**I. The benefits of abstinence shown by the example of the Hebrews**

In former days, when the people of the Hebrews and all the tribes of [Israel](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08193a.htm) were oppressed for their scandalous [sins](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm) by the grievous tyranny of the [Philistines](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12021c.htm), in order that they might be able to overcome their enemies, as the sacred story declares, they restored their powers of mind and body by the injunction of a fast. For they understood that they had deserved that hard and wretched subjection for their neglect of God's commands, and [evil](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) ways, and that it was in vain for them to strive with arms unless they had first withstood their [sin](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm). Therefore abstaining from food and drink, they applied the discipline of strict correction to themselves, and in order to conquer their foes, first conquered the allurements of the palate in themselves. And thus it came about that their fierce enemies and cruel taskmasters yielded to them when [fasting](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05789c.htm), whom they had held in subjection when full. And so we too, dearly beloved, who are set in the midst of many oppositions and conflicts, may be cured by a little carefulness, if only we will use the same means. For our case is almost the same as theirs, seeing that, as they were attacked by foes in the flesh so are we chiefly by spiritual enemies. And if we can conquer them by God's [grace](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06689a.htm) enabling us to correct our ways, the strength of our bodily enemies also will give way before us, and by our self-amendment we shall weaken those who were rendered formidable to us, not by their own merits but by our shortcomings.

**II. Use Lent to vanquish the enemy, and be thus preparing for Eastertide**

Accordingly, dearly-beloved, that we may be able to overcome all our enemies, let us seek Divine aid by the observance of the heavenly bidding, [knowing](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) that we cannot otherwise prevail against our adversaries, unless we prevail against our own selves. For we have many encounters with our own selves: the flesh desires one thing against the spirit, and the spirit another thing against the flesh. And in this disagreement, if the desires of the body be stronger, the mind will disgracefully lose its proper dignity, and it will be most disastrous for that to serve which ought to have ruled. But if the [mind](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10321a.htm), being subject to its Ruler, and delighting in gifts from above, shall have trampled under foot the allurements of earthly pleasure, and shall not have allowed [sin](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm) to reign in its mortal body , reason will maintain a well-ordered supremacy, and its strongholds no strategy of spiritual wickednesses will cast down: because man has then only [true](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) peace and [true](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) freedom when the flesh is ruled by the judgment of the [mind](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10321a.htm), and the mind is directed by the [will](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15624a.htm) of [God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm). And although this state of preparedness, dearly-beloved, should always be maintained that our ever-watchful foes may be overcome by unceasing diligence, yet now it must be the more anxiously sought for and the more [zealously](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15753a.htm) cultivated when the designs of our subtle foes themselves are conducted with keener craft than ever. For [knowing](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) that the most hallowed days of Lent are now at hand, in the keeping of which all past slothfulnesses are chastised, all negligences alerted for, they direct all the force of their spite on this one thing, that they who intend to celebrate the Lord's [holy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm) [Passover](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11512b.htm) may be found unclean in some matter, and that [cause](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03459a.htm) of offense may arise where propitiation ought to have been obtained.

**III. Fights are necessary to prove our Faith**

As we approach then, dearly-beloved, the beginning of Lent, which is a time for the more careful serving of the Lord, because we are, as it were, entering on a kind of contest in good works, let us prepare our [souls](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm) for fighting with [temptations](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14504a.htm), and understand that the more [zealous](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15753a.htm) we are for our [salvation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm), the more determined must be the assaults of our opponents. But stronger is He that is in us than He that is against us [1 John 4:4](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/1jo004.htm#verse4), and through Him are we powerful in whose strength we rely: because it was for this that the Lord allowed Himself to be tempted by the tempter, that we might be taught by His example as well as fortified by His aid. For He conquered the adversary, as you have heard , by quotations from the law, not by actual strength, that by this very thing He might do greater [honour](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07462a.htm) to [man](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm), and inflict a greater punishment on the adversary by conquering the enemy of the [human race](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm) not now as God but as Man. He fought then, therefore, that we too might fight thereafter: He conquered that we too might likewise conquer. For there are no works of power, dearly-beloved, without the trials of [temptations](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14504a.htm), there is no [faith](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm) without [proof](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm), no contest without a foe, no victory without conflict. This life of ours is in the midst of snares, in the midst of battles; if we do not wish to be deceived, we must watch: if we want to overcome, we must fight. And therefore the most wise Solomon says, My son in approaching the service of God prepare your [soul](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm) for [temptation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14504a.htm) [Sirach 2:1](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/sir002.htm#verse1) . For He being a man full of the wisdom of [God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), and [knowing](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) that the pursuit of religion involves laborious struggles, foreseeing too the danger of the fight, forewarned the intending combatant; lest haply, if the tempter came upon him in his [ignorance](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm), he might find him unready and wound him unawares.

