

## On Fasting

**Saint John Cassian** (360-430), *The Institutes*, V.8-10, 13-14, 21, 23 (On the Spirit of Gluttony)

(1) And so it is a very true and most excellent saying of the Fathers that the right method of fasting and abstinence lies in the measure of moderation and bodily chastening; and that this is the aim of perfect virtue for all alike, viz.: that though we are still forced to desire it, yet we should exercise self-restraint in the matter of the food, which we are obliged to take owing to the necessity of supporting the body. For even if one is weak in body, he can attain to a perfect virtue and one equal to that of those who are thoroughly strong and healthy, if with firmness of mind he keeps a check upon the desires and lusts which are not due to weakness of the flesh. For the Apostle says: "And take not care for the flesh in its lusts" (Rom. 13:14). He does not forbid care for it in every respect: but says that care is not to be taken in regard to its desires and lusts. He cuts away the luxurious fondness for the flesh: he does not exclude the control necessary for life: he does the former, lest through pampering the flesh we should be involved in dangerous entanglements of the desires; the latter lest the body should be injured by our fault and unable to fulfil its spiritual and necessary duties.

(2) The perfection then of abstinence is not to be gathered from calculations of time alone, nor only from the quality of the food; but beyond everything from the judgment of conscience. For each one should impose such a sparing diet on himself as the battle of his bodily struggle may require. The canonical observance of fasts is indeed valuable and by all means to be kept. But unless this is followed by a temperate partaking of food, one will not be able to arrive at the goal of perfection. For the abstinence of prolonged fasts—where repletion of body follows—produces weariness for a time rather than

purity and chastity. Perfection of mind indeed depends upon the abstinence of the belly. He has no lasting purity and chastity, who is not contented always to keep to a well-balanced and temperate diet. Fasting, although severe, yet if unnecessary relaxation follows, is rendered useless, and presently leads to the vice of gluttony. A reasonable supply of food partaken of daily with moderation, is better than a severe and long fast at intervals. Excessive fasting has been known not only to undermine the constancy of the mind, but also to weaken the power of prayers through sheer weariness of body.

(3) In order to preserve the mind and body in a perfect condition abstinence from food is not alone sufficient: unless the other virtues of the mind as well are joined to it. And so humility must first be learned by the virtue of obedience, and grinding toil and bodily exhaustion. The possession of money must not only be avoided, but the desire for it must be utterly rooted out. For it is not enough not to possess it,—a thing which comes to many as a matter of necessity: but we ought, if by chance it is offered, not even to admit the wish to have it. The madness of anger should be controlled; the downcast look of dejection be overcome; vainglory should be despised, the disdainfulness of pride trampled under foot, and the shifting and wandering thoughts of the mind restrained by continual recollection of God. And the slippery wanderings of our heart should be brought back again to the contemplation of God as often as our crafty enemy, in his endeavour to lead away the mind a captive from this consideration, creeps into the innermost recesses of the heart.

(4) We also ought first to give evidence of our freedom from subjection to the flesh. For “of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he the slave” (2 Pet. 2:19). And “every one that doeth sin is the slave of sin” (Jn. 8:34). And when the scrutiny of the president of the contest finds that we are stained by no infamy of disgraceful lust, and when we are judged by him not to be slaves of the flesh, and ignoble and unworthy of the Olympic struggle against our vices, then we shall be able to enter the lists against our equals, that is the lusts of the flesh and the motions and disturbances of the soul. For it is impossible for a full belly to make trial of the combat of the inner man: nor is he worthy to be tried in harder battles, who can be overcome in a slight skirmish.

