

# Did You Know...

✝ News and trivia from our parish and the Catholic Church ✝  
-- contributed by the Christ Child Church Women's Club --

## Christ Child Catholic Church

*Dedicated to Growth in Christ and to the Challenges of Loving Service*

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### How did a beaver get to be a fish?

Lent has been with us for a very long time, but not always in its present form. In fact, Lent has varied in length and focus, from as little as a day, to 40 hours, and eventually to the 40 days we now observe.

The principal purpose of Lent is of course the recognition of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, and it has always been our custom to do a little suffering and sacrifice of our own, in his honor.

In fact, the various Christian churches have gone so far as to codify "suffering and sacrifice" into many forms of service and deprivation. One common form is abstinence, the most widely-known form of which is the "no meat on Fridays" rule. But how did this curious practice originate?

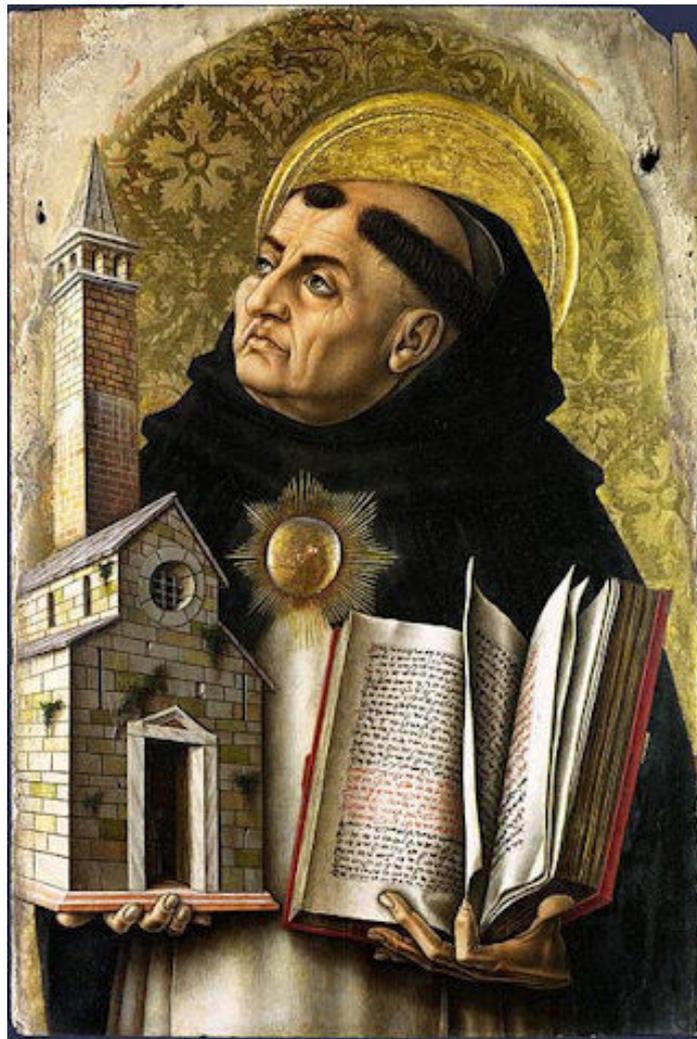


In early times also, abstinence was a broadly acceptable form of "suffering", and fasting was the most prominent abstinence. Different periods of fasting were in use for many years. But it wasn't always practical to starve for extended periods, especially when there was work to be done. Soon, the fasting was focused on "luxury" foods like meat, cheese, oil, and wine. One could still consume bread and beans -- after all, there were farms to be tended and jobs to be worked. It was simply necessary to forsake the "good stuff" -- steaks and chicken were off the table.

But there's still the puzzle of meat versus fish. Why is meat a luxury to be sacrificed, but not fish? This comes from the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, in the Summa Theologica (around 1270 AD), in which he stated:

*“For, since such like animals are more like man in body, they afford greater pleasure as food, and greater nourishment to the human body, so that from their consumption there results a greater surplus available for seminal matter, which when abundant becomes a great incentive to lust. Hence the Church has bidden those who fast to abstain especially from these foods.”*

Aquinas held that eating animals that were "like us" was more pleasurable (in oh so many ways), and therefore a more durable sacrifice. And thusly, seafood became the world-wide substitute (almost) for meat during Lent.



Now, "seafood" might mean to most of us the fish and creatures from oceans, lakes and rivers, right? Sure. Right. Well, over the course of time, "seafood" was opportunistically expanded a bit; it has come to include (for the sake of Lent rulings):

- Alligators (USA South)
- Capybara (South America)
- Beaver (USA West)

I'm sure there are others, but these certainly stand out.



Once the churches had codified acceptable forms of sacrifice for Lent, in addition to the flexibility of what was seafood, people (being people) started to come up with "workarounds" -- ways of luxuriating instead of sacrificing.

One pious soul on the east coast celebrated his Lent Fridays with a lobster dinner (what a sacrifice!). McDonald's Filet-O-Fish was created as a way to observe the restrictions of Lent, without so many people missing their visits to the Golden Arches. This likely made Fridays a bit easier for folks (and more profitable for McD). Even some Catholic dioceses celebrate some Lent Fridays with a fish-fry. And then there's the ubiquitous Lent diet -- a 'sacrifice', in our own behalf.

All these clever folks are missing the point. Sacrifice is the point, and it shouldn't be subverted (no matter how clever, productive, or amusing). It should be clear that Lent is not simply a set of rules to follow, and perhaps circumvent a little. It's a time to observe the spirit of the rules, not to game them.

Certainly, it's not difficult to see that some modest deprivation is a small acknowledgment indeed, of the torturous pain and death that Jesus experienced in our behalf.

As it turns out, one of the best ways to honor the glory of Jesus is to spend your Lent Friday with love in your heart -- and very little in your stomach.

**Still Curious? See these links ---**

[Lent - Wikipedia](#)

[Lent and meat on Fridays](#)

[Fish during Lent](#)

[Beaver is a fish](#)

--- *Karin and Greg Illes*

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<http://christchild.org/did-you-know-articles>