**IV. The Christian's armour is both for defense and for attack**

So, dearly-beloved, let us who instructed in Divine learning come wittingly to the present contest and strife, hear the Apostle when he says, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of this dark world, against spiritual [wickedness](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) in heavenly things [Ephesians 6:12](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/eph006.htm#verse12), and let us not forget that these our enemies feel it is against them all is done that we strive to do for our [salvation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm), and that by the very fact of our seeking after some good thing we are challenging our foes. For this is an old-standing quarrel between us and them fostered by the [devil's](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm) ill-will, so that they are tortured by our being justified, because they have fallen from those [good](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06636b.htm) things to which we, God helping us, are advancing. If, therefore, we are raised, they are prostrated: if we are strengthened, they are weakened. Our cures are their blows, because they are wounded by our wounds' cure. Stand, therefore, dearly-beloved, as the Apostle says, having the loins of your [mind](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10321a.htm) girt in [truth](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm), and your feet shod in the preparation of the gospel of peace, in all things taking the shield of [faith](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm) in which you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the [evil](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) one, and put on the helmet of [salvation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm) and the sword of the [Spirit](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07409a.htm), which is the [Word of God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09328a.htm) [Ephesians 6:14-17](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/eph006.htm#verse14) . See, dearly-beloved, with what mighty weapons, with what impregnable defences we are armed by our Leader, who is famous for His many triumphs, the unconquered Master of the [Christian](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) warfare. He has girt our loins with the belt of [chastity](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03637d.htm), He has shod our feet with the bonds of peace: because the unbelted soldier is quickly vanquished by the suggester of immodesty, and he that is unshod is easily bitten by the serpent. He has given the shield of [faith](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm) for the protection of our whole body; on our head has He set the helmet of [salvation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm); our right hand has He furnished with a sword, that is with the word of Truth: that the spiritual warrior may not only be safe from wounds, but also may have strength to wound his assailant.

**V. Abstinence not only from food but from other evil desires, especially from wrath, is required in Lent**

Relying, therefore, dearly-beloved, on these arms, let us enter actively and fearlessly on the contest set before us: so that in this [fasting](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05789c.htm) struggle we may not rest satisfied with only this end, that we should think abstinence from food alone desirable. For it is not enough that the substance of our flesh should be reduced, if the strength of the [soul](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm) be not also developed. When the outer man is somewhat subdued, let the inner man be somewhat refreshed; and when bodily excess is denied to our flesh, let our mind be invigorated by spiritual delights. Let every [Christian](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) scrutinise himself, and search severely into his inmost heart: let him see that no discord cling there, no wrong desire be harboured. Let chasteness drive incontinence far away; let the light of [truth](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) dispel the shades of deception; let the swellings of [pride](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12405a.htm) subside; let [wrath](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01489a.htm) yield to reason; let the darts of ill-treatment be shattered, and the chidings of the tongue be bridled; let thoughts of revenge fall through, and injuries be given over to oblivion. In fine, let every plant which the heavenly Father has not planted be removed by the roots [Matthew 15:13](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat015.htm#verse13) . For then only are the seeds of [virtue](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15472a.htm) well nourished in us, when every foreign germ is uprooted from the field of wheat. If any one, therefore, has been fired by the desire for vengeance against another, so that he has given him up to [prison](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12430a.htm) or bound him with chains, let him make haste to forgive not only the innocent, but also one who seems worthy of punishment, that he may with confidence make use of the clause in the [Lord's prayer](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09356a.htm) and say, Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Which petition the Lord marks with peculiar emphasis, as if the efficacy of the whole rested on this condition, by saying, For if you forgive men their [sins](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm), your Father which is in heaven also will forgive you: but if you forgive not men, neither will your Father forgive you your [sins](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm).