(5) First then we must trample under foot gluttonous desires, and to this end the mind must be reduced not only by fasting, but also by vigils, by reading, and by frequent compunction of heart for those things in which perhaps it recollects that it has been deceived or overcome, sighing at one time with horror at sin, at another time inflamed with the desire of perfection and saintliness: until it is fully occupied and possessed by such cares and meditations, and recognizes the participation of food to be not so much a concession to pleasure, as a burden laid upon it; and considers it to be rather a necessity for the body than anything desirable for the soul. And, preserved by this zeal of mind and continual compunction, we shall beat down the wantonness of the flesh (which becomes more proud and haughty by being fomented with food) and its dangerous incitement, and so by the copiousness of our tears and the weeping of our heart we shall succeed in extinguishing the fiery furnace of our body, which is kindled by the Babylonish king who continually furnishes us with opportunities

for sin, and vices with which we burn more fiercely, instead of naphtha and pitch—until, through the grace of God, instilled like dew by His Spirit in our hearts, the heats of fleshly lusts can be altogether deadened. This then is our first contest, this is as it were our first trial in the Olympic games, to extinguish the desires of the palate and the belly by the longing for perfection. On which account we must not only trample down all unnecessary desire for food by the contemplation of the virtues, but also must take what is necessary for the support of nature, not without anxiety of heart, as if it were opposed to chastity. And so at length we may enter on the course of our life, so that there may be no time in which we feel that we are recalled from our spiritual studies, further than when we are obliged by the weakness of the body to descend for the needful care of it. And when we are subjected to this necessity—of attending to the wants of life rather than the desires, of the soul—we should hasten to withdraw as quickly as possible from it, as if it kept us back from really health-giving studies. For we cannot possibly scorn the gratification of food presented to us, unless the mind is fixed on the contemplation of divine things, and is the rather entranced with the love of virtue and the delight of things celestial. And so a man will despise all things present as transitory, when he has securely fixed his mental gaze on, those things which are immovable and eternal, and already contemplates in heart—though still in the flesh—the blessedness of his future life.

(6) For it is not an external enemy whom we have to dread. Our foe is shut up within ourselves: an internal warfare is daily waged by us: and if we are victorious in this, all external things will be made weak, and everything will be made peaceful and subdued for the soldier of Christ. We shall

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have no external enemy to fear, if what is within is overcome and subdued to the spirit. And let us not believe that that external fast from visible food alone can possibly be sufficient for perfection of heart and purity of body unless with it there has also been united a fast of the soul. For the soul also has its foods which are harmful, fattened on which, even without superfluity of meats, it is involved in a downfall of wantonness. Slander is its food, and indeed one that is very dear to it. A burst of anger also is its food, even if it be a very slight one; yet supplying it with miserable food for an hour, and destroying it as well with its deadly savour. Envy is a food of the mind, corrupting it with its poisonous juices and never ceasing to make it wretched and miserable at the prosperity and success of another. Kenodoxia, i.e., vainglory is its food, which gratifies it with a delicious meal for a time; but afterwards strips it clear and bare of all virtue, and dismisses it barren and void of all spiritual fruit, so that it makes it not only lose the rewards of huge labours, but also makes it incur heavier punishments. All lust and shifty wanderings of heart are a sort of food for the soul, nourishing it on harmful meats, but leaving it afterwards without share of the heavenly bread and of really solid food. If then, with all the powers we have, we abstain from these in a most holy fast, our observance of the bodily fast will be both useful and profitable. For labour of the flesh, when joined with contrition of the spirit, will produce a sacrifice that is most acceptable to God, and a worthy shrine of holiness in the pure and undefiled inmost chambers of the heart. But if, while fasting as far as the body is concerned, we are entangled in the most dangerous vices of the soul, our humiliation of the flesh will do us no good whatever, while the most precious part of us is defiled:

since we go wrong through that substance by virtue of which we are made a shrine of the Holy Ghost. For it is not so much the corruptible flesh as the clean heart, which is made a shrine for God, and a temple of the Holy Ghost. We ought therefore, whenever the outward man fasts, to restrain the inner man as well from food which is bad for him: that inner man, namely, which the blessed Apostle above all urges us to present pure before God, that it may be found worthy to receive Christ as a guest within, saying “that in the inner man Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:16-17).

