



Occasionally, the liturgical calendar has a curious intersection with secular holidays.

This year, Ash Wednesday—which begins the penitential season of Lent with a day of fasting, abstinence, and prayer—falls on Feb. 14, Valentine’s Day.

Valentine’s Day celebrates a third-century Christian martyr, but it has also become a celebration of romantic love, replete with chocolates, fancy prix fixe menus, roses, and an overload of **candy hearts**.

The Archdiocese of Chicago has clarified that Lent is more important than candy hearts, and suggested that Catholics pick some other day for paper hearts and Cupid’s arrows.

A statement released by the Archdiocese explained that Catholics will not be dispensed from the laws of fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday, and suggested that Catholics planning to celebrate Valentine’s Day could do so on Feb. 13th, which is also Mardi Gras.

“The obligation of fast and abstinence must naturally be the priority in the Catholic community,” said the statement.

“Valentine’s Day can appropriately be celebrated the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday which also happens to be Mardi Gras, a traditionally festive time before beginning our Lenten observance.”

Mardi Gras is traditionally celebrated each year on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. Customary Mardi Gras celebrations include parades, elaborate costumes, and the consumption of pancakes. In the Archdiocese of Chicago, it might also serve as a substitute Valentine’s Day.

Catholics 18-59 are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Catholics 14 and older are also required to abstain from meat on those days, and on Lenten Fridays.

According to the US bishops' conference, a person fasting "is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal."