

THE CHRISTIAN'S OBLIGATIONS*

As to Worship, Fasting and Abstinence, and the Six Precepts set forth on the basis of the Book of Common Prayer, Canon Law, and general Catholic Usage.

The Church's Discipline as to Worship

The Catholic Church requires regular attendance at its chief act of worship, the Holy Eucharist. In the United States the following feasts are generally recognized as days upon which the faithful are expected, as a matter of Christian duty and obligation, to worship at the Eucharist, that is to say:

Holy Days of Obligation

1. Sundays throughout the year. (Each Sunday is the weekly Feast of the Lord, in recognition of his resurrection, i.e., the Lord's Day).

2. Christmas Day—December 25th—(the Feast of his Nativity, in recognition of the beginning of his redemptive work).

3. The Circumcision—January 1st—(the

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Octave of Christmas, and itself a Feast of the Incarnation. Also the dedication of the New Year).

4. Ascension Day (in honor of the final glorification of our humanity in Christ's Person).

5. All Saints' Day—November 1st—(in honor of Christ's triumphs in redeemed humanity).

Other festivals, formerly Holy Days of Obligation and still generally recognized as Feasts on which the instructed Churchman will naturally be impelled to worship at the Eucharist, are:

Special Days of Devotion

1. The Annunciation of the B.V.M.—March 25th—(in recognition of God becoming Man by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary).

2. Corpus Christi—the Thursday after Trinity Sunday—(in thanksgiving for the Bread of Life).

3. and 4. The Assumption—August 15th—and the Conception of the B.V.M.—December 8th—(being the chief Feasts of our Lady, the former her "heavenly birthday," the latter a feast early introduced from the East into the West by the Church of England).

The above Days of Obligation binding on all (with the Special Days of Devotion for those who are cognizant of their impelling character) constitute a normal minimum of eucharistic worship, although special circumstances may in special cases excuse the individual therefrom; and growth in the spiritual life will lead to a more frequent attendance, even daily when possible. In particular the Prayer-Book Holy Days and others of similar character (that is, all Holy Days of sufficient note to merit the formal title "Days of Devotion") are marked out for us by Catholic usage as specially appropriate occasions for eucharistic worship.

The Church's Discipline as to Fasting and Abstinence

Fasting is a Christian duty. In modern times it is customary to distinguish between abstinence (in which the quality of food is lowered, usually by not eating meat) and fasting (in which the quantity of food is reduced as well) although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. The discipline "which the Church requires" is widely recognized to be the following:

Rules of Fasting and Abstinence

1. Abstinence from flesh meat on Fridays

throughout the year (except those falling on Christmas or Epiphany or between those feasts).

2. Fasting, usually meaning not more than a light breakfast, one full meal, and one half meal, on the forty days of Lent.*

3. Fasting with abstinence on Ember Days, on Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent, and on Easter Even up to noon, at which time Lent is commonly held to end and Eastertide to begin.

Those who cannot choose their food (soldiers, certain employees, etc.) should eat what is set before them, although they should welcome the opportunity to observe abstinence. (It is understood, however, that in tropical countries, where meat is hard to obtain and therefore not an ordinary part of the diet, abstinence is commuted to some other form of discipline than going without flesh meat.) Illness, old age, extreme youth, and heavy manual work excuse from fasting, but the major Fast Days of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, as the American Prayer-Book indicates, are stricter in

* Lent consists of forty days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Even, exclusive of the Sundays which fall within this period. Because Sunday is the weekly feast of Christ's resurrection, the rule of fasting has never applied to this day of the week under any circumstances.

obligation, though not in observance, than the other Fast Days, and therefore should not be neglected except in cases of serious illness or other necessity of an absolute character.

The desire to imitate the stricter fasts of previous ages, or of saintly ascetics such as the Tractarians, may be a moving of divine love, or sometimes it may be a love of singularity. But since the practice may be unwise, it should never be undertaken without consultation with a competent spiritual guide.

However, certain Vigils, formerly of obligation but no longer listed in the American Prayer-Book, may commendably be observed by fasting and abstinence, in honor of the labors of our Lord and His Saints, as:

Fasts of Devotion

1. Christmas Eve.
2. Vigil of Pentecost.
3. Vigil of All Saints.

Easter Even is a Vigil, but is not listed as a Fast of Devotion because it is normally observed as a Lenten day of fasting with abstinence up to noon, at which time, according to the usual reckoning, Eastertide begins.

The Eucharistic Fast

The fast before Communion is not primarily an act of penance, but one of homage to our Lord, in order to receive the Blessed Sacrament as the first food of the day. It is normally a strict fast from both food and drink from midnight. At the Midnight Mass of Christmas it is natural and reverent, though not of obligation, to fast for some hours beforehand. No fast before Communion is required of those in danger of death. (And this is held to justify some relaxation in the case of those on active duty in the armed forces, for whom the fast from midnight may, if necessary, be replaced, according to widespread practice, by one of two to four hours, under the authority of Chaplains or others ministering to those involved.) Liquid food may be allowed to those seriously ill, or to those bed-ridden for over a month, but in such cases, no one should presume to "dispense himself," for the Priest who dispenses the Sacrament is the guardian of the Church's requirements, from whom a formal dispensation should ordinarily be sought.

Since the eucharistic fast is not penitential, it is not understood to prohibit smoking. However, common sense and good

manners ought to regulate those things which do not fall within the formal regulations of the Church, such as smoking, the use of lipstick, propriety of dress, and personal cleanliness.

There is no law of the Catholic Church as to what hours of the day or night the Eucharist is to be celebrated. The law concerns only the fast before Communion, and thus the hour for celebration must be set according to the ability of the Celebrant and Communicants to fast from midnight previous to reception. Hence there is no justification for celebrating the Eucharist in the afternoon or evening, except those unusual circumstances indicated above, which may, by permission from the proper superior authority, excuse from the normal observance of the fast, namely, imminence of death or danger thereof, or absolute impossibility of normal reception of the Holy Communion.

The Ordinary Catholic Duties.

Churchmen need a clear knowledge of the fundamental rules of discipline which are part of the Catholic heritage of the Episcopal Church, and these are to be found in a simple summary which, in contrast to the Ten Commandments of God, are known as:

The Six Precepts of the Church

Being the Irreducible Minimum of Catholic Practice

1. Of Mass. To assist at Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation.

2. Of Fast and Abstinence. To keep the fasts and abstinences, prescribed in the Prayer-Book, according to normal Catholic custom.

3. Of Confession. To seek sacramental absolution when needed for mortal sin, and at Easter time to do so as a matter of obedience to normal Catholic custom.

4. Of Communion. To receive Holy Communion at least once a year, during Eastertide.

5. Of Almsgiving. To give regularly to the support of the Church and the ministry.

6. Of Marriage. To keep the Church's law of marriage.

Lay Baptism

PROVIDED an infant or adult is in danger of dying before a priest can be procured, any other person, whether man, woman, or child, may baptize in the following manner:

While pouring common water on the head or face of the person, pronounce the words:

I BAPTIZE THEE IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER,
AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST.
AMEN.