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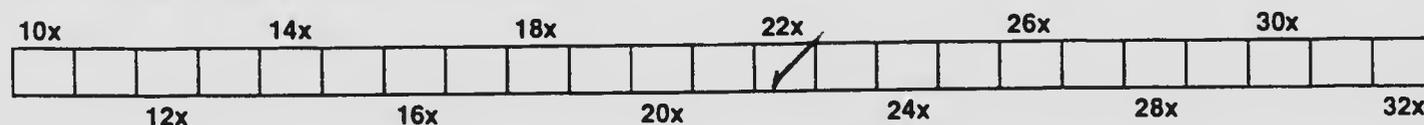
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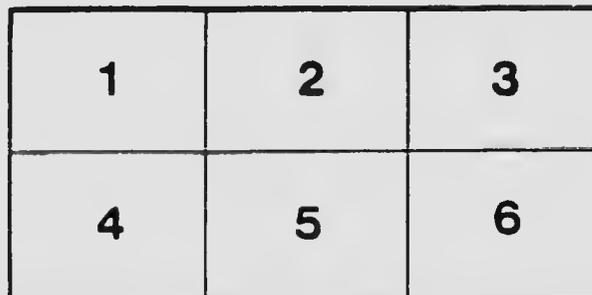
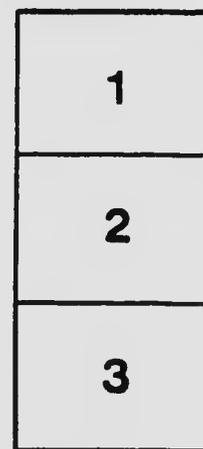
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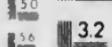
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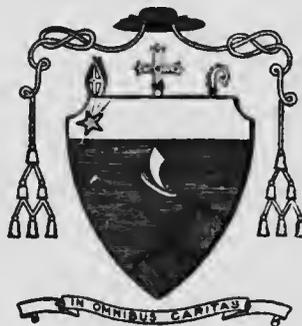
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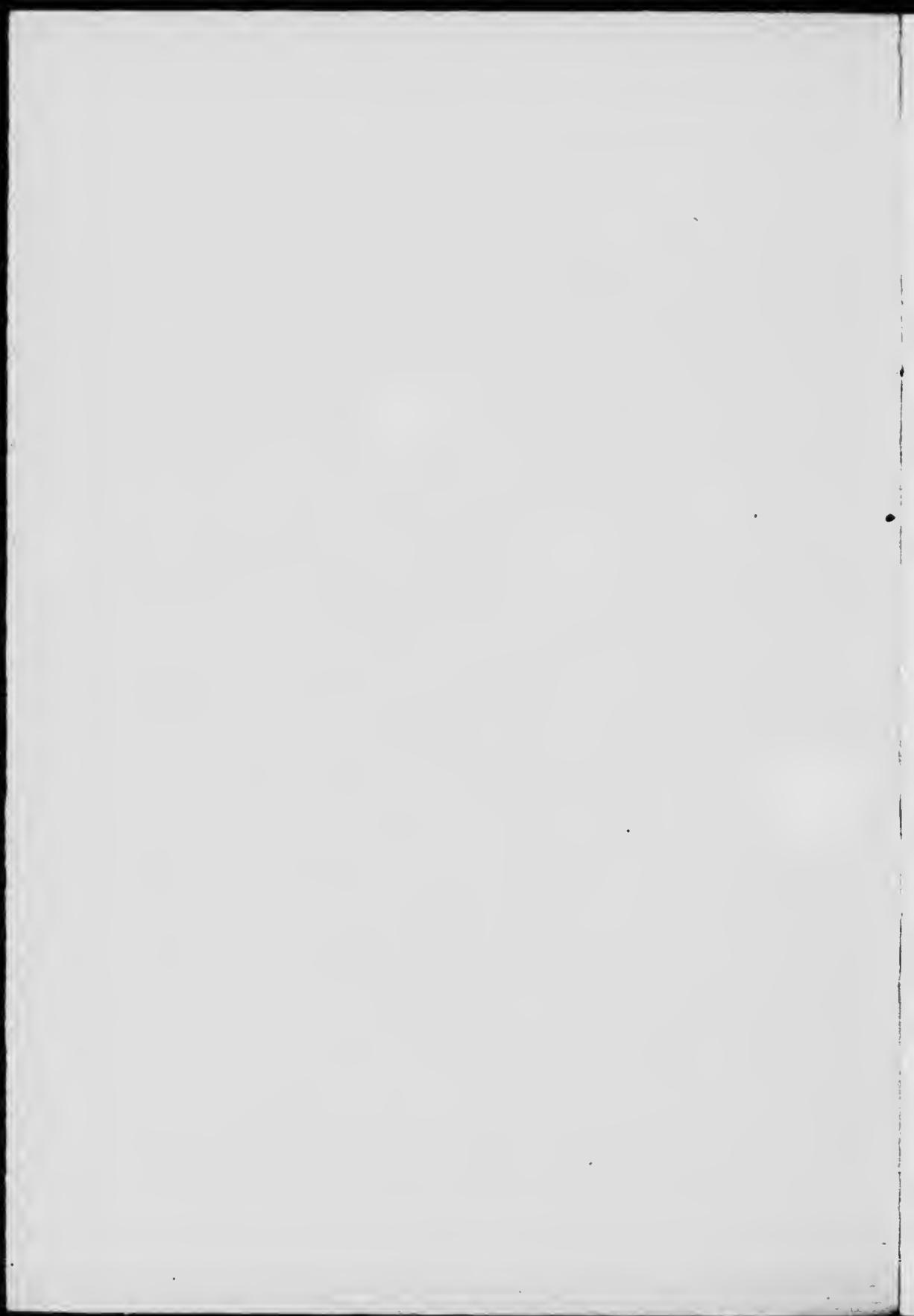
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PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
Right Rev. E. A. LeBLANC, D.D.
Bishop of Saint John
TO
The Clergy and Laity
OF HIS DIOCESE



