



What God's Law Teaches, What Christ Has Fulfilled, and What It Means for You Today

Introduction: Between Lobsters and Commandments

Is it a sin to eat seafood? And pork? Why does the Old Testament have such strict rules about food? Are they still valid for Christians? Is it true that Orthodox Jews don't eat pork because it's considered unclean, while we do? What does all this mean for a Catholic today in the 21st century, someone who perhaps has shrimp for Christmas dinner or enjoys a seafood paella with family?

This article isn't just a culinary curiosity or an exercise in biblical archaeology. It's an invitation to rediscover the **theological and pastoral depth** of the biblical dietary laws, to understand how **Christ fulfilled and transformed** them, and to apply these principles to our daily lives as Catholics—guided not by legalism, but by love, reverence, and spiritual wisdom.

1. The Old Testament Diet: Between the Clean and the Unclean

In the books of **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy**, we find a complex system of rules dividing foods into **clean and unclean**. For example:

"But whatever is in the seas and in the rivers that does not have fins and scales... it is detestable to you" (Leviticus 11:10).

This included shellfish such as lobsters, shrimp, mussels, oysters, crabs, etc. Likewise, pork was forbidden:

"And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat or touch their carcasses" (Leviticus 11:7-8).

These rules weren't mere health recommendations. They had a **deep religious meaning**:



they were a constant reminder to the people of Israel that they were **holy, set apart from other nations**. The distinction between clean and unclean foods visibly expressed their identity as God's chosen people. They ate differently because they were called to live differently.

2. Christ and the Fulfillment of the Law: A Radical Shift

Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law, but to **bring it to fulfillment**:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

Fulfilling the Law doesn't mean following every rule to the letter, but rather **discovering its deeper meaning in Christ**. Jesus Himself began to prepare the way toward freedom from dietary restrictions. In the Gospel of Mark, He teaches:

"Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? [...] In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:18-19).

But it is especially in the life of the early Church that this issue becomes definitively clarified.

3. St. Peter, the Heavenly Sheet, and the Opening to the Gentiles

In the **Acts of the Apostles**, we read about a vision St. Peter had:

"He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-



footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.' The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean'" (Acts 10:11-15).

This passage is decisive. The Church, through Peter, understood that the old dietary distinctions had been **surpassed by Christ's redemptive work**. What defiles a person is not what enters through the mouth, but what comes from the heart (cf. Matthew 15:11).

The vision had an even broader meaning: **God was opening salvation to the Gentiles**, that is, to all nations. It was no longer necessary to become Jewish (and observe Jewish dietary laws) to enter the New Covenant.

4. The Council of Jerusalem: Freedom without Libertinism

In Acts 15, we read about the **first Council of the Church**, where it was decided which Jewish laws Christians were to observe. The conclusion was:

"That you abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:29).

But **there was no requirement to follow the Mosaic dietary laws**, such as the prohibition against shellfish or pork. That is, from the very beginning of the Church, Christians were **not bound** by the dietary laws of the Old Testament.

5. St. Paul and Christian Freedom

St. Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, is even more explicit:



“Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience” (1 Corinthians 10:25).

And also:

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

For St. Paul, the key issue is not whether you eat pork or seafood, but whether your **conduct reflects charity, faith, and humility**. However, he also warns not to use Christian freedom in a way that causes scandal to the weak in faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 8).

6. So Can a Catholic Eat Everything? Yes, But...

From a **theological** perspective, a Catholic can eat any kind of food, including seafood and pork, **as long as it is done with gratitude, without gluttony, without scandal, and without offending one's own or another's conscience**.

St. Paul insists:

“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

So yes: you can enjoy a seafood feast with friends or pork ribs, but remember:

- It's not just about whether you *can*, but **how** you do it.
- Do you eat out of necessity or excessive pleasure?
- Do you live with temperance or gluttony?
- Do you remember to bless your food?



- Do you honor the days of fasting and abstinence the Church prescribes?
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7. The Spiritual Meaning of Eating: Beyond What Enters the Mouth

For Christians, eating has a **sacramental sense**, though it is not a sacrament. Every meal is a reflection of the **Eucharist**, the banquet par excellence. Eating is not just a biological act—it is also a **moral and spiritual act**.

In **Catholic Tradition**, the Church Fathers and saints have taught that we must live **with sobriety, gratitude, and detachment**. St. Basil once said:

“Hunger is the best cook. If you’re truly hungry, everything will taste good.”

And St. Benedict, in his Rule, imposes moderation even in what is permitted.

8. Practical Applications for Today

What should a Catholic do about this today?

1. **Avoid scandal and don’t be scandalized.** If you know someone who avoids certain foods for religious reasons, respect them. And if someone judges you for eating something permitted, respond with charity and sound doctrine.
2. **Cultivate temperance.** The real issue is not what you eat, but **how** you eat. Do you eat out of anxiety? Out of gluttony? As an excuse for indulgence?
3. **Bless your meals.** A small gesture, but spiritually powerful. Before every meal, offer a simple prayer of thanksgiving.
4. **Live fasting and abstinence.** The Church does not forbid shellfish or pork, but she **does** invite us to fast and abstain on certain days. This trains us in sacrifice and obedience.
5. **Teach with truth.** If you have children, teach them not just what to eat, but why and how. The table is also an altar.



Conclusion: Beyond Seafood, Toward Holiness

Christ did not come to establish a religion of external rules, but to **transform hearts**. What we eat can say a lot about how we live. Therefore, the issue isn't seafood or pork. The issue, if anything, is a heart that forgets to be grateful, that indulges, that forgets the poor, that eats without God.

A Catholic **can** eat seafood. Can eat pork.

But never as a pagan would. Let our tables always be marked by faith, temperance, charity, and joy. Because what matters is **not what enters the mouth**, but **what comes out of the heart**.

| *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).*