

Catholic Witness - Friday Penance

A key resolution of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, released after their May 2011 plenary meeting, was **"to re-establish the practice of Friday penance in the lives of the faithful as a clear and distinctive mark of their own Catholic identity."**

This act of common witness will come into effect from Friday 16 September 2011 - the day the Church in England and Wales marks the anniversary of the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom.

Full Resolution

By the practice of penance every Catholic identifies with Christ in his death on the cross. We do so in prayer, through uniting the sufferings and sacrifices in our lives with those of Christ's passion; in fasting, by dying to self in order to be close to Christ; in almsgiving, by demonstrating our solidarity with the sufferings of Christ in those in need. All three forms of penance form a vital part of Christian living. When this is visible in the public arena, then it is also an important act of witness.

Every Friday is set aside by the Church as a special day of penance, for it is the day of the death of our Lord. The law of the Church requires Catholics to abstain from meat on Fridays, or some other form of food, or to observe some other form of penance laid down by the Bishops' Conference.

The Bishops wish to re-establish the practice of Friday penance in the lives of the faithful as a clear and distinctive mark of their own Catholic identity. They recognise that the best habits are those which are acquired as part of a common resolve and common witness. It is important that all the faithful be united in a common celebration of Friday penance.

Respectful of this, and in accordance with the mind of the whole Church, the Bishops' Conference wishes to remind all Catholics in England and Wales of the obligation of Friday Penance. The Bishops have decided to re-establish the practice that this should be fulfilled by abstaining from meat. Those who cannot or choose not to eat meat as part of their normal diet should abstain from some other food of which they regularly partake. This is to come into effect from Friday 16 September 2011 when we will mark the anniversary of the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom.

Many may wish to go beyond this simple act of common witness and mark each Friday with a time of prayer and further self-sacrifice. In all these ways we unite our sacrifices to the sacrifice of Christ, who gave up his very life for our salvation.