SAINT JOHN, N. B.
THE SAINT JOHN GLOBE PUBLISHING COMPANY, LIMITED
1914



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Edward,

By the Grace of God and Favour of the Apostolic See,
Bishop of Saint John,
To the Clergy, Religious Orders and Laity
of the Diocese:

Health and Benediction in the Lord.

DEAR BRETHREN:

We are again at the entrance of that solemn season when the Church invites us to withdraw from the distractions of the world, and to examine seriously the state of our souls to see how we stand before God. To encourage us to embrace with eagerness the practices of this holy time, she places before our minds the example of our Lord Who, by fasting and prayer, did penance for our sins, whilst she also urges us not to lose sight of what He endured for us in His sacred Passion. What a privilege to belong to a Church which holds out to her members such spiritual advantages as are soon to be offered us, and which loses no opportunity of directing our thoughts to Christ and of renewing in our minds the saving recollections of His Passion and Death.

Entering into the spirit of Lent, we will find it a time of sweet and hallowed associations. Whatever acts of mortification we may perform, whatever prayers we may address to the throne of mercy and the heavenly court, we feel that we are fasting and praying in union with our brethren throughout the world, and that, when myriads of holy men and women in every land are engaged in the same penitential exercises, ours, poor as they may be, will find favour before God, at least for the sake of the just who walk always in His presence.

No man, however, need hope to spend Lent in a manner pleasing to God or profitable to himself unless he is determined, at the very outset, to renounce sin. It would almost seem that this is expected of us now more than at any other time. Why? Because Lent is a holy season. Strictly speaking, of

course, all seasons are holy. Time and grace belong equally to God, and their use is only granted to enable us to merit heaven. We have no right to abuse a single instant of time by sin, to turn it aside from the end for which God gave it. We have not received it to employ it in the service of Satan. Nevertheless, there seems to be a special degree of malice, of wanton disrespect for God's mercy, in the sins we commit during the holy days of Lent. From time immemorial, this season has been consecrated by the Church to prayer, fasting, and works of penance. Then it is that our holy Mother, in sackcloth and ashes, prostrates herself before the throne of divine clemency and implores forgiveness for the transgressions of mankind; then it is she calls out to us through the voice of her ministers that "now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation."—*2 Cor. VI., 2.* Such being the case, does it not seem like sacrilege to continue a life of sin during these blessed days? The first and most necessary step, therefore, towards the sanctification of Lent, is to cease violating the commandments of the Lord. Let the blasphemer, the man who has the name of God continuously on his lips, lay aside at once his detestable habit. Let those who have regarded too lightly, in the past, the precept of hearing holy Mass, no longer absent themselves from the divine sacrifice. Let the drunkard, the gambler, and those who have been keeping late hours in bad or questionable company, breaking the hearts of mothers, wives and families at home, let them, with God's grace, desist from their evil course. Let him who is prone to anger, be angry now no more; and let all who have made their members subservient to iniquity make them now subservient to justice, unto sanctification.—*Rom. VI., 19.* Dear children of the laity, you cannot spend a good Lent and continue to sin. Break to-day with every evil habit.