(7) We should then choose for our food, not only that which moderates the heat of burning lust, and avoids kindling it; but what is easily got ready, and what is recommended by its cheapness, and is suitable to the life of the brethren and their common use. For the nature of gluttony is threefold: first, there is that which forces us to anticipate the proper hour for a meal, next that which delights in stuffing the stomach, and gorging all kinds of food; thirdly, that which takes pleasure in more refined and delicate feasting. And so against it a monk should observe a threefold watch: first, he should wait till the proper time for breaking the fast; secondly, he should not give way to gorging; thirdly, he should be contented with any of the commoner sorts of food. For anything that is taken over and above what is customary and the common use of all, is branded by the ancient tradition of the fathers as defiled with the sin of vanity and glorying and ostentation. Nor of those whom we have seen to be deservedly eminent for learning and discretion, or whom the grace of Christ has singled out as shining lights for every one to imitate, have we known any who have abstained from eating bread which is accounted cheap and easily to be obtained

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among them; nor have we seen that any one who has rejected this rule and given up the use of bread and taken to a diet of beans or herbs or fruits, has been reckoned among the most esteemed, or even acquired the grace of knowledge and discretion. For not only do they lay it down that a monk ought not to ask for foods which are not customary for others, lest his mode of life should be exposed publicly to all and rendered vain and idle and so be destroyed by the disease of vanity; but they insist that the common chastening

discipline of fasts ought not lightly to be disclosed to any one, but as far as possible concealed and kept secret. But when any of the brethren arrive they rule that we ought to show the virtues of kindness and charity instead of observing a severe abstinence and our strict daily rule: nor should we consider what our own wishes and profit or the ardour of our desires may require, but set before us and gladly fulfil whatever the refreshment of the guest, or his weakness may demand from us.

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**Saint John Klimakos** (579-649), *The Ladder*, Step 14.2-7, 10, 12, 30-33

(1)Gluttony is hypocrisy of the stomach; for when it is gluttoned, it complains of scarcity; and when it is loaded and bursting, it cries out that it is hungry. Gluttony is a deviser of seasonings, a source of sweet dishes. You stop one spout, and it spurts up elsewhere; you plug this too, and you open another. Gluttony deludes the eyes of others; while appearing to receive in moderation, it intends to devour everything at once. Satiety in food is the father of fornication; but affliction of the stomach is an agent of purity. He who fondles a lion often tames it, but he who coddles the body makes it wilder still. The Jew rejoices on Sabbaths and feast days; and a monk who is a glutton, on Saturdays and Sundays. He counts beforehand the days till Pascha, and he prepares the food for it several days in advance. The slave of the belly calculates with what dishes he will celebrate the feast, but the servant of God considers with what spiritual gifts he may be enriched.

(2)As long as the flesh is in full health, let us observe abstinence at all times and in every place. When it has been tamed (which I do not suppose is possible this side of the grave), then let us hide our accomplishment.

(3)When our soul desires different foods, it is demanding what is proper to its nature. Therefore, let us also use cunning against our most wily foe. And unless a very severe conflict is on us, or penance for falls, let us for a while only deny ourselves fattening foods, then heating foods, and only then what makes our food pleasant. If possible, give your stomach satisfying and digestible food, so as to satisfy its insatiable hunger by sufficiency, and so that we may be delivered from excessive desire, as from a scourge, by quick assimilation. If we look onto the matter, we shall find that most of the foods which inflate the stomach also excite the body.

(4)The prince of demons is the fallen Lucifer, and the prince of passions is gluttony (lit., the throat of the belly). When sitting at a table laden with food, remember death and judgment, for even so you will only check the passion slightly. In taking drink, do not cease to bring to mind the vinegar and gall of your Lord. And you will certainly either be abstinent, or you will sigh and humble your mind. Do not be deceived: you will not be delivered from Pharaoh, and you will not see

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the Heavenly Passover, unless you continually eat bitter herbs and unleavened bread (cf. Ex. 12:8). And bitter herbs – this is the coercion and pain of fasting; and unleavened bread – this is a mind that is not puffed up. Let this cleave to your breathing, the word of him who says: ‘But as for me, when demons troubled me, I put on sackcloth, and humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer hath cleaved to the bosom of my soul’ (Ps. 34:13). Fasting is the coercion of nature and the cutting out of everything

that delights the palate, the excision of lust, the uprooting of bad thoughts, deliverance from incontinence in dreams, purity of prayer, the light of the soul, the guarding of the mind, deliverance from blindness, the door of compunction, humble sighing, glad contrition, a cessation of chatter, a cause of stillness, a guard of obedience, lightening of sleep, health of body, agent of dispassion, remission of sins, the gate of Paradise and its delight.

