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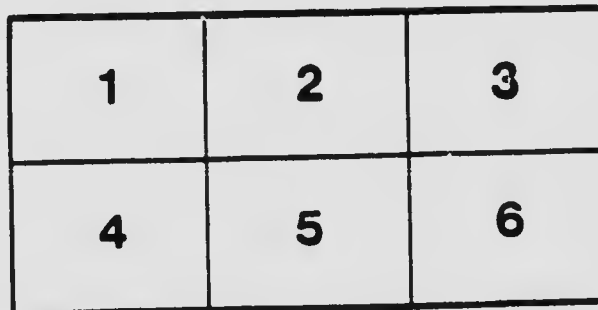
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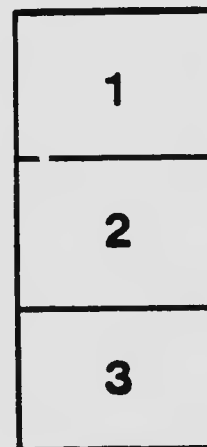
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C I R C U L A R .

REVEREND AND DEAR FATHER:

The comfort that was naturally afforded us at the success which attended your zeal and labours in carrying out the suggestions we offered to you in our last circular letter prompts us, on the important occasion of the holy season of Lent, again to intimate to you some thoughts that may serve to inspire you to further efforts along the same lines. In this age of general relaxation of the stern rules of Christian penance, it is necessary for us to strive by every means in our power to inspire our people with the spirit of our Holy Mother the Church in order that they might profit by this "acceptable time" and "this day of salvation." It is true, indeed, that whenever we turn to God by sincere repentance, that is for us "the day of salvation." Nevertheless the time of Lent may be truly styled the official day of salvation. In this holy season the Church exhorts, commands all her children to do penance in an especial manner. In this she is fulfilling the great end of her existence—the sanctification of souls. Her Divine Spouse, when on earth,

replied to those who asked Him why His disciples did not do penance, "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."

Immediately after the Ascension of our Divine Lord the Apostles and all the faithful began the saving exercise of penance. In a special manner they prepared for the greatest of our solemnities, Easter, by the observance of forty days' fasting, abstinence, prayer, and alms-deeds. Throughout the successive ages of the Church this law was most faithfully observed. Saint Jerome tells us, four hundred years afterwards, "Lent is everywhere observed by Apostolic institution." Saint Isidore says that Lent has come down to us from Apostolic times. Throughout the different ages of the Church down to our own time this observance of Lent has never failed. It is true the Church, in consideration of our weaknesses, has deigned to mitigate the rigors of the early penitential works; but this should make us all the more zealous in the exact observance of what she at present prescribes. Pope Benedict XIV. wrote to the Catholic world in the year 1751, "The observance of Lent is the very basis of the Christian warfare. By it we prove ourselves not to be the enemies of the cross of Christ. By it we avert the scourges of Divine Justice. By it we gain strength against the prince of darkness. It shields us with heavenly help. Should mankind grow remiss in the observance of Lent it would be a detriment to God's glory, a disgrace to the Catholic religion, and a danger to Christian souls. Neither can it be doubted but such negligence would become a source of misery to the world, of public calamity and of private woe."

It is for us to ward off these frightful calamities predicted by that illustrious Pontiff as following the non-observance of penitential works, by exhibiting in ourselves the utmost zeal in fulfilling the laws of penance as they are officially given to us during the season of Lent. There is no one who claims to be a Christian that can dispense himself from the law of penance. The Divine Master has laid down, with the greatest precision, the conditions of discipleship with Him. "If any man come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." "If any man will not deny himself he cannot be my disciple." "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish." These are the conditions that our Lord Himself has fixed; and He has left us no power of dispensing with them. If we only consider our very nature we will find new motives for admiring the Infinite Wisdom that prescribed these conditions. It was by the indulgence of appetite that man fell and thereby brought death (and the innumerable miseries leading to it) upon the human race. It was by self-denial, by suffering, and by the cross that mankind was redeemed. Although we have been redeemed we still are sinners. We therefore must still make atonement.

"The imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth." (Gen. viii., 21.) We thus find from the very word of God that we carry within us the promptings of every vicious passion, and if these are not repressed by self-denial, they will carry us into every species of sin and iniquity. Hence holy Job said, "The life of man is a warfare upon earth."

The epistle of the first Sunday of Lent is but a vivid description of this great and truceless warfare.

