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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

*VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN*

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

How the Fasts of the Church, Which Are Violated By Gluttony, Are to Be Observed

*“When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry.”* Matthew 4:2.

To do penance, to deny one's self, and to mortify the flesh is most necessary; necessary, because we are sinners who have inherited the sin of our forefather Adam, and who are banished to this vale of tears, that we may regain the heaven we have lost by doing penance and following the rugged way of the Cross; necessary, because we are sinners who, after having received Baptism, have offended God by sin, and must atone for our sin by penance; necessary, even if we are innocent, because it is still possible for us to sin, so that we must strive by penance to keep ourselves in the state of grace; necessary, because we are living under a head who was crowned with thorns, and we must be like him, if we hope to be with him in heaven. The Gospel of today reminds us of a special manner of doing penance, of which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gives us an example: “When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry.” The example of Jesus Christ is there to encourage all Christians to fast, abstain and endure hunger; and it is to that that the Catholic Church binds her children during this season under pain of sin, that they may imitate Christ to a certain extent. Are we, then, bound to fast? Certainly. And how?

*We are all bound to fast in the manner prescribed by the law, a duty which is neglected by many Christians.*

Are we bound to fast, and how are we to fast? That is the very thing that our opponents are most determined on denying; they do not refuse to acknowledge that our Lord fasted forty days, but they maintain that it is impossible, or at least useless, or even superstitious to imitate him according to our ability in that respect. That it is which liberal Catholics, who are unfortunately numerous enough, cannot get into their heads, because it does not suit their stomachs. Why should we fast? they say. Why should we not eat and drink what is set before us, as long as we have a good appetite for it? God has given his gifts to men that they may use them at pleasure. Does he not say: “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man”? But they interpret that text falsely, and in an arbitrary manner.

1. There is the natural law. Are you a human being? Then if you are, you are often bound to fast. And why? I will tell you. The fire in your stove is burning so brightly that the flame is going up the chimney; if you let it go on like that it will set fire to the house. What will you do in order to avert that danger? You do not think long

about it; you at once take away the wood which feeds the flame. You have a horse in your stable which you require now and then to go to another town on business; but you feed him very well, and leave him a long time idle, so that he has become quite stubborn, and rears, and plunges if any one attempts to mount him. What is to be done? There is not much difficulty in the matter. Shut up your corn-bin; do not give him so much to eat; let him suffer hunger for a few days, and then give him nothing but a little hay and some green stuff, and he will soon become tame enough. Your body is your horse, which must carry the soul about; your intention is to use it to reach heaven; but when it is too well fed it becomes restive, like an untamed horse, and God himself warns us not to allow that to happen: “Do not become like the horse and the mule, who have no understanding” (Ps. 31:9). It revolts against the spirit and refuses to obey reason in many things; so that there is nothing left but to take away its food, to be more moderate in eating and drinking, and to subdue it by fasting and abstinence; otherwise it will leave the road which leads to heaven, and enter on the broad path which heads to hell. The concupiscence of the flesh is like a blazing fire, which threatens to consume the beautiful and precious soul with its impure flame. How is that mischief to be prevented? Take away the fuel, the nourishment of that flame; the body must learn to fast, it must be subdued by hunger and thirst, or else it will bring the soul to eternal flames.

2. Are you a Christian? Do you adore the true God? If so, then you must often fast, because the divine law makes fasting obligatory. The first commandment that God gave to man was that of fasting and abstinence; for immediately after having created Adam, he told him that he was not to eat the fruit of a certain tree under pain of death. The law of fasting is as old as the world. If Adam had observed that law of abstinence, we, his unhappy descendants, would not now have to fast, and would be free also from many crosses and trials; but because he has harkened to his appetite more than to the voice of God, we must do penance to this day for his gluttony! Now, if God obliged Adam to abstain while he was still innocent, how much greater must not our obligation be, since we have so often offended God? If fasting was prescribed as a medicine to keep Adam in good health, how much more necessary is it not for us?

In the New Testament Jesus Christ goes before us by his example; he tells his followers what they must do after his death: “The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast”. In the time of the Apostles the rule was to live “in hunger and thirst, in fastings often” (2 Cor. 11:27). It is a law which Jesus Christ has given and imposed on his followers.

3. Are you a Catholic? At least you profess to be one, and so you are bound to fast. There is no doubt of the law of the Church in this respect; it is promulgated throughout the whole world, and is constantly observed; it has always been a mark and sign of the true religion and of the true faith in Jesus Christ, and fasting is still a means of distinguishing in our days a Catholic from a Protestant or an atheist. Hence he who, without a dispensation justly obtained, does not observe the fast, is not only disobedient to the Church, but he also denies her in a certain sense; for if I see a man who is in good health eating meat on forbidden days, I look upon him at once, if he is unknown to me, as a Protestant or an infidel.

But do we all fast in the manner prescribed by that law? Every Catholic knows how the fast is to be observed, namely (with the exception of those who are excused), all Catholics of every class and condition are bound under pain of grievous sin, first, to abstain from flesh meat on certain days, and then to eat a full meal only once a day, besides a small collation in the evening.