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### **Saint Isaac the Syrian** (c. 660-680), *Ascetical Homilies*, 37

(1)The man who loves the conversation of this yoke-mate fasting his whole life long is a friend of chastity. Just as the satisfaction of the belly is the source of all evils, and as the slackness of sleep kindles the lust of fornication, so fasting, vigil, and wakefulness in God’s service by resisting the sweetness of sleep through crucifying the body throughout the day and night, are God’s holy pathway and the foundation of every virtue.

(2)Fasting is the champion of every virtue, the beginning of the struggle, the crown of the abstinent, the beauty of virginity and holiness, the resplendence of chastity, the commencement of the path of Christianity, the mother of prayer, the well-spring of sobriety and prudence, the teacher of stillness, and the precursor of all good works. Just as the enjoyment of light is coupled with healthy eyes, so desire for prayer accompanies fasting that is practiced with discernment.

(3)When a man begins to fast, he straightway yearns in his mind to enter into converse with God. For the body that fasts cannot endure to sleep upon its pallet all the night through. Fasting naturally incites wakefulness unto

God, not only during the day, but also at night. For the empty body of a faster is not greatly wearied, his mind is wakeful unto God in prayer. It is better for a man to desist from his liturgy because of weakness due to fasting, than because of sloth due to eating.

(4)When the seal of fasting is set upon a man’s lips, his thought reflects with compunction, shameful thoughts are far removed from him, cheer cannot be detected in his eyes, and he is an enemy of lusts and vain conversations. No one has ever seen a discerning faster enslaved by evil desires.

(5)Fasting with discernment is a spacious mansion for every good thing; but he who neglects fasting makes every good totter. For fasting was the commandment that was given to our nature in the beginning to protect it with respect to the tasting of food, and it was from this that the first of our line fell away (cf. Gen. 3:1-7). There, however, where the first defeat was suffered, the ascetic strugglers make their beginning in the fear of God as they start to keep His laws.

(6)And the Savior also, when He manifested Himself to the world in the Jordan, began

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with this. For after His baptism the Spirit led Him into the wilderness and He fasted for forty days and forty nights (cf. Matt. 4:1-2). Likewise all who set out to follow in His footsteps make the beginning of their struggle upon this foundation.

(7) For this is a weapon forged by God, and who shall escape blame if he neglects it? And if the Lawgiver Himself fasts, who among those who keep the law has no need of fasting? This is why the human race knew no victory before fasting, and the devil had never experienced defeat from our nature; but this weapon has made him powerless from the outset. Our Lord was the first-born Leader of victory, that He might set the first crown of victory upon the head of our nature. When the devil, that foe and tyrant, sees a man bearing this weapon, he is straightway frightened and he recoils and considers that defeat which he suffered in the wilderness at the hands of the Savior; at once his strength is shattered and the very sight of this weapon, given us by our Commander-in-chief, burns him. What weapon is more powerful, and gives more boldness to the heart in the time of battle against the spirits of wickedness, than hunger endured for Christ's sake? For the more the body toils

and endures hardship when the phalanx of the demons encompasses a man, the more his heart is given succor by the power of confidence. He who has armed himself with the weapon of fasting is afire with zeal at all times.

(8) Elias the zealot also pursued the work of fasting when he was zealous for God's law. He took this labor upon himself: for forty days his mouth abstained from food on the long journey he made on foot (3 Kgm. 19:8). For fasting reminds the faster of the commandments of the Spirit, and it is an intermediary between the old Law and the grace given us by Christ. He who is negligent with respect to fasting is slothful, heedless, and feeble in the other ascetical struggles as well, and he manifests an inception and an evil token of slackness in his soul, thus giving his antagonist an opportunity for defeating him. It is evident that he who enters naked and unarmed into the struggle will retreat from it without gaining the victory; for his limbs were not shielded with the warmth of the hunger that comes of fasting. Such is the nature of fasting, that whoever perseveres in it will possess an unshakeable mind, one ready to encounter and repel all the troublesome passions.