**VI. The right use of Lent will lead to a happy participation in Easter**

Accordingly, dearly-beloved, being mindful of our weakness, because we easily fall into all kinds of faults, let us by no means neglect this special remedy and most effectual healing of our wounds. Let us remit, that we may have remission: let us grant the pardon which we crave: let us not be eager to be revenged when we [pray](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12345b.htm) to be forgiven. Let us not pass over the groans of the poor with deaf ear, but with prompt kindness bestow our mercy on the needy, that we may deserve to find mercy in the judgment. And he that, aided by God's [grace](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06689a.htm), shall strain every nerve after this perfection, will keep this [holy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm) fast faithfully; free from the leaven of the old [wickedness](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm), in the unleavened bread of sincerity and [truth](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) [1 Corinthians 5:8](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/1co005.htm#verse8), he will reach the blessed [Passover](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11512b.htm), and by newness of life will worthily [rejoice](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07131b.htm) in the [mystery](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10662a.htm) of [man's](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm) reformation through Christ our Lord Who with the Father and the [Holy Spirit](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07409a.htm) lives and reigns for ever and ever. [Amen](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01407b.htm).

**On Lent II**

**1. Progress and improvement always possible**

Although, dearly-beloved, as the [Easter](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05224d.htm) festival approaches, the very recurrence of the season points out to us the Lenten fast, yet our words also must add their exhortations which, the Lord helping us, may be not useless to the active nor irksome to the devout. For since the idea of these days demands the increase of all our religious performances, there is no one, I am sure, that does not feel glad at being incited to good works. For though our nature which, so long as we are mortal, will be changeable, is advancing to the highest pursuits of [virtue](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15472a.htm), yet always has the possibility of falling back, so has it always the possibility of advancing. And this is the [true](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) justness of the perfect that they should never assume themselves to be perfect, lest flagging in the purpose of their yet unfinished journey, they should fall into the danger of failure, through giving up the desire for progress.

And, therefore, because none of us, dearly beloved, is so perfect and [holy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm) as not to be able to be more perfect and more [holy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm), let us all together, without difference of rank, without distinction of desert, with [pious](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748a.htm) eagerness pursue our race from what we have attained to what we yet aspire to, and make some needful additions to our regular devotions. For he that is not more attentive than usual to religion in these days, is shown at other times to be not attentive enough.

**2. Satan seeks to supply his numerous losses by fresh gains**

Hence the reading of the Apostle's proclamation has sounded opportunely in our ears, saying, Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of [salvation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm). For what is more accepted than this time, what more suitable to [salvation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm) than these days, in which [war](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15546c.htm) is proclaimed against [vices](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15403c.htm) and progress is made in all [virtues](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15472a.htm)? You had indeed always to keep watch, O [Christian](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) [soul](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm), against the enemy of your [salvation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm), lest any spot should be exposed to the tempter's snares: but now greater wariness and keener [prudence](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12517b.htm) must be employed by you when that same foe of yours rages with fiercer [hatred](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07149b.htm). For now in all the world the power of his ancient sway is taken from him, and the countless vessels of captivity are rescued from his grasp. The people of all nations and of all tongues are breaking away from their cruel plunderer, and now no race of men is found that does not struggle against the tyrant's [laws](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09053a.htm), while through all the borders of the earth many thousands of thousands are being prepared to be reborn in Christ : and as the birth of a new creature draws near, spiritual [wickedness](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) is being driven out by those who were possessed by it. The [blasphemous](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02595a.htm) fury of the despoiled foe frets, therefore, and seeks new gains because it has lost its ancient right. Unwearied and ever wakeful, he snatches at any sheep he finds straying carelessly from the sacred folds, intent on leading them over the steeps of treasure and down the slopes of luxury into the abodes of death. And so he inflames their [wrath](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01489a.htm), feeds their hatreds, whets their desires, mocks at their continence, arouses their [gluttony](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06590a.htm).

