

CIRCULAR,

To the Clergy and the Faithful of the Diocese of Sandwich,

Beloved Brethren:

Now is the acceptable time: now is the day of salvation.—(11 Cor. chap. 6. v. 2.) This time of graces and salvation mentioned by the Apostle, is fast approaching. In a few days we shall enter upon the holy season of Lent which is set apart by the Church, in imitation of our Saviour's fast in the desert, to satisfy the justice of God and atone for sin, by bringing forth worthy fruits of penance. In the beginning of this solemn fast, the Church, through the voice of her ministers, warns her children to dispose themselves to rise from the spiritual death of sin to a new life, that they may partake of the joy of his Resurrection at the end of this holy time.

This salutary warning is addressed equally to the just and to sinners:—to the former who take delight in following, in the narrow way of penance, the Author and Consummator of all justice, to the latter who will find in penitential works the most effectual means to be restored to the friendship of their God.

Among all the practices of the Catholic Church, there is none more ancient, or founded on better reasons, than the annual observance of Lent. The precept of fasting was begun in the earthly paradise, when God forbade our first parents to taste of the fruit of a certain tree, under pain of death and his displeasure. St. John the Baptist fasted, and his fast is commended by our Saviour. Anna the prophetess is praised for serving God with fastings and prayers night and day. The Ninivites by fasting and penance prevented the destruction of their city. God by the Prophet Joel, calls upon his people to turn to him with all their hearts, in fasting, weeping, and mourning. The precept of fasting strictly commanded and practised in the Old Law, comes recommended to us in the New Law, by the teaching and example of Jesus Christ who fasted forty days and forty nights, and foretold of his Apostles that they would fast when the bridegroom was taken from them. Hence in the Acts of the Apostles we find the Christians of Antioch fasting, and Paul and Barnabas ordained with prayers and fasting, and Priests ordained by them in every Church with prayer and fasting. We may, therefore, say that God in Holy Scriptures has commanded fasting, the penitents of old and Saints have practised it, and the Church now appoints the days and times for it.

This indispensable duty of a Christian to lead a penitential life, is founded on a divine dispensation for the justification of sinners, with which Christian people cannot be too familiar. All Catholics have learned from their earliest youth, that sin is forgiven by a Sacrament instituted by Christ for that purpose, for which the power of pronouncing judicial sentence of remission of sin, was communicated to the pastors of the Church. It is likewise an unquestionable doctrine handed down to us by the same authority, that upon this forgiveness of sin, that is, after the remission of that eternal debt, which God, in His justice, awards to transgressors against his law, he has been pleased to reserve a certain degree of inferior or temporary punishment, appropriate to the guilt which had been incurred; and it is on this part of the punishment alone, that, according to the Catholic doctrine, satisfaction can and ought to be made to God. Almighty God acts with respect to sinners

Ans. No. 365