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**Saint Gregory Palamas** (1296-1359), *Homily* 9.3-9 (In the Time of Fasting and Prayer)

(1) Brethren, by our actions let us lay hold of the benefit of fasting and self-control. Let us prove our good disposition towards them and give a practical demonstration of the fruit they bear. "For every tree is known by its fruit" (Lk. 6:44), and, "The husbandman must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say," says the apostle (2 Tim. 2:6-7). Each of the other virtues cleanses and adorns either the soul or the body, or rather, just one

part of the soul or body. The mind is cleansed and adorned by prayer and knowledge, anger by meekness, and desire by chastity. But fasting and self-control lull the stirrings of the body and quench the raging of anger and desire. They make the understanding like a clear, cloudless sky, cleansing it from the rising vapors which result from large quantities of food, and the melancholy which they cause. The outward man perishes

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through fasting and self-control, but the more he does so, the more the inward man is renewed, as the apostle tells us (2 Cor. 4:16). Someone has said, “A fat belly does not bring forth a fine mind.” A belly refined by fasting and self-control, however, necessarily refines the mind as well.

(2) Everything noble and good is accomplished and perfected by these means. Fasting and self-control are a double wall of defense and whoever lives within them enjoys great peace, like someone inside Jerusalem, for the name Jerusalem means peace. The head cook of the ruler of Babylon (i.e., Nebuzaradan) makes war against this wall, and unless he finds those inside strongly defending the walls he razes them to the ground, bringing culinary delights into action as engines of destruction (cf. 4 Kgm. 25:8-11; Jer. 52:12f.).

(3) If the people on the walls not only despise rich and varied food but are extremely frugal even in making bread, then they can overturn the tent of Midian by their self-control, rather as the story of Gideon foreshadows. “Lo,” it says, “a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian.” The barley bread shows how frugal and restrained, even in necessary food, were the men fighting alongside Gideon. “And it came,” it says, “unto the tent of Midian, and smote it and overturned it” (Judg. 7:13). Without doubt the tent overturned by a barley cake is the voracious appetite of the gullet and stomach, the force of which is taken away by fasting and plain fare. Daniel, a man subject to desires, did more than just destroy with a cake the dragon (Bel and the Dragon, 23-27), the god of those whose god is the belly, who has power over the loins and the navel. He also, after not having eaten the bread of desires or drunk wine for many weeks, saw strange visions

and was attended by an archangel (cf. Dan. 10:1-21).

(4) Having spoken of Daniel, we turn now to that greedy and ungrateful race who said, “Who shall give us flesh to eat? Now our soul is dried away” (Num. 11:4-6). When they had eaten so much that it was coming out at their nostrils, they suffered a terrible blow. “The wrath of the Lord,” it says, “was kindled against the people, and their satiety became for them a very great plague” (Num. 11:33). The so-called “graves of greed” in that place are a monument to God’s wrath against them (Num. 11:34), and with this in view we should flee gluttony, embrace self-control, and welcome these days of fasting with open arms, because they make the body obedient to the soul and lighten the mind in its ascent to God. John the Forerunner of Grace was content all his life long with locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4). Peter used only salted olives, lupin seeds, and light vegetables (cf. *Clementine Homilies*, 12.6 [4<sup>th</sup> c.]). To say nothing of Paul who, in his own words, lived “in hunger and thirst, in fastings often” (2 Cor. 11:27).

(5) The forty day period of the fast is not your whole life, and every day your fasting ends when the sun sets. Going without food to this extent is surely easy and reasonable for nearly everyone. But when we eat let it also be with moderation, so that fasting and eating within due limits, we may not lag far behind those who do not eat at all. Perhaps you spare your flesh and avoid fasting in case you waste away. The opposite is true. Eating your fill unavoidably gives rise to gout, headaches, and other illnesses, whereas fasting is the mother of good health. It seems that the fornicator is not the only one who sins against his own body; for the glutton also offends

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against his body by making it sickly and diseased.

