

Ember Days

The observance of Ember Days is a very ancient tradition in our Church with evidence of their existence in the third century, perhaps even earlier. By the late fifth century, Pope Gelasius writes of four periods of fasting in the spring, fall, summer, and winter. The practice of observing special days of fasting around the changing of the seasons seem to have begun in Rome, but the practice eventually spread by the fifth century. The Roman pagans at the time of the nascent Church would often dedicate time at the changing of the seasons to implore the gods of agriculture for a successful planting season, as well as for a bountiful harvest and rich vintage. The Catholic Church saw the laudable practice of imploring divine assistance with agricultural work, and sought to incorporate such prayer in its liturgical practices, helping to ease the conversion of the pagans to Christianity by incorporating and adapting elements with which they would already be familiar.

By the mid eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII arranged and prescribed the Ember Days as they were celebrated for centuries following, designating 4 different sets of days (Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays) around the changing of seasons as days of prayer and fasting. Those days are as follows:

- Winter: Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after the Memorial of St. Lucy (December 13)
- Spring: Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after Ash Wednesday
- Summer: Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after Pentecost Sunday
- Fall: Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14)

Today, the Ember Days are considered days of prayer and fasting in the Church to remind us both of God's abundant blessings of nature (prayer) and our need of moderation in the use of God's creation (fasting). During these periods, let us especially remember that much of our diocese is rural and many of our parishioners and their families are involved in various forms of agriculture. May these Ember Days allow us as a local Church to give thanks to God for creation and for those who work on the land, and ask God to bless their work which sustain us in so many ways.

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Ember Days in 2025 (*if the feast day marking the start of Ember Days takes place on a Wednesday, Friday, or Saturday [e.g. Ash Wednesday], that set of Ember Days begin the following Wednesday).

Spring: March 12, 14, 15

Summer: June 11, 13, 14

Fall: September 17, 19, 20

Winter: December 17, 19, 20

Prayers of Thanksgiving: We give thanks for the fruits of the earth and those who work on the lands.

Fasting: Fasting on the Ember Days reminds us to use God's creation in moderation.

Praying for Priests: Ember Days were traditionally days of ordination to the diaconate and priesthood, with the lay faithful using Ember Days to pray for their priests and asking God to send good priests. Even though ordinations do not typically happen on Ember Days anymore, these days are still a great opportunity to pray for our priests and for vocations.