How many abuses and acts of disobedience are caused by this imaginary difficulty, even amongst Catholics who seem to be fervent enough in other respects! All kinds of pretexts and excuses are framed to obtain a dispensation privately from the ecclesiastical authorities, if the Church has not granted a general and public one. Health is endangered by fasting. The stomach cannot bear fish. The constitution is so delicate that it cannot keep such a long fast. The head suffers from it. The night’s rest is disturbed by unpleasant dreams. Fasting makes one so weak that it is impossible to attend to one’s duties. These pretexts are suggested by gluttony and sensuality, and yet they must suffice to obtain an exemption from the general law of the Church! Of what value they are in the sight of God will appear before the whole world on the last day.

Delicate constitution, weakness, headache, interrupted sleep, who thinks of them when there is question of spending whole nights in gambling, dancing and other amusements? We do not want to rest from those things, nor do we complain of not being strong enough for them, although it may sometimes take us days to recover after them. But when it becomes necessary to do anything for God, to atone for one’s sins, to mortify and chastise the flesh, and to fast and abstain according to the custom observed in the Church for so many centuries—

oh, then the weakness appears at once, and the strength vanishes! If one were to say to those delicate people who try to avoid the fast without sufficient cause: See, I will give you two dollars for every day that you abstain from meat, on condition that you give one dollar to the poor when you do not abstain, is it likely that there would be many cases of weakness then? I think not. On the contrary, there would be a great deal of competition in a fast of that kind. And yet it is not a vile piece of money that is promised as a reward for fasting, but the kingdom of heaven, that God himself will give. Oh, but that is another matter altogether; we are too weak to earn heaven by fasting! However that may be, it would be well to remember the warning of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Proverbs: "If thou say: I have not strength enough;" I am too weak, even if you persuade your doctor or your confessor to agree with you, "he that seeth into your heart, he understandeth, and nothing deceiveth the keeper of thy soul; "God will know well enough the value of your excuses, "and he shall render to a man according to his works."

Others again say: My stomach cannot bear fish; my health does not permit me to fast, I should surely become ill. What a pity that would be! But what becomes of this great anxiety about their health with those who often drink to excess, either because they have got into the habit of it, or because they do so through sheer conviviality, although they know that it injures their health, and, as experience tells them, even shortens their lives? Oh, they do not trouble much about their health in such a case as that; they must keep up their old habits! But when there is question of practicing temperance, of abstaining from unnecessary food and drink, and of fasting according to the Christian law, then they begin to fear for their health; then is the time to look out for a dispensation. What becomes of this great anxiety about their health with those women who gratify their sensuality whenever they get a chance on the occasion of a visit, and spend their time in drinking tea, coffee or chocolate, although the doctor has forbidden them to do so? What becomes of it with those who do not hesitate to conform to the most scandalous fashions, even in the depth of winter, and thus to open the way to diseases and complaints of different kinds? These are almost the only ones who have to look after their health, and who cannot bear to eat fish, when Lent comes on. And what are we to say of those business men who risk all kinds of dangers by sea and land for the sake of a temporal gain? They think nothing of their lives, even, not to speak of their health. But to abstain from meat on some days, and to eat fish, oh, that is altogether too dangerous for the health!

It is not right for you to say that fasting injures your health; you should say, rather, that it is disagreeable to your comfort and sensuality. How many there are who cannot get rid of the complaints and diseases from which they suffer, but by temperance, abstinence and fasting? Besides, as God has promised a long life to those who honor their parents and are obedient to them, how could the same God allow our health to be injured and our lives to be shortened by our obedience to our holy Mother, the Catholic Church, when we submit to her law of fasting without seeking to be excused from it, and thereby prove ourselves her obedient, dutiful and zealous children?

In the first chapter of the Book of Daniel you will find the history of those young men who were chosen to wait upon king Nabuchodonosor, and who had first to be fed for some years on food from the king's own table. Four of them, amongst whom was Daniel, begged to be excused from taking that food, as it was unlawful for them to touch it, according to the Jewish law. "And the prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel: I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed you meat and drink; and if he should see your faces leaner than those of the other youths, your equals, you shall endanger my head to the king" (Dan. 1:10). Do not be afraid, said Daniel; try it only for ten days, and give us during that time nothing but vegetables and water, and you will see whether we shall be thinner (Dan. 1:12). "And after ten days their faces appeared fairer and fatter than all the children that ate of the king's meat" (Dan. 1:15). And they continued that mode of life for three years longer.

Delicate Christians, you are afraid that Lent will injure your health and strength, although it does not condemn you to live on vegetables and water, and merely requires you to abstain, according to our Christian law, from flesh-meat on two days of the week. Do not fear, I say to you; you can hold out for the forty days. Leave the care of your health to God. Think of death, which you perhaps imagine you can keep off longer by eating meat; remember that the body which you now pamper will one day be the food of worms; think while you are enjoying an abundance of food and drink, that you may perhaps be the rich man in the flames of hell, and that, like him, you may ask for a drop of water and not be able to get it.

The Church, like an indulgent mother, has been forced to mitigate the ancient severity of the law of fasting, on

account of the decrease of fervor and charity on the part of her children. She concedes now as much to our weakness as if she tried to adapt herself to our sensuality. And yet we make such a difficulty of it, we seek to avoid it in every possible way; easy as the law is, we refuse to obey God and the Church of Christ, or at least we do not obey fully, as we ought. Now, we have in addition, a dispensation, according to which it is allowed to eat meat once a day; is there any one, then, who will refuse to observe a strict abstinence on those days on which meat is forbidden, and to observe every day the law regarding the collation? What are we thinking of? Does our religion teach us to adore a crucified God, or does it not? Ah! let us show that we have at least some of this religion left. Amen.

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