(6)We indulge ourselves through all our senses, so let us impose self-control on them all. If you abstain from food while your sight lures you into adultery, inquisitiveness and malice in the hidden place of your soul, your hearing is open to insulting words, lewd songs and evil slanders, and your other senses are open to whatever harms them, what is the benefit of your fasting? None whatsoever. For the evil which you avoid with one of your senses, you let into your soul through another. We are made up of a soul and a body, and both soul and body consist of many members. For the soul too has members after a fashion: those parts of it concerned with growth, desiring, anger, and reason. Therefore true

fasting must extend to every part, cleansing and healing them all. Fasting, brethren, gently and kindly restores the soul to health, and that is why our Fathers imposed it on us during these days.

(7)If we shrink from fasting in our foolishness, hell awaits to punish us, to cut us down and burn us, at that time when Christ will cut in pieces anyone incapable of being healed and consign them to the unquenchable fire to suffer eternal punishment. It was because we did not fast in paradise that we were thrown into this life full of sufferings (cf. Gen. 2:15-17; 3:17). In the same way, if we have not fasted here or lived with as much self-restraint as we could, we shall fall into that unquenchable and unbearable hell-fire.

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**Saint John of Kronstadt** (1829-1908), Homily 8 (On Cheesefare Sunday [the day before Lent begins])

*When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting.* (Matt. 6:16)

(1)In our times there are very few people who would like to hypocritically appear to be great fasters in order to be praised by other people. It is much easier today to find people who neither desire to fast nor to appear to be fasting because they think fasting is useless and futile, and that to appear to be fasting so as to be noticed by others is foolish and ridiculous. However, between such extremes, there are certainly those among Christians who try to follow the golden mean, deviating neither right nor left, and follow the path of fasting directly and precisely, as true fasters, keeping a good fast, well-pleasing to the Lord.

*your soul* (1 Pet. 2:11); how can your soul not take precedence over your sin-loving flesh, which pulls you down on earth? What benefit do you receive from dainty food and drink, how are you not ashamed to burden yourself with them? Why do you submit yourself to the rule of sensuality? Is this pleasing to you? Look, the imaginary sweetness of your pleasures is a dangerous lure of the flesh, through which it easily gains preponderance over your soul and does not allow you to think of heaven and strive for it. Fear this lure. Like a fly in honey, you will get stuck in it and remain there until you die.

(2)How can your soul not soar to heaven, not *abstain from fleshly lusts which war against*

(3)Is the fast necessary, as a means to abstain from improper thoughts and movements of the heart, as well as blameworthy actions? If



you agree that God is your Lawgiver and just Judge, who knows how to punish those who transgress His laws; if your conscience tells you that your soul upset the order of moral life, disobeying the laws of the Creator, then you must agree that you need to restore the order of your moral life, bring your thoughts from their agitation to and fro back to their proper order, force your heart to break away from unworthy goals, to which it has clung so strongly due to your carelessness and negligence, that it has forgotten the first object of its love, God; you must behave so that your actions would not be shameful if exposed before the judgment of your conscience and the judgment of people and of God. You know that a sinful thought is an abomination to God, that God requires your heart, which you willingly submitted to the passions, for Himself, and that the impure and *the boastful shall not stand in His sight* (Ps. 5:5). If you wish to be united with God, if you desire eternal bliss, then you must agree that it behooves you to fast with your soul, gather your mind, correct your thoughts, purify them, and instead of wearing the rags of iniquitous deeds you must adorn yourself with the precious garment of good deeds. The physical fast was established to facilitate the fasting of the spirit.

(4) Shall I, even after this, speak of the benefits of the fast, seeing as how when we spoke of its necessity, we already have partially mentioned its benefits? The fast pacifies our sinful, capricious flesh, freeing it from the weight of the soul, conferring it wings, as it were, so it can soar toward the heavens, providing a place for the action of God's grace. He who fasts freely and correctly knows how the soul becomes free and bright during the fast; then good thoughts easily enter the heart, the heart becomes purer, more tender, more compassionate; we

feel an inclination toward good deeds; compunction for our sins appears in our souls, which start to feel the deadliness of the state we are in and start to grieve over its sins.

