

# Asking for a friend: Should I take my wife out for Valentine's Day dinner on Ash Wednesday?

It hasn't happened since 1945, so it's no wonder we're puzzling about it.

This year, Valentine's Day—that celebration of romantic love complete with schmaltzy cards, chocolate, overpriced roses, and special dinners—falls on the same day as Ash Wednesday, a day of fasting and abstinence for Catholics.

Ash Wednesday is one of two days that are considered universal days of fast and abstinence; the other one is Good Friday. In the Roman Catholic Church, fasting means limiting the intake of food and drink – typically to one main meal and two smaller meals, with no solid foods in between. Abstaining means refraining from meat. Anyone over the age of 18 and under the age of 59 is obliged to fast and abstain.

Ash Wednesday also marks the beginning of Lent, the 40-day season of preparation for Easter that ends on Holy Thursday, three days before Easter Sunday. During Lent, Catholics recall their baptism and do penance – fasting, prayer, and almsgiving – as they commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ.

Valentine's Day, while it was originally named for an obscure Catholic saint, has evolved into a popular secular celebration of love. So what is a faithful – and romantic – Catholic to do?

Think of it as a great opportunity, says Steven Defer of the archdiocesan Office of Life and Family. His advice to husbands and boyfriends: Celebrate with your Valentine a day early, on Tuesday, Feb. 13.

“Hey, guys – this is your chance to make it look like you actually gave it some advance thought!” says Defer, who has been married for 23 years. “It will be easier to get a restaurant reservation, and you also won't be stuck on Wednesday picking up some wilted roses at the last minute from the gas station on the way home from work.”



**Chef and partner Lino Oliveira of Sabor restaurant in downtown Edmonton.**Lorraine Turchansky, Grandin Media

Catholic restaurateurs Grandin Media spoke to are happy to accommodate those who might want to dine a day earlier or order a meatless meal on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

At [Sabor](#) in downtown Edmonton, chef and partner Lino Oliveira says they're offering a three-course Valentine's menu, which includes a meat, fish or vegetarian entrée, throughout the week.

The restaurant features the flavours of Spain and Portugal, and "because we specialize in fish, we always offer that as an option on all our menus."

And you might have a better chance getting a table before Valentine's Day, when the restaurant is usually fully booked, he says.

"We start taking bookings quite far in advance, and we're pretty much reaching our capacity for that day already."



**Matteo Saccomanno of Sorrentino's restaurant in Little Italy.** Alan Schietzsch, Grandin Media

At [Sorrentino's](#), a family-owned chain of Italian restaurants in Edmonton, they're offering a three-course Valentine's menu with a choice of entrees including fish.

Matteo Saccomanno, who manages the Little Italy location, says they can make the special available for those who want to come a day early.

"Sure, if you want to come on Tuesday, I will definitely make sure my chef has some of that prepared and we can accommodate you, no problem," he says.

"Just let me know in advance that you want to do the set menu."



**Sly Borowka of Continental Treat restaurant** Lorraine Turchansky, Grandin Media

Over on Edmonton's south side, [Continental Treat](#) has been a fixture on Whyte Avenue for 36 years, specializing in Eastern European cuisine.

Owner and manager Sly Borowka says they'll be offering their Valentine's special on Feb. 13, 14, and 15, because many patrons choose to avoid the crowds on the 14<sup>th</sup>, even when Ash Wednesday isn't an issue.

"On Valentine's Day, we usually have double and triple seatings, so it's pretty busy," he says.

Regardless of the day, diners have many fish and meatless options on the regular menu, from the Treat's legendary dill pickle soup to pierogis to kopytka (Polish potato dumplings similar to gnocchi) with mushroom sauce.

Of course, Valentine's Day celebrations are not limited to adults; it's usually a fun day for kids at school too, as they feast on heart-shaped treats and exchange cards with classmates. Father Paul Kavanagh, Director of Divine Worship for the Archdiocese, recently advised Catholic schools to consider holding their Valentine's celebrations on Tuesday the 13<sup>th</sup> in order to observe Ash Wednesday on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

In fact, the feast day of St. Valentine is no longer even recognized in the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. When the Church revised the calendar in 1969, several saints such as St. Valentine and St. Christopher were dropped from the list because there wasn't sufficient documentation of their lives and holiness.

Some accounts hold that Valentine was a priest in A.D. 269 under the rule of Emperor Claudius II, who apparently prohibited marriage because he believed that single men made better soldiers. Valentine agreed to marry couples in secret, and for that he was imprisoned and eventually beheaded.

According to some, Valentine had written to his jailer's daughter, whom he had miraculously cured of blindness, and signed the note, "Your Valentine," which might have begun the custom of sending love messages on his feast day.

For those who are wondering about the rare coincidence of dates this year, well, it all depends on the spring equinox. This year, spring starts on March 21. Easter is always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the equinox, and Ash Wednesday is 40 days, not including Sundays, before Easter.