Most earnestly do we exhort all who are not at present in the state of grace, to take immediate steps for its recovery. There may be some who have sinned mortally many times since their last confession, yet, to have done so but once,

even in thought, is to have passed from the state of favour with God to the state of separation from Him, is to have ceased being the friend, the beloved child of the Almighty, and to have become the slave of Satan and the heir to perdition. Is this the state of even one soul in this diocese? Is it the condition of a large number? The conscience of each man will tell him how he stands, but, be the number large or small, to such we say: let there be no procrastination of intention, no postponement of action, make your peace with God. Delay may bring you an eternity of woe, whilst upon immediate repentance may depend your salvation. "Be converted, and do penance for all your iniquities: and iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions by which you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit: And why will you die, O house of Israel."—*Ezekiel XVIII.*, 30, 31.

During the hallowed days of Lent, dear Brethren, the Church expects that you will assist more frequently at Mass, that you will recite the rosary every day, and that, as far as in you lies, you will fast and abstain and perform other works of piety, but, do you realize, if you continue to live in a state of enmity with God, whatever good works you perform will profit you nothing? The most you can hope for is that they will obtain for you true sorrow and repentance, and, no doubt they will, but, apart from this, they have no other supernatural value. Good works done in mortal sin are dead works, because the soul itself is dead. Delay your return to the Lord, and, for want of such dispositions as are necessary to stamp a supernatural value on your actions, these will be considered as dross, nothing worth, in the eternal account of God. "If the just man turn himself away from his justice and do iniquity...all his justice which he had done shall not be remembered."—*Ezekiel XVIII.*, 24. On the other hand, if you recover now the divine favour, every act, performed with a view of pleasing the Almighty, will infallibly be rewarded by an increase of grace here, and an extra degree of glory hereafter.

You are aware that every Catholic is bound to comply with the Paschal precept which comes into force on Ash Wednesday and extends to Trinity Sunday. The law of the Church in this matter is very clear: All the faithful of both sexes, after coming to the years of discretion, shall faithfully confess their mortal sins at least once a year, receiving reverently at least at Easter the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Those who neglect to do this may be excluded from the Church of God while living and deprived of christian burial when they die. The Church has a right to legislate thus for our spiritual welfare. "He that heareth you," says Christ, "heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me."—*Luke X.*, 16. The Catholic who neglects to fulfill this precept is guilty of gross contempt for God and His Church, and, had he nothing else but this act of disobedience to answer for, it alone would be sufficient to condemn him forever. Let all the faithful under our charge comply with this precept as soon as possible. Experience shows that, when its fulfilment is unduly deferred, there is danger of its being entirely neglected.

We have already intimated that Lent is a season of prayer, of self-denial and mortification. As christians we are all bound to a life of mortification, and, it was to emphasize this fact as well as to commemorate the forty days fast of Christ in the desert that this holy season was established. During the primitive ages of the Church, the penitential discipline of Lent was characterized by a vigorous severity which, in our age of luxurious indulgence, would appear harsh and extreme.

The sainted martyrs, confessors, and virgins whose heroic lives and virtues still illumine the history of the ages of faith, followed the examples of the Apostles and triumphantly bore the mortification of Christ on their bodies in order to purify their souls. Like the Apostles, too, they sought heaven in labor and painfulness, in frequent vigils, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and privation. These virtues and austerities, be it remembered, were not confined to the anchor-

ites of the desert or the inmates of the cloister; they were practised by multitudes of devout people living in the world and engaged in temporal pursuits. As the fervor of piety declined and christians became averse to the strict discipline of the early ages, modifications of the Lenten regulations followed, and the rigor of the ordinance of fasting was gradually mitigated to suit the temper and exigencies of the times. It is to be regretted that even the indulgence of the Church has often been abused, and relaxation of the obligation of fasting has frequently degenerated into licence and neglect.