**3. The twofold nature of Christ shown at the Temptation**

For whom would he not dare to try, who did not keep from his treacherous attempts even on [our Lord Jesus Christ](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm)? For, as the story of the [Gospel](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06655b.htm) has disclosed , when our Saviour, Who was [true](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) [God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), that He might show Himself [true](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) Man also, and banish all [wicked](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) and erroneous opinions, after the fast of 40 days and nights, had experienced the hunger of [human](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm) weakness, the [devil](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm), rejoicing at having found in Him a sign of possible and mortal nature, in order to test the power which he feared, said, If You are the [Son of God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14142b.htm), command that these stones become bread [Matthew 4:3](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat004.htm#verse3) . Doubtless the Almighty could do this, and it was easy that at the Creator's command a creature of any kind should change into the form that it was commanded: just as when He willed it, in the marriage feast, He changed the water into wine: but here it better agreed with His purposes of [salvation](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm) that His [haughty](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12405a.htm) foe's cunning should be vanquished by the Lord, not in the power of His Godhead, but by the [mystery](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10662a.htm) of His humiliation. At length, when the [devil](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm) had been put to flight and the tempter baffled in all his arts, [angels](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01476d.htm) came to the Lord and ministered to Him, that He being [true](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) Man and [true](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) [God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), His Manhood might be unsullied by those crafty questions, and His Godhead displayed by those [holy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm) ministrations. And so let the sons and [disciples](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05029a.htm) of the [devil](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm) be confounded, who, being filled with the poison of vipers, deceive the simple, denying in Christ the presence of both [true](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) natures, while they rob either His Godhead of Manhood, or His Manhood of Godhead, although both falsehoods are destroyed by a twofold and simultaneous [proof](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm): for by His bodily hunger His perfect Manhood was shown, and by the attendant [angels](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01476d.htm) His perfect Godhead.

**4. The Fast should not end with abstinence from food, but lead to good deeds**

Therefore, dearly-beloved, seeing that, as we are taught by our Redeemer's precept, man lives not in bread alone, but in every word of God , and it is right that [Christian](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) people, whatever the amount of their abstinence, should rather desire to satisfy themselves with the [Word of God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09328a.htm) than with bodily food, let us with ready devotion and eager [faith](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm) enter upon the celebration of the solemn fast, not with barren abstinence from food, which is often imposed on us by weakliness of body, or the disease of [avarice](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02148b.htm), but in bountiful benevolence: that in [truth](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) we may be of those of whom the very Truth speaks, blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled [Matthew 5:6](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat005.htm#verse6) . Let works of [piety](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748a.htm), therefore, be our delight, and let us be filled with those kinds of food which feed us for [eternity](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05551b.htm). Let us [rejoice](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07131b.htm) in the replenishment of the [poor](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12327a.htm), whom our bounty has satisfied. Let us delight in the clothing of those whose nakedness we have covered with needful raiment. Let our humaneness be felt by the sick in their illnesses, by the weakly in their infirmities, by the exiles in their hardships, by the [orphans](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11322b.htm) in their destitution, and by solitary [widows](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15617c.htm) in their sadness: in the helping of whom there is no one that cannot carry out some amount of benevolence. For no one's income is small, whose heart is big: and the measure of one's mercy and goodness does not depend on the size of one's means. Wealth of goodwill is never rightly lacking, even in a slender purse. Doubtless the expenditure of the rich is greater, and that of the poor smaller, but there is no difference in the fruit of their works, where the purpose of the workers is the same.

**5. And still further it should lead to personal amendment and domestic harmony**

But, beloved, in this opportunity for the [virtues'](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15472a.htm) exercise there are also other notable crowns, to be won by no dispersing abroad of granaries, by no disbursement of money, if wantonness is repelled, if [drunkenness](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01274a.htm) is abandoned, and the [lusts](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09438a.htm) of the flesh tamed by the [laws](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09053a.htm) of [chastity](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03637d.htm): if hatreds pass into affection, if enmities be turned into peace, if meekness extinguishes [wrath](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01489a.htm), if gentleness forgives wrongs, if in fine the conduct of master and of slaves is so well ordered that the rule of the one is milder, and the discipline of the other is more complete. It is by such observances then, dearly-beloved, that God's mercy will be gained, the charge of [sin](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm) wiped out, and the adorable [Easter](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05224d.htm) festival devoutly kept. And this the [pious](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748a.htm) Emperors of the Roman world have long guarded with [holy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm) observance; for in [honour](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07462a.htm) of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection they bend their lofty power, and relaxing the severity of their decrees set free many of their prisoners: so that on the days when the world is saved by the Divine mercy, their clemency, which is modelled on the Heavenly goodness, may be [zealously](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15753a.htm) followed by us. Let [Christian](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) peoples then imitate their princes, and be incited to forbearance in their homes by these royal examples. For it is not right that private [laws](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09053a.htm) should be severer than public. Let faults be forgiven, let bonds be loosed, offenses wiped out, designs of vengeance fall through, that the [holy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm) festival through the Divine and [human](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm) [grace](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06689a.htm) may find all [happy](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07131b.htm), all innocent: through [our Lord Jesus Christ](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm) Who with the Father and the [Holy Spirit](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07409a.htm) lives and reigns God for endless ages of ages. [Amen](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01407b.htm).