(5) When we do not fast, on the other hand, when our thoughts are in disarray, when our heart is unrestrained and our will allows us everything, then rarely can you see a saving change in man, then his soul is dead: all of its forces act in the wrong direction; the main purpose for his actions, the meaning of life, leaves his sight, and in its place many other particular goals appear, almost as many as there are passions or whims inside each man. A strange activity happens within the soul, and its result seems to be some sort of building up. You see the materials needed for the construction, the beginning, middle, and end of the work, but in fact it comes to nothing. The soul acts against itself, against its own salvation, with all its power: intellect, will, and the senses. He who fasts as a Christian should, rationally, freely, become worthy, according to the true promise of the Lord, of receiving a reward from the Heavenly Father for his ascetical efforts. *Your Father, said the Savior to the true faster, who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly* (Matt. 6:4). And this reward, without a doubt, is always generous, truly fatherly, serving for our most essential benefit.

(6) Brethren! Let us understand that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that we do not belong to ourselves, but to God, because we have been bought for the price of the Blood of the Son of God. *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price* (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Let us respect our nature, elevated through its participation in the divine nature; let us eat

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and drink only as much as is necessary to sustain our life and strengthen our forces; let us not submit our nature to the power of impure passions, but let us make it holy,

something we ourselves would not be ashamed to look at, and in which God could recognize the work of His hands.

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### **Eusebius of Caesarea** (c. 324), *Church History*, V.24.11-13

(1) Among them was Irenæus, who, sending letters in the name of the brethren in Gaul over whom he presided, maintained that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be observed only on the Lord's day. He fittingly admonishes Victor that he should not cut off whole churches of God which observed the tradition of an ancient custom (of observing Pascha on the day of the Jewish Passover [the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan]) and after many other words he proceeds as follows:

fast one day, others two, yet others more; some, moreover, count their day as consisting of forty hours day and night.

(2) For the controversy is not only concerning the day, but also concerning the very manner of the fast. For some think that they should

(3) And this variety in its observance has not originated in our time; but long before in that of our ancestors. It is likely that they did not hold to strict accuracy, and thus formed a custom for their posterity according to their own simplicity and peculiar mode. Yet all of these lived none the less in peace, and we also live in peace with one another; and the disagreement in regard to the fast confirms the agreement in the faith.

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### **Socrates Scholasticus** (c. 440), *Church History*, V.22

(1) The aim of the apostles was not to appoint festival days, but to teach a righteous life and piety. And it seems to me that just as many other customs have been established in individual localities according to usage.

fasting three five days only, and that at intervals, yet call that time 'The forty days' fast.' It is indeed surprising to me that thus differing in the number of days, they should both give it one common appellation; but some assign one reason for it, and others another, according to their several fancies. One can see also a disagreement about the manner of abstinence from food, as well as about the number of days. Some wholly abstain from things that have life: others feed on fish only of all living creatures: many together with fish, eat fowl also, saying that according to Moses, these were likewise made out of the waters. Some abstain from eggs, and all kinds of fruits: others partake of dry bread only; still others eat not even this:

(2) And it will not perhaps be unseasonable to notice here the diversity of customs in the churches. The fasts before Pascha will be found to be differently observed among different people. Those at Rome fast three successive weeks before Pascha, excepting Saturdays and Sundays. Those in Illyrica and all over Greece and Alexandria observe a fast of six weeks, which they term 'The forty days' fast.' Others commencing their fast from the seventh week before Pascha, and

while others having fasted till the ninth hour (~3:00 PM/early evening), afterwards take any sort of food without distinction. And among various nations there are other usages, for which innumerable reasons are assigned. Since however no one can produce a written

command as an authority, it is evident that the apostles left each one to his own free will in the matter, to the end that each might perform what is good not by constraint or necessity. Such is the difference in the churches on the subject of fasts.

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**Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite** (1749-1809), *Exomologetarion A Manual of Confession* (Concerning Fasting on Wednesday and Friday)