The Church never loses sight of the world as the great battlefield of her children. She looks upon Lent as the time when they are engaged, as it were, in mortal conflict with their relentless foes. She sees on the one side the World, the Devil and the Flesh putting forth their utmost efforts to retain their power over the hearts of her children. On the other hand it is she herself who inspires her own with the spirit requisite for success in the engagement. She tells them it is by self-denial, by fasting, by prayer, and by alms-deeds, that they are to retain dominion over their rebellious nature, and she gazes with admiring sympathy on her heroes carrying these principles to a successful issue.

The Royal Psalmist has said: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray," and the Holy Ghost has told us elsewhere, "The just man falls seven times." We have here still another motive for penance, viz., to make atonement to the Divine Justice for our sins. It is here that the saying of our Lord "unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish" is rigorously applied. Whatever the world may think of penance, however absurd it may think fast, prayer, and alms-deeds are, it always remains true that Divine Justice is unchangeable, and to it we owe atonement for our sins. This is the secret of penance in all the ages of the world. David watered his couch with his tears, and his very knees did tremble with weakness from his fasting. God prescribed fasting and prayer for the Ninevites to avert their impending ruin on account of their sins. Saint Paul counts more on his work of penance for salvation than the fact that he is a "Vessel of election," or that he was favored with the most extraordinary heavenly visions, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection . . . lest I become cast away."

The spirit of modern relaxation can in no way affect these Divine oracles. If we say that penance is not practical nowadays, that very few do it, we must say in return those very few are the only ones that are saved and that the rest all perish. The love of ease and the desire of being dispensed, so prevalent in modern times, can never exempt us from this essential law of Christianity, and the Church can no more cease preaching penance than she can cease being Catholic. Hence the necessity of entering with proper dispositions the holy season of Lent, of filling ourselves with the spirit of the Church in this "acceptable time." We have to prove ourselves the disciples of our crucified Redeemer. We have to atone for the many sins of our lives. We may, indeed, at any time during the year do works of penance, and they are always acceptable to God and even necessary for our sanctification; but in the time of Lent these exercises are elevated by the Divine precept in a general manner obliging us to fast, and, by the sanction of Catholic tradition, together with the certainty of Apostolic institution, and by the millions of Christians throughout the world being united together in this great holocaust of penance. In the midst of this multitude we may consider our Divine Redeemer in the actual exercise of his forty days' fast. Although it is nearly two thousand years since He passed the first Lent in the desert, yet "a thousand years are as one day, and one day is as a thousand years" to God. There is no past, there is no future in the Divine action, for God lives not in time but in eternity. The Eternal Father is looking to-day as vividly on his Divine Son fasting forty days in the desert as he did two thousand years ago. We are invited to look at Him in like manner, worn and emaciated with the rigors of His fast. We

are to bear Him company during our own Lent, carrying on our bodies the marks of our penance, bearing our miseries in union with his and with the many million Christians throughout the Catholic world.

Neither must we forget the motives the Church brings to our assistance to encourage us in these arduous works. She keeps constantly before us during Lent the conspiracy of the Jews against the life of her Divine Spouse, the horrible instruments of His passion and the agonies of His sufferings and death. She wishes by these to excite our sympathy, our admiration and our love, and thus stimulate us to suffer, in an infinitely less degree, it is true, the privations imposed upon us during this holy season. From considerations such as these we may justly hope the good people will be inspired to undertake with courage and zeal, and to execute with fidelity the works prescribed for the proper observance of Lent.

1. All the days of Lent, except Sundays, are days of fast and abstinence of obligation for all persons of the age of twenty-one years, except excused by hard labor, ill health, and such legitimate excuses.
2. Custom in this country permits in the morning a cup of tea or coffee with a little bread.
3. By dispensation from the Holy See the use of flesh meat is permitted at every meal on Sundays, and once each day at the principal meal on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, except Ember Saturday and Saturday in Holy Week.
4. The use of lard or dripping is permitted in cooking fish and vegetables, not only during Lent, but also on days of fast and abstinence through the year,

except Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and the vigil of the Nativity of our Lord.

5. It is not permitted to use fish and flesh meat at the same meal.

6. The time for complying with the Easter duty will commence next Sunday, and all should prepare by a good confession and holy communion to sanctify the holy season, and thus merit grace and glory by their prayers, fasts, and other good works.

The people may be assembled, if possible, say on Wednesday and Friday evenings during Lent for some spiritual exercises — the Beads, the Way of the Cross, a lecture or instruction on the Commandments, the Sacraments, or the Passion of our Lord.

Permission is granted to give the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament every Sunday and Friday during the holy season.

The offerings of Good Friday are for the support of the Friars guarding the Holy Land.

You will read this Letter at the different Masses in your Church the first Sunday after its reception.

Yours faithfully in the Lord.

† T. CASEY,
Bishop of St. John.

St. John, N. B., February 4th, 1902.

