday, so that we may be one with him in giving honour to God and in working to save the world.

What form of penance will I begin to do this Friday and every Friday from now on?

A Day of Good Works

We are called to do good works every day. On Friday we may do them to thank Jesus for suffering and dying on the cross for us.

Works of charity. We may visit a sick person, or help an older person or a busy parent. We may listen patiently to someone who needs to talk. We may invite a lonely person to share a meal with us or bring a treat to someone with few friends. We can give alms to good causes, especially those that bring food to the hungry. We can reach out to the discouraged, the suffering, the lonely, the people who feel they are failures or rejected by others.

Prayer. We may spend some extra time on Friday praying for peace or for a family in need. We may pray with an older person or someone who is sick. We may pray for a person who seems intent on getting in trouble with the law. We may offer prayers for those who persecute others and for their victims. We may pray for those who are in the grip of alcohol or drugs, and for those who are confused. We may pray that more people will offer their talents and their lives in the service of the Church and of other good causes.

God's word. Each Friday we may spend some time in reading God's word. We may read a chapter from the gospel slowly and prayerfully, letting Jesus speak to us. We may pray a psalm, giving praise to God in the words of the Spirit, and asking for help for ourselves and for others. We may read another passage from the Scriptures, and let the Spirit of Jesus bring its message alive in our hearts and in our life.

We may offer any of these good works for our penances on Friday.