FASTING AS TRAINING OF THE WILL

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Dear faithful, we have begun the season of Lent, a season in which the cry of the prophet Joel resounds in the Church's liturgy: "Rend your hearts, and not your garments." This is, my dear brethren, the time in which we are to complete the work of tearing open our hearts. What does that mean? We rend our hearts, we open them, in order to cleanse them, so that all the evil may flow out of them that we have gathered in them over the past year. If we looked honestly into our interior, into our heart, into our soul, we would probably have to let out a groan of horror: so much evil, so much spiritual squalor there is in our heart. For all of us this is an opportunity to complete the spiritual purification, so that our heart may be cleansed to its depths, so that not the slightest blemish remains in it, so that no dirt remains in it, so as to prepare in it a place for the peace that flows from meeting the Risen One.

We need, dear brethren, to pray that this Lent of the year of Our Lord 2025, who knows, perhaps the last in our life, may be great not only in name, but may be a time in which great works will be accomplished in our soul, a time of great spiritual growth, a time of great conformity to Our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Holy Church calls us in a special way to fasting during this season.

THE NEED FOR FASTING

But do we in fact know how to fast as Catholics? In the coming week we have a wonderful occasion: the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday of the Ember Days, when the Holy Church imposes on us the obligation of keeping the strict fast, that is, both the fast in quality, abstaining from meat meals, and in quantity: one full meal and two smaller ones, without snacking during the day.

Yes, dear brethren, many a Catholic probably thinks today: and why do I actually need fasting? Why do I actually need it? All around us, my dear brethren, live plenty of people who follow various diets. Many a woman sits for hours on the internet, searching for which diet would be the most effective, exchanging information with her friends about which diet will help shed as many kilograms as quickly as possible. There are various so-called scientists who calculate how much meat we should eat in a year so as not to increase our carbon footprint. There are many people, my dear brethren, who fast for the body. Not so the Catholic: the Catholic fasts for God, fasts for the soul.

But really, what does abstaining from some meal have to do with it, or perhaps even a fast from the internet, which would do many a person good today; what does that have to do with my soul? Well, my dear brethren, contrary to appearances, a great deal. The Fathers of the Church used to say that whoever cannot abstain from what is permitted will not be able to abstain from what is forbidden.

LACK OF STRONG WILL

And look, my dear brethren: food is in itself morally indifferent. Indeed, food is necessary for us human beings. We must eat in order to keep our organism alive. An instinct of self-preservation is written into us, and with it comes appetite. We feel appetite because we need, my dear brethren, to nourish our body, to supply it with the ingredients necessary for it to live. Why, then, fasting? We deny ourselves what in itself is not something evil, what is something permitted, in order to form a strong will for ourselves.

This is the great problem of modern man: the lack of a strong will. Our life, my dear brethren, resembles

one great building site. Here we start something, there we start something, but we lack perseverance, we are not able to finish anything in our life. And we see, my dear brethren, all around us the fruits of the lack of a strong will in modern Catholics [...], because they come to the conclusion that it is too hard. We see priests abandoning the cassock, abandoning the priestly state, because suddenly it is too hard. We see, my dear brethren, all around us people who are weak, people deprived of a strong will, with whom one can do anything, with whom one can do literally anything, because they will not resist anyway, because they have no opinion of their own anyway, because even if they catch fire with some zeal, it will be a straw fire, even if they begin something, they will not finish it. And this is, my dear brethren, partly the effect of the loosening of discipline in the Church, also the loosening of Church discipline.

FASTING FOR OUR GOOD

My dear brethren, who still reminds people today that Lent is for fasting? Who, dear brethren, still remembers that I am to abstain from this or that meal, to keep the fast in quality and in quantity? We forget this, my dear brethren. We do not respect fasting. It is not given to make our life harder, because today I cannot fry myself a cutlet. Fasting is given to each of us so that we may form a strong will. I refuse, I give up what is permitted, what is not evil in itself, in order to form a strong will.

An athlete who wants to win a medal must train, must exercise, must prepare. And all of us, my dear brethren, take part in a spiritual contest, and the Holy Church, on the threshold of Lent, calls all of us to spiritual training. She calls us, my dear brethren, to military exercises, not the kind that the Polish-speaking occupation government is preparing for us, but, my dear brethren, to real exercises. Exercises that are indispensably necessary so that we [...] rags with which the floor is wiped. Fasting is given by the Church for our good, to help us. So let us all make a firm resolution to keep, as zealously as possible, these practices of fasting that the Church has prescribed and commanded us for the season of Lent, in order to strengthen our will.

THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE

And do not be surprised, my dear brethren, that precisely during Lent, when Friday comes, you will suddenly feel the greatest desire to eat meat, to break this fast. That is how the evil spirit works. This is precisely the spiritual battle. The devil comes to tempt you, and this is the battle you are fighting: are you able to resist the devil, saying to him, "Begone, Satan," as Christ the Lord said, or rather every time he passes by you, do you immediately follow after him [...].

Dear faithful, in conclusion, a story that a distant relative told me. As a little girl she lived in the countryside. It was in the postwar times. Preparations for Easter were under way, slaughtered [...]. The sausage smelled throughout the whole house, hidden on top of the wardrobe so that nobody would by chance [...]. And anyway she did not especially care for meat. Good Friday came, and there was only one thing on her mind: take a piece, a little slice. See how the devil works. She struggled for several hours, and in the end [...] she decided to give in to the temptation. She set up a chair, on it another little chair, a stool, and up this ladder the little girl climbs. She is already reaching out her hand for that piece of sausage, and suddenly the whole construction collapsed, landed on the floor, the household came running. She got such a thrashing that she never again thought about meat on a Friday. And so, such a thrashing [...].

We have no respect for God's gifts, we have no respect for food, for the nourishment that the Lord gives us, and this, my dear brethren, will be punished sooner or later. Let us no longer, my dear brethren, be the cause of God's wrath. Let us treat [...] let us deny ourselves, my dear brethren, what gives pleasure to our body, in order to help the soul, in order to form a strong will, without which there is no good Catholic. And only a good Catholic, my dear brethren, will find refuge under the wings of the Lord, as we heard in the psalm which makes up today's Tract. Let us be, my dear brethren, good Catholics. Let us be, my dear brethren, Catholics ready for spiritual battle, the real, the only real battle, the stakes of which are our eternal life.

Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and

of the Holy Ghost. Praised be Jesus Christ.