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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

February 3, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

During the days and weeks of penance that lie ahead --- from **Ash Wednesday, February 26 until Holy Thursday, April 9, 2020** --- the Catholic Church throughout the world commemorates the penitential season of Lent. The model Jesus gave us for “these forty days” was his own experience in the desert and the temptations that followed him there where he encountered Satan face-to-face. And yet, Jesus, there in the desert --- alone, fasting and in intense prayer --- beat back the devil and triumphed over temptation, as strong and as unrelenting as it was throughout those forty days.

We enter the desert of Lent like Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, to face our devils, our temptations head on. But we are not alone. The Lord Jesus Christ is with us. And so, too, is the Church, the entire community of faith observing Lent. Here is what the Catholic Church in the United States requires of us as baptized Catholics:

1. **The days of FAST (only one full meal) and ABSTINENCE (no meat) are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. No dispensations are granted on these solemn days except for reason of sickness or those provided in canon law below.**
2. All other **Fridays of Lent** are **days of ABSTINENCE (no meat).**

Those between the ages of 18 and 59 are obliged to FAST (only one full meal) as above. From the age of 14, people are also obliged to ABSTAIN (no meat: this obligation prohibits the eating of meat, but not eggs, milk products or condiments of any kind, even though made from animal fat).

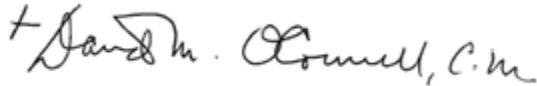
The obligation to observe the laws of fast and abstinence is a serious one for Catholics. Failure to observe one penitential day in itself is not considered a serious sin. It is the failure to observe any penitential days at all, or a substantial number of penitential days, that must be considered serious.

The obligation, the privilege really, of receiving the Eucharist at least once a year --- often called “Easter duty” --- for those in the state of grace should still be fulfilled during the period from the **First Sunday of Lent, February 29-March 1 to Trinity Sunday, June 7-8** However, the Church’s law does permit this precept to be fulfilled at another time during the year when there is a just cause.

I want to encourage Catholics to go to Confession and to make use of the sacrifices and traditions that have always been part of our Lenten practices in the Church.

We do, indeed, fast and pray with the Lord Jesus and with our fellow Catholics. May this Lent be a time of penance leading to grace and joy for us all at Easter.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David M. O'Connell, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive style.

Most Reverend David M. O'Connell, C.M.
Bishop of Trenton

NB:

1. Ashes should be distributed in the proper liturgical manner and context. "Drive-thru" distribution of ashes is prohibited. If it is not simply a "drive- thru" then it is not an issue.
2. Please instruct your parishioners concerning Lenten Regulations in your homily or announcements on the weekend of **February 22-23**, before Ash Wednesday.
3. **Chrism Mass:** Please note that the Chrism Mass will be at **St. Robert Bellarmine Co-Cathedral in Freehold, NJ** on **Monday, April 6** at 7:30 p.m.
4. **Easter Vigil:** **NO** Mass should precede the Easter Vigil on **Holy Saturday, April 11**. The Easter Vigil is observed **after darkness** (cf. General Instruction to the Roman Missal).
5. **General Absolution:** General Absolution is **NOT** permitted in the Diocese. Encourage individual Confessions during Lent. Contact me if there is a concern.
6. **Confirmation:** In the case of baptized Catholics who are completing their Christian Initiation at the Easter Vigil, priests who will celebrate the Vigil must request from me in writing the faculty to confirm, indicating in the letter the names of those baptized Catholics who are to be confirmed for our records. Priests already have the faculty to confirm Catechumens whom they baptize, and Candidates whom they receive into full communion in the Catholic Church.