

Diocese of Qu'Appelle.

The Lord Bishop of the diocese issued the following earnest and devout Pastoral on Lent to the people of his diocese, directing it to be read in all churches on the Sunday before Lent or on the first Sunday in Lent:

Brethren, beloved in the Lord.

Once again, by the great mercy of God, we are permitted to have the great privilege of hearing the call of our Holy Mother the Church to her children, to gather round the Cross of our dear Lord, and to look upon the pierced Hands and wounded Side, and thorn-crowned Head of Him Who was wounded for our iniquities and Who bore the chastisement of our peace, and to ask ourselves very seriously and earnestly what share we—each one of us—have therein. It is a great privilege to be led year by year by loving hands to that holy spot to rekindle at that Furnace of Divine Love the love of our cold unfeeling hearts. True that we ought to live continually—every day—as in the very presence of that Cross, that its Shadow—let me say rather its Light—should fall on every act, every word, every thought of our daily life. But, who can say that this is really so with him or her? Do we not all need in our spiritual life times for re-awakening, for fresh and renewed efforts, for starting once again with increased earnestness and determination towards the mark of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus?

Such is the Season of Lent. It is a call to all—to clergy and to people. It is a call to the prodigal in the far off country, to forsake his evil ways, and to return to his Father who still yearns for his love, and He will abundantly pardon. It is a call no less to the son, who is still abiding in his Father's house, to remember the great and glorious privilege of his sonship, and to show his thankfulness by a life of ever increasing devotion. It is a call to deeper thoughtfulness in the things that concern the peace of our souls, and to more active work for God, and for His Holy Church, and for the souls of our fellow men. It is a call to the lukewarm and the indifferent, and to those who are halting between two opinions to decide whose service they will choose for eternity. It is a call to the most mature saint to come yet nearer to Jesus, and to know more of Him, and to be more filled with His love. For there is not one soul that might not learn yet more of His loveliness than it yet knows, that might not be more entirely filled with the richness and fulness of His grace and love.

We desire to celebrate the Festival of our Redemption—the glorious Feast of Easter—with hearts full of joy and praise and thanksgiving for the Victory then won for us, by the Captain of our Salvation, over sin and death. But if we are truly to enter into the joy and thanksgiving of that holy Season, we must prepare for it, we must realize more and more deeply *what it is for us individually*, our need of the salvation wrought for us on the Cross—our own share in it—we must feel more fully the greatness of the love therein manifested as from the depth of our sense of guilt and helplessness, we learn the great truth, "He loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*."

Lent is a time for special self-discipline and self-denial and mourning on account of sin; but it is, above all, a time for a preparation of heart for a nearer approach to Jesus, and a more entire self-dedication to Him. All should tend to this. We keep Lent not for itself, but for that to which it leads. Every Easter should see in us a distinct advance in the spiritual life, a real dying with Christ to the past, a real rising again to newness of life with Him, for Him, in Him.

Let us then briefly consider how we may use the self-discipline to which we are now called, for this purpose.

I. The Church orders the Forty Days of Lent i.e. the time between Ash Wednesday and Easter Day, exclusive of the Sundays (which

are never observed as Fasting days), to be kept as Days of Abstinence or Fasting. That *fasting* in the mind of our Church, means as it always did, a definite abstinence from food, and not merely as some people profess to think a vague and indefinite giving up of anything such as pleasures, excesses, or even sins, from which latter we are certainly bound to abstain equally at all times, cannot be doubted. The Homily on Fasting, ordered to be read in churches in the absence of a Sermon, says, "Fasting by Christ's assent, is a withholding of meat, drink, and all natural food from the body for a determined time of fasting." It is no mere distinction between different kinds of meat. The Homily further gives the following admirable reasons for this special discipline of the body:

"There be three ends," it says, "whereunto if our fast be directed, it is then a work profitable to us, and accepted of God.

The first is, to chastise the flesh that it be not too wanton, but tamed and brought into subjection to the spirit.

The second, that the spirit may be more fervent and earnest in prayer.

The third, that our fast be a testimony and witness with us before God for our humble submission to His high Majesty, when we confess and acknowledge our sins unto Him, and are inwardly touched with sorrowfulness of heart, bemoaning the same in the affliction of our bodies."

