

PASTORAL ADDRESSES.

For the Lent of 1851.

ARMAND FRANCIS MARY DE CHARBONNEL,

By the Grace of God, and the favor of the Holy Apostolic See, Bishop of Toronto :
To the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese :—

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN :

Do Penance, was the first preaching of our Lord after having fasted forty days in the Desert. Such will be our first instruction to you in recalling to your minds, at the beginning of this holy season, 1st. What is Lent ? 2nd. For what reason Lent was instituted ; 3rd. With what disposition Lent is to be spent.

1st. Lent is a solemn fast of forty days, which, according to the most ancient doctors, as well as the Lord's Day on Sunday, was instituted by the Apostles, and always observed throughout the Church of Christ. "There is no place," says St. Basil, preaching on Fast, "no city, no corner in the world, wherein this law is unknown : soldiers, travellers, merchants, hear it published everywhere, and submit themselves to it with an humble docility ; therefore let nobody believe himself exempt from it. Every Christian, of whatever country and rank he may be, is included in the precept ; angels record the names of those who keep it exactly. Be afraid, that by breaking it, yours be effaced from the roll of the faithful servants."

Of old the greatest penances were scarcely sufficient for the primitive Christian. In this Diocese, through a dispensation of the Holy Apostolic See, Lent consists in taking every day, Sundays excepted, a single full meal, which must be without flesh meats, on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, as well as on the first Thursday of Lent and all the Holy Week. Besides it is allowed to take a mouthful in the morning and a small collation in the evening.

To transgress this law, without a sufficient reason, is a venial or mortal sin, according to the degree of the violation.

Are exempt from fasting : Youths under twenty-one years, and from both fasting and abstaining, children under seven years ; sick or weak persons ; women with child or giving suck ; those who are obliged to hard labors, in a word, all those who, through whatever impediment, cannot either fast or abstain without a great inconvenience.

But remark well, dearly beloved brethren, that a discreet fast is rather wholesome. Such has always been the opinion of eminent physicians,—we obey them for our health, would we not obey the Church for the health of our souls ? Notwithstanding the most austere fasts St. Paul, the first hermit, lived 113 years ; St. Antony, 105 ; St. Arsenius, and St. Romualdus, 120 ; St. John, the silentary, 104 ; the abbot Theodosius, 105 ; the two Sts. Matharius, St. Paphnucius, St. Sabas, St. John of Egypt, about 100. Have you ever read of a certain Cornaro, an Italian, that being exhausted by debauchery at 35 years of age, and being given up by the doctors, recovered and enjoyed so perfect a health by the only means of a severe diet, living on twelve ounces a day, that he died upwards of 100 years old.

When your motive for not fasting or not abstaining is not evidently sufficient, you must take advice with a prudent person, such as your Confessor or Pastor. A person may be excused for a day, a week, and not for another week or day. Again one may be excused from fasting and not from abstaining, or from abstaining and not from fasting. But what you must know well about that law so much abused amongst those who are not acquainted with our Divine Religion, is, that when a person transgresses it, what defiles the soul is not the food, but the disobedience of the will. As it was disobedience and not the food which defiled the first Christians, when they ate blood or strangled meats, forbidden to them by the Apostles in the first council of Jerusalem ; as it was disobedience and not the food which defiled the Jews when they ate swine's flesh or any other food forbidden to them by Moses, in the name of God ; As it was disobedience and not the food which defiled men, when they ate flesh with blood forbidden to Noah by God himself, after the flood ; as it was disobedience and not the food which defiled Adam, Eve, and their posterity when they ate the fruit forbidden to them by their Creator under pain of temporal and eternal death. Whence you see, Dearly Beloved Brethren, that the law of abstinence is as old as the world, and the first law which God gave to Man ; hence we see days of abstinence and fast, kept not only by the Jews and Catholics, but even amongst Christians separated from us, amongst the Musselmén and Pagans. The Common Prayer Book of England contains a list of days of fast and abstinence. Amongst the Greeks, those who do not keep Lent are not looked upon as Christians. Seventy different sects of Mahomedans keep a fast of one month, and many tribes of Indians have been found keeping some fasts.

St. Paul, it is true, condemns in his Epistles the distinction of meats ; but it was only against those who falsely forbade some meats, and marriage itself, as things coming from an evil principle, and against those who durst not eat of meat sold in the market, lest it might have been offered to idols, just as we should condemn, now, ignorant Catholics who would distinguish between beings created by God and others created by Satan ; between articles sold in the market by Indians, for instance, and others sold by Catholics ; but far from condemning the fasts of the Church in the texts referred to, St. Paul himself fasted and chastised his body very severely, lest, perhaps, he might become a reprobate, recommending nothing more than the mortification of the flesh, and obedience to the laws of the Church, always as wise as the Holy Ghost, her divine assistant.

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