

It cannot be doubted that the Apostles imitated the example of their Divine Master; it is instructive, therefore, to note what we read in the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke, that they never undertook anything of importance without previously preparing themselves by prayer and fasting. (Acts c. xiii v. 23. c. xiv v. 24, c. xvii v. 9, 21, 23.) We learn from the most ancient Christian writers, that the lives of the Disciples and Apostles of our Lord might be said to be a continual fast. St. Gregory Nazianzen testifies that the food of St. Peter was generally husks. From St. Clement of Alexandria, we gather that St. Matthew lived on fruit, herbs, and legumes. Hegeppus relates that the Apostle James, who is called the brother of our Lord, never drank wine or any other strong drink, nor did he ever eat fish or flesh. We read in the works of Sts. Jerome and Epiphanius, that the first Christians of Alexandria, who had been instructed and governed immediately by the Apostles themselves, and who had imbibed their spirit, and followed their doctrine and discipline, never ate any other food than bread or herbs;—that there were some amongst them who used to abstain altogether from food for the space of six days, and that they did not eat or drink till after sunset each day. During the first ages, the faithful with an unanimous consent, indicative of their faith and fervor, fasted every year forty days previous to the festival of Easter. This universal custom soon became the common law of the Church, which the Fathers, assembled in Councils, confirmed and enforced by express canons, in order to guard against relaxation, which might have so easily crept in on the cessation of persecution, and the establishment of peace and prosperity within the Church.

The most ancient writers after the Apostles assure us that the fast of Lent was observed by the Church of Christ from the very first; and they also inform us of the reason why the particular period of forty days was selected. Who is there that has not heard of the great St. Ignatius, whose martyrdom a few years after the death of St. John the Evangelist, proved so glorious to the Church. He was a convert and disciple of St. John, and was appointed Bishop of Antioch by the directions of Sts. Peter and Paul. Than his authority, therefore, there can be none higher or more venerable. His words are, "The fast of Lent should be observed by the faithful, because it contains an imitation of the practice of the Lord." (Epis. ad Phillip.) St. Gregory Nazianzen expresses the same idea. "Christ," he writes, "fasted immediately before he was tempted, but we fast before Easter. . . . He abstained altogether from food for forty days, which only a God could do; but we have regulated our fast according to the measure of our strength." (Orat. in San Lavarum.) According to St. Jerome, "The Lord fasted forty days in the wilderness to give the model of our solemn fasts." (In caput. 58 Isaie.) St. Ambrose teaches "it is not the invention of human thought, but the command of the Divine Majesty." (Ep. ad Casula.) And his illustrious disciple St. Augustine explains these words when he says, "The precept of Lent is partly of Divine Institution, partly of Ecclesiastical." Of Divine Institution, because God, both in the Old and New Testament, has frequently given this precept. "I see (he writes) that fasting is commanded in the Gospels, in the Apostolical writings, and in that entire instrument called the New Testament." Of Canonical or Ecclesiastical Institution, because the Church has selected forty days for a solemn and public fast, wherefore to fast at any time is a means to appease the anger of God, and satisfy for our sins; but not to fast in the time of Lent, is to provoke God's anger by as many sins as there are breaches of the precept. To fast on other days is a remedy, not to fast in Lent is a sin. (St. Aug.)—The most ancient Councils of Nice, Carthage, and Laodicea, speak of it as a long established Institution, and St. Jerome calls it an Apostolical Tradition. "The forty days fast (says St. Augustine) has authority both in the Old Testament, from the fast of Moses and Elias, and from the Gospel, because our Lord fasted as many days."

These extracts from the Fathers have already intimated to us the motive of the precept of the Church regarding the fast of Lent. This motive is threefold,—1st, that we may imitate the example of Christ, who has told us to take up our cross and follow him; 2nd, that we may be made sharers in the merits of his passion; and 3rd, that we may prepare ourselves for a worthy Easter Communion.

But in order to animate ourselves to a faithful compliance with the regulations for the fast of this holy penitential season, let us here consider; 1st, that fasting is commanded by our Divine Lord, as we read in the Gospel (Matt. c. ix v. 15), "And Jesus said to them: can the children of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast. And when you fast be not as the hypocrites sad. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father, who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee (Matt. c. vi v. 16, 17, 18); 2nd, that it is a most powerful means of subduing the rebellious flesh, and repressing its sinful motions; of giving freedom to the soul, and better disposing it for the contemplation of heavenly and eternal truths; of averting the anger of God, provoked by our transgression of his laws; of satisfying for our sins; and lastly of drawing down on ourselves the choicest blessings of Heaven. During this holy season, the Church calls upon her children to perform, as it were, common and public penance for the crimes and negligences committed during the year and their entire lives; and by united fastings, prayers and tears, to endeavor to appease the anger of God, and avert the effects of his wrath. The Holy Scriptures abound in testimonies as to the wonderful effect of fasting in obtaining the pardon of sin, and drawing down the graces of God. At one time we see, as in the 1st book of Kings, that the Israelites, who had provoked God by their crimes, so appeased him by their fast, that he granted them a glorious victory over the Philistines. Then we behold the