In the early Church the fast of Christians was often very rigorous. S. Chrysostom (fourth century) says, "There are those who rival one another in fasting, and show a marvellous emulation in it, some indeed who spend two whole days without food, and others who rejecting from their tables the use not only of wine, and of oil, but of every dish, and taking only bread and water, persevere in this practice during the whole of Lent." Our Lord not only sanctioned this special discipline of the body by giving rules for its proper exercise, and by saying that after His departure His disciples would fast, but He also expressly attached to it a great power over spiritual evil when He said to His apostles concerning the cure of the lunatic child possessed with a devil whom the could not cure. "This kind goeth not forth but by prayer and fasting." He, moreover, "promised a blessing, a reward to it, whensoever it is rightly performed; 'Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.'"—*Bishop Beveridge*.

It is true that our Church, while ordering certain days to be kept as days of abstinence or fasting, has not laid down any definite rules as to how her people are to observe those fasts. But it is only natural to presume that in the absence of any declaration to the contrary, the same days as had been observed previously being retained, it was intended also that the same manner of observing them should be continued.

In the early Church the rule, confirmed by the Council of Chalcedon (451), was that no food should be taken till the Evening or after four o'clock.

This is probably too rigorous a rule for those who have to work hard, and even for any person in our cold climate. Nevertheless, all who have any reverence for the authority of the Church, should observe her rule concerning this matter of fasting, in some real measure of abstinence from food. The ordinary diet of different persons varies so much that it is impossible to lay down any rule that would be applicable to all. The ordinary meal of many persons in this country would be considered a real fast to many others. The following general rules, however, can, I think, be very well adapted to the circumstances of all persons who desire to "hear the Church":

1. That all should *diminish* in some degree the quantity of their food on fasting days.
2. That all who are accustomed to eat animal food should abstain from that altogether on some days of the week, at all events on Fridays, which being ordered to be kept always as a fast day in remembrance

of our Lord's death, should be doubly observed during Lent.

3. That food, that is necessary to enable men to carry on the work they have to do, should be regulated both in kind and quantity by that necessity, and not allowed to become a luxury.
4. That delicacies, which may be properly used at other times by those who can afford them, be given up on fast days.

Over and above this discipline of fasting there should be during Lent a careful abstention from all parties and amusements as becomes those who are called to humiliate themselves and to mourn on account of sin.

In whatsoever we do, however, we must continually remember that *fasting* and all other acts of self-denial are only a *means* to an end, and must not be regarded as in themselves an end except as acts of self-chastisement. Their purpose and end is that we may learn the better to exercise self-control in greater matters, that we may subject the body to the spirit, and that by disengaging ourselves more than usual from bodily appetites and the attractions of the world, we may draw nearer to God.

II. It is a means to help to more earnest and continued *Prayer*, and *Meditation* on spiritual things.

We all recognize the necessity of prayer. And yet how few live a really prayer-full life? How few find a real delight in prayer? How few know what it is to *continue* instant in prayer, to wrestle with God in earnest entreaty, like Jacob, saying, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." Perhaps the reason why our prayers are usually so weak and languid and short, is just because we have forgotten the connection that Scripture so often shows exists between fasting and prevailing prayer. "I humbled myself with fasting," says David, "and my prayer returned into my own bosom." As "prayer is the refreshment of fasting," so prayer cannot in its full power be exercised without the self-discipline and rigour which is included in fasting.

Oh! brethren, we want, above all, for ourselves, for the saving of souls around us who are perishing in their sins and cannot pray for themselves, for the welfare of the whole Church of the Living God, more souls filled with the spirit of supplication, more *men of desire*. We want more faithful souls like holy Anna serving "God with fasting and prayers." We want more true *saints*—men and women on whom rests the glory of near communing with God.

III. But fasting and other acts of self-discipline must lead not only to a nearer approach of the soul to God, but also to more active service to our fellow men. *Almsgiving* as well as fasting must give a wing to prayer. "The association" of these three duties "in our Saviour's teaching is no positive and arbitrary law, but a moral necessity." What you save by self-denial you must not store up for yourselves, you must give it to Christ for His poor or His Church. There is a spiritual force in almsgiving, as in fasting. Our blessed Lord says, "Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold, all things are clean unto you." The Angel said to Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." There are few things, I think, that our Church people need more than a very much higher idea of the measure of self-denial that God requires in the matter of alms and gifts to His service. What most men give is utterly miserable and unworthy of those who call themselves Christians. It has no real self-denial or self-sacrifice in it. They spend all they think they require on themselves, and then give of the fragments that remain unto God, and, too often, then flatter themselves that they have done something praiseworthy in giving anything. If our Church people in this country gave to God's service (since they have no poor to whom to give alms), in anything like the measure of the early Christians, our Church, here, could be entirely self-supporting, and we should not have the ignominy of appealing to others to pay for our supply of the ministrations