(1) Canon 69 of the Holy Apostles designates that any hierarch or priest or deacon or subdeacon or reader or chanter who does not fast during Great Lent and Wednesday and Friday is to be deposed. If a layperson does not fast during these times (unless he cannot fast on account of bodily illness), he is to be excommunicated. Do you see how the Apostles numbered the Wednesday and Friday fast together with the fast of Great Lent? Therefore, just as the fast of Great Lent consists in the eating of dry foods (Gk., *xerophagia*), namely, to eat but once a day, at the ninth hour, without consuming oil or wine, likewise, the fast of Wednesday and Friday is to be conducted in the exact same manner. St. Epiphanius also says: “We fast on Wednesday and Friday until the ninth hour” (*Exposition of the Faith*, 22). Likewise, Philostorgios says that the fast of Wednesday and Friday not consist in the abstention from meat, but it designates that one is not to eat any food until the evening (*Church History*, 10, 12). St. Benedict (Canon 41) also designates that the fast of Wednesday and Friday is until the ninth hour. And Balsamon forbids consumption of shellfish on Wednesday and Friday just as during Great Lent. Let us therefore stop insensibly thinking that the fast of Wednesday and Friday is not an Apostolic directive, for behold, the Apostles in their

Canons number this fast together with that of Great Lent, and in the *Apostolic Constitutions* they number it together with the fast of Holy Week, saying:

(2) “One must fast during Holy Week and Wednesday and Friday” (V.20). But why should I say that this regulation is only of the Apostles? It is a regulation of Christ Himself, for this is what the Apostles say in Book V, ch. 14 of the *Constitutions*:

(3) “He (that is, Christ) commanded us to fast on Wednesday and Friday.” We therefore fast on these days according to the Holy Hieromartyr Peter (Canon 15): “On Wednesday because on this day the council of the Jews was gathered to betray our Lord; on Friday because on this day He suffered death for our salvation.” The divine Jerome says the same thing.

(4) Therefore, because the fast of Great Lent is equal to the fast of Wednesday and Friday it follows that, for those who are sick or weak, the relaxation of the fast is also to be equal during these fasts. For this reason, as Canons 8 and 10 of Timothy allow a woman who is pregnant during the Great Fast (Lent) to consume as much wine and food as is necessary for her condition, this also applies to the fast of Wednesday and Friday. The same holds for those who have become weak from excessive sickness, that is, they are

allowed to consume oil and wine during these fasting periods. So says the divine Jerome: “The fast of Wednesday and Friday is not to be broken unless there is great necessity.” The divine Augustine says the same. [N.B. The divine Apostles in Book V, ch. 20, of the *Constitutions* also command the following: “We order you to fast on every Wednesday and Friday, and out of the surplus of your fast to give to the poor.” The same is said by Ignatios the Godbearer in his Epistle, *To the Philippians* (ch. 13), namely, that those who fast on Wednesday and Friday are at the same time to distribute alms out of their abundance to the poor. See *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Sim. III.7: “And you shall do thus: After completing what has been written, in that day on which you fast you shall taste nothing except bread and water, and you shall reckon the price of the expense for that day which you are going to keep, of the foods which you would have eaten, and you shall give it to a widow or an orphan or to someone destitute, and thus you shall be humble-minded that through your humility he who receives it may fill his soul and pray to the Lord for you.”]

(5)But because those who are lovers of the flesh desire to eat and break the fasts of Great Lent, Wednesday, and Friday, or pretend that they are sick (without actually being so), or if they are indeed sick they say that oil and wine are not sufficient to carry them through their illness, because of these pretenses, a Spiritual Father or hierarch should not believe only the words of those claiming these things, but

should ask an experienced and God-fearing physician about their condition, and according to his recommendation, allow the sick to break the fast.

(6)We must also note the following, that just as there must be a fast from food on Wednesday, Friday, and Great Lent, there must also be a fast from pleasures of the flesh. For this reason weddings cannot take place on these days, because the divine Paul commands that married are not to come together during a time of prayer and fasting: “Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer” (1 Cor. 7:5). And the divine Chrysostom, bringing the saying of Joel as a witness: “Sanctify a fast...let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet” (Jl. 2:15-16), says that even newlyweds, who have strong desire, vigorous youthfulness, and unfettered urges, are not to come together during a period of fasting and prayer (*On Virginity* 30). How much, then, are other married couples, who do not have such impulsiveness of the flesh, not to come together? Therefore, Balsamon says that married couples who do not exercise self-control during the Great Fast are not to commune on Pascha and are also to be penanced (*Responses to the Questions of Mark*, Question 50). Likewise, married couples who come together on Wednesday and Friday must be corrected through penances.

