

# Ramadan, the month of fasting

It is the month of Ramadan. It is neither a hunger strike nor an uncommon fad diet. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Hijri calendar. Muslims follow a calendar based on the lunar months. Watching for the crescent is one of the customs of Muslims to observe the beginning of the lunar months. This is why the “waxing” crescent moon serves as a symbol of Islam. Muslims do not worship the moon or anything else with God (Allah in Arabic), the Almighty. Islam is a purely monotheistic religion.

During the time of Ramadan, Muslims strive to devote themselves to worshipping God, the Almighty, reflecting on the meaning of life, the perfection of their character, and increasing God-consciousness.

Ramadan is a revered month. It is not holy as in worshipping the month, but holy in its meaning and because of the blessings Muslims believe are bestowed upon them during the month. Ramadan is a remarkable month, a special month, observed and fasted by Muslims all around the world.

Fasting in Islam means abstaining from eating, drinking (even water),

and having intimate relations between spouses from dawn (Fajr) to sunset (Maghrib). Relieved of these basic human needs for a restricted period, a Muslim focuses on spiritual development, his innermost feelings, and emotions. Muslims also focus on increasing their acts of worship, prayers, good deeds, giving charity, and strengthening family and community bonds during Ramadan. For individual Muslims and their community at large, Ramadan is a time for inner reflection and renewal, exercising self-control and patience, as well as engaging in gratitude and forgiveness. It is a perfect opportunity to connect and deepen one’s connection with God. Many Muslims use this month to abandon bad habits such as smoking and backbiting. Socially, it often brings families and friends together in festive gatherings around meals to break their fast.

Fasting Ramadan is one of Islam’s five pillars. These pillars assert that there is only one God (deity) and that Muhammad is his messenger, as well as performing the five daily prayers, paying Zakat (Almsgiving. It is 2.5%



Guest Column

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of one’s annual money holding), fasting during Ramadan, and going on pilgrimage if one is physically and financially able to do so. It is interesting to notice that many people think that these pillars are “Islam”, although Prophet Muhammad said that Islam was built on these pillars and is not these pillars.

Fasting is not a special worship that exists only in the Islamic faith. Other religions do have fasting as part of their worshipping practice (rituals,) thus Islam is not the only religion that asks its followers to fast. Yet fasting in other religions takes different forms and during different times, and involves abstaining from something dear or valuable for a certain period.

Muslims were ordered in the Quran to perform the fasting. Allah [Allah is the name of God in Arabic, just like God in English, Gott in German, and Dieu in French] says, “O you

who believe! Observing As-Saum (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqun (the pious) (183) [Observing Saum (fasts)] for a fixed number of days, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number (should be made up) from other days. And as for those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g. an old man, etc.), they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a Miskin (a poor person) (for every day). But whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him. And that you fast, it is better for you if only you know (184) The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion (between right and wrong). So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan i.e. is present at his home), must observe Saum (fasting) that month, and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number [of days which one did not observe Saum (fasts) must be made up] from other days. Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things diffi-

cult for you. (He wants you) must complete the same number (of days), and you must magnify Allah [i.e. say prayers that praise Allah] on seeing the crescent of the months of Ramadan] for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him. (185) [Quran 2: 183-185]

Among the many benefits of Ramadan, Muslims practice self-control and experience what the world’s hungry experience daily. They also learn to be thankful for all the blessings they enjoy and may take for granted. They also learn to value the life that they have and be grateful for God’s mercy. Through fasting, one will learn that he is not enjoying these blessings because one is special or better than others, but it is like a test he has to go through to show God, the Bestower, how he will behave with these blessings. Ramadan thus provides numerous opportunities for self-improvement, making one more humble, generous, and inclined towards good deeds. Many Muslims spend the month of Ramadan performing acts of charity and working toward quitting bad habits, like smoking or backbiting.

The end of the fasting month is marked by the communal festival of Eid-ul-Fitr, the festival of breaking the fast. Muslims mark the occasion of Eid by decorating their homes, wearing their best clothes, attending outdoor or mosque prayer services, and participating in joyful festivals. Before the Eid prayer, Zakat Al-Fitr – an obligatory charity consisting of food but nowadays often given in money – should be distributed to the poor to ensure they are also included in the spirit of Eid. The greeting that is often used during this time is “Eid Mubarak”, meaning “blessed festival.” Gifts are exchanged and celebratory food is joyfully shared after a month of physical and spiritual cleansing.

By fasting, Muslims perform a vital act of worship that was practiced by all of Islam’s Prophets, including Nooh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus), and Muhammad (peace be upon them all).

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For more information, please visit: [www.icstillwater.org/about/ramadan](http://www.icstillwater.org/about/ramadan)

## Pope acknowledges criticism, health issues but says in upcoming memoir he has no plans to retire

VATICAN CITY – Pope Francis says he has no plans to resign and isn’t suffering from any health problems that would require doing so, saying in a new memoir he still has “many projects to bring to fruition.”

Francis, 87, made the comments in an autobiography, “Life: My Story Through History,” which is being published Tuesday, the 11th anniversary of his installation as pope. Extensive excerpts were published Thursday in the Italian daily Corriere della Sera.

In the memoir, written with Italian journalist Fabio

Marchese Ragona, Francis traces key moments of his life and their intersection with world events (World War II, Argentina’s military dictatorship and Vatican intrigue) and how they together inform his priorities as pope.

Significantly, he addresses recurring speculation about his health problems, criticism from conservatives and what both may mean for the future of his pontificate. Such questions have always surrounded the papacy but the prospect of a papal resignation only became a reality with the late Pope Benedict XVI

’s historic 2013 retirement.

Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has been battling bronchitis, the flu and a cold on and off this winter and for the past two weeks has asked an aide to read most of his speeches. He had a chunk of his large intestine removed in 2021 and was hospitalized three times last year, including once to remove intestinal scar tissue from previous surgeries to address diverticulosis, or bulges in his intestinal wall.

In his memoir, he stressed that the papacy is a job for life but that “if a serious physical

impediment” occurs, he has already penned a letter of resignation that is being held in the Secretariat of State.

“But this is, I repeat, a distant possibility, because I truly do not have any cause serious enough to make me think of resigning,” he said. “Some people may have hoped that sooner or later, perhaps after a stay in the hospital, I might make an announcement of that kind, but there is no risk of it: Thanks be to God, I enjoy good health, and as I have said, there are many projects to bring to fruition, God willing.”

Francis acknowledged that critics inside the Vatican and out have accused him of destroying the papacy and have tried to block the reforms that he was mandated by cardinals to enact as a result of his 2013 election.

“There was a strong desire to change things, to abandon certain attitudes, which, sadly, have proved difficult to eradicate,” he said. “Needless to say, there are always some who wish to put the brakes on reform, who want things always to stay as they were during the days of pope kings.”

– AP

## Worship at the church of your choice this week

24 The LORD bless you and keep you;

25 the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;

26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.



Numbers 6:24-26

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<b>Wednesday Mass</b> 12:10 p.m.	<b>Saturday Vigil Mass</b> 5 p.m.
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