We must not forget, dear Brethren, that though the forms and conditions of fasting are altered, the precept remains unchanged and is still obligatory on the conscience. We cannot avoid sin or keep the commandments without a certain amount of self-denial, and there is no more fatal error than to regard the practise thereof as a mere counsel of perfection, as something which concerns saints or those who aim at a high degree of sanctity, but which ordinary christians may practice or not, as they choose. The precept is universal: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish."—*Luke XIII.*, 3. There can be no effective turning away from sin, no solid conversion to God, no perseverance in grace and no advancement in virtue without mortification. The man who comes to confession and receives absolution, and who, going his way, forgets his past frailties and begins to lead an easy, comfortable life and who neglects to mortify the evil habits that still remain rooted in his soul, that man has not the true spirit of penance. In a short time he will infallibly find himself in the proximate danger of relapsing into his old sins. Even had we never fallen, were we saints from our childhood, we would yet have to curb the corrupt inclinations of our nature, and to bring them under the control of grace and reason and will. A saint has said: "If I had one foot in heaven and should cease to mortify myself, I should be lost." And Saint Paul, that vessel of election, who laboured unceasingly for Christ, whose mind dwelt in visions

and ecstasies, humbly confesses that even he himself might be lost did he not practise the holy exercise of mortification: "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest, perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become reprobate."—*1 Cor. IX.*, 27. Nothing could be clearer than the words of our Lord: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."—*Luke IX.*, 23. "To many," says the Imitation of Christ, "this seems a hard saying: Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Jesus.—*Matt. XVI.*, 24. But it will be much harder to hear that last word: Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."—Book II, Chap. XII.

Dear Brethren, let us spend this Lent as if we knew it to be our last. Let us hearken to the Church's voice, and perform, to the utmost of our power, the prescribed works of penance and self-denial. Let us be determined, from the very start, to allow no obstacle, much less culpable negligence or sloth, to keep us from making these forty days a time of salvation, of solid, lasting conversion to God.

The regulations for the holy season will be the same as last year.

We strongly recommend at all times, but, more especially in Lent, abstinence from intoxicating liquor in imitation of the Sacred Thirst of our Crucified Lord. The habit of using liquor is one fraught with peril to the soul and body. When once contracted, it very often becomes a spiritual bondage undermining the moral as well as the physical condition of man. It masters the will, deadens the conscience and leaves its victim a complete wreck without help or without hope. Would to God our people were thoroughly alive to its many dangers!

We ordain, wherever it can be done, that, at least twice a week, public services be held in the churches at such hours as the Reverend Clergy may judge most convenient. These exercises will consist of instructions, prayers and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. But among all devotional exercises, we especially recommend the Stations of the Cross, and,

wherever it is possible, pastors will have this devotion every Friday in Lent. After holy Mass and the grace-giving Sacraments, there is no exercise of religion so fruitful to the christian soul as pious meditation on the Passion of Christ.

We take this opportunity of announcing our departure for Rome at an early date, February 20. We go to render an account of the state of our diocese to the Supreme Pastor of the Church, according to the ecclesiastical law which requires Canadian Bishops to make their visit *ad limina* this year. When we see the Holy Father, we shall have the pleasure of assuring him of the love, respect and veneration of our clergy, religious orders and laity, and of requesting him to impart to them his especial blessing. Brethren, pray that the Almighty may grant us a safe and prosperous journey.

During our absence, the Very Reverend Mgr. W. F. Chapman, V. G., will act as Administrator of the diocese.

"The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."—*Philip. IV.*, 7.

The Reverend Clergy will read this letter to their congregations on the first Sunday after its reception.

Given from our residence in St. John on the Feast of the Apparition of our Lady at Lourdes, February 11, 1914.

† E. A. LEBLANC,
Bishop of St. John.

WM. DUKE,
Chancellor.

