

Friday abstinence for vegans/ Parents and nonchurch wedding

Q. What do persons who don't normally eat meat do about the church's rules on abstinence, such as on the Fridays during Lent? Nowadays, many Catholics are mainly fish eaters anyway, or they are vegans or vegetarians. What can they do to participate in the discipline of the church? (New Middletown, Indiana)

A. Your question prompts a question in my own mind: What's the difference between a vegan and a vegetarian? On the off chance that any of our readers — like myself — might not have known this, here it is: Vegans eat no animal products at all, while vegetarians don't eat animals but may eat products that come from them such as dairy and eggs.

And yes, there are many of each: I've read that, at some point in their lives, more than 10 percent of Americans are vegans or vegetarians. So your question does have relevance, and the answer is simple: Pick your own penance.

In 1966, when the U.S. Catholic bishops lifted the rule of mandatory abstinence on Fridays throughout the year, this is what they said: "Since the spirit of penance primarily suggests that we discipline ourselves in that which we enjoy most, to many in our day abstinence from meat no longer implies penance, while renunciation of other things would be more penitential" (No. 20).

Vegans and vegetarians should choose their own sacrifice on the Fridays of Lent. How about refraining from your favorite meatless meal? And it doesn't even have to be food-related: Since Fridays are set aside for grateful remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus, how about taking an extra five minutes of prayer on Lenten Fridays to thank Jesus for dying on the cross?

Q. We just learned that our daughter is engaged. Her fiance is not a Catholic and probably not a member of any religion. We raised our kids in the church, and they always attended Sunday Mass. But our daughter has problems with some of the church's teachings and has stopped going to Mass; now she is saying that she

doesn't want to be married in the church, particularly since she's horrified by the recent scandals.

We plan on speaking to her again about the importance of being married in the church. We're having Masses said for that intention and have also asked some priest friends to pray for her. Should she persist, however, we do have some questions.

I feel that our not attending her wedding would rupture our relationship with her and probably sink any chances of her ever returning to the church. But would it be wrong to participate in any way — such as by her dad's walking her down the aisle, or helping to pay for the wedding or giving her a gift?

She is our only daughter and this is heartbreaking for us, but we don't want to offend the Lord, even for the sake of our daughter. Any insight you could give would be appreciated — as would your prayers for her and for us. (Austin, Texas)

A. I am edified by your question — both by your clear love for your daughter and by your strong commitment to the church. I assure you that I will add my own prayers for her happiness in marriage and for her eventual return to Catholic practice.

(As regards your daughter's horror at recent scandals, would it help if you told her that you yourself are equally offended, but that you are not willing to let this criminal and sinful behavior do even more damage by depriving you of the support you experience from the sacraments?)

As to your participation in her wedding ceremony: You have explained to your daughter, and will again, your strong preference that she be married in the church and your disappointment should she not be. But I agree that your absence from the ceremony might well eliminate any chance of her ever coming back to the sacraments.

So long as she understands your feelings and your regard for the faith in which you raised your children, I think that you and your husband could participate in the wedding ceremony in the ways you mention.

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