wicked, the impious Achab, who as soon as he humbles himself and fasts, appeases the anger of the Lord and obtains mercy. Again, there is the Royal Prophet, who smarting under the remorseful stings of a guilty conscience, and trembling under the chastening hand of God, has recourse to fasting, and by this means averts the evils that were impending over him. Ask the Jews how they were saved from the imminent calamities threatened by Holofernes, or the total destruction of their race by Aman. They will answer, they found no refuge from such terrible evils, but in the fasts recommended by the High Priest Eliachim, and Queen Esther. Ask the Prophet Jonas how the Ninevites averted the utter ruin of their city, which God had commissioned him to announce—he will tell you, they and their city were spared by reason of the fast commanded to all by their king. In fine, enquire of the Prophet Joel, what are they to do to expiate their sins, who are truly sorry for them—his answer is emphatic—"Let them join fasting to tears and sorrow for sin." For this reason it was, St. Basil declares, that repentance without fasting is imperfect, and generally useless.

But fasting not only appeases the anger of God, averts the effects of his vengeance, and reconciles the sinner with his Judge, through the merits of Christ; but through the same infinite merits obtains special favors for the just, and renders prayers more acceptable. "Prayer (says Tobias, c. 12) is good with fasting." The Prophet Daniel is an illustrious instance of what fasting does for the just. By fasting and prayer and confession of sin, he moved God to grant him the favor he had so earnestly desired—"I ate no desirable bread (he tells us) and neither flesh nor wine entered into my mouth, neither was I anointed with ointment: till the days of three weeks were accomplished." (c. x. v. 3.) And from the 12th verse, we learn how this penance was rewarded. An angel was sent to comfort him, who thus spoke—"Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand, to AFFLICT thyself in the sight of God, thy words have been heard; and I am come for thy words."

On previous occasions we called your attention to the all-important question of education, and urged on you the necessity of providing Catholic schools for Catholic children. It is consoling and encouraging to be able to bear witness to the docility and zeal with which you have responded to this call. Although comparatively few and poor, you have established and maintained many excellent schools for both sexes at your own sole expense. But though much has been done, the work, it may with truth be said, has only commenced. Nothing like adequate provision for even the most elementary education of our children has yet been made. Renewed exertions, therefore, will be demanded of all; and the faithful of this diocese will have to prepare themselves for great sacrifices, in order to hand down to their children the faith once delivered to the saints, and without which "it is impossible to please God."—Heb. xi. v. 6.

You must trust in God and your own exertions alone; from the Government you can expect nothing. The Government refuse us all aid. So far as we are concerned, all Government schools in this Diocese are Godless and hostile to the Catholic Church. Catholics cannot frequent them without exposing themselves to grievous dangers to their faith and morals. Of these schools, therefore, Catholics cannot avail themselves except in cases of very great necessity, and when—such necessity being supposed—every possible precaution is taken to ward off all dangers to faith and morals. Parents and guardians should bear in mind that they are responsible for the children under their charge, and often reflect on these words of the Apostle: "He that neglects his own, particularly those of his own household, has lost the faith, and has become worse than an infidel;" and again on these words of our Divine Master: "What will it avail a man to gain the whole world if he lose his own soul, or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

We, therefore, most earnestly exhort all to exert themselves to establish and maintain efficient Catholic schools wherever it is possible to do so; and we call upon the clergy—who, indeed, have not been wanting in this matter—to exert themselves with the greatest zeal and perseverance in the great cause of Catholic education. Nothing but education can save the rising generation from the baneful influence of the infidel systems of education so characteristic of this century and so fashionable in this Colony.

Our Holy Father is still a prisoner in the Vatican, and dependent on the aims of the faithful for the means of carrying on the Government of the Church. It is our duty to aid him in every way in our power. Whilst, therefore, we supplicate the Throne of Mercy in his behalf, let us be generous in our aims on next Good Friday. For we ordain that on this day—the Anniversary of the Crucifixion of our Divine Redeemer—a collection be made for His Holiness in all the missions of this Diocese. The amount thus collected is to be forwarded to us as soon as possible for transmission to Rome.

During this holy season pray for the conversion of sinners and unbelievers, pray that all may come to the knowledge of the truth, "that there may be one fold and one shepherd" (John x v. 16).

Pray also for our Holy Father, and the liberty and independence of the Church; and that a merciful Providence may send us a sufficient number of good priests, and enable us to provide a Christian education for our children.

"The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." (Thess., last verse.)

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Given at Dunedin,
Feast of St. Agatha, 1877.

The following are the regulations for Lent, which we make in virtue of special faculties received from the Holy See:—

1st. We grant permission for the use of Flesh Meat at dinner only, on all Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and also on all Saturdays, except one, that is the second Saturday during Lent.