

# FASTING.

## CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

### CHAPTER XVI.

## FIFTH COMMANDMENT OF THE CHURCH.

### *Lent, Ember-days, and Vigils you shall fast.*

(Page 531)

408. *How the First Christians Fasted.* -

We sometimes complain, dear friends, of the slight privations, fasts and abstinences imposed upon us by the Church. But how would it be if we were obliged to the same penances as the first Christians? I find a very remarkable example of this in the life of St. Fructueux, Bishop of Tarragona, in Spain, and one of the most celebrated martyrs of the third century. He was condemned, with two of his deacons, Augurus and Eulogius, to be burned alive, during the persecution of the Emperor Valerian, for refusing to adore the false gods, or the Emperor's image. As they were all three being conducted to the amphitheatre, which was to be the place of their torment, all the people came crowding around Fructueux to pity him, for his virtue had made him beloved by every one, even the pagans. The faithful wept also like the others, inwardly consoling themselves, nevertheless, with his approaching glory. Several, by a movement of

(Page 532)

charity, offered him a drink, in order to relieve him a little. But it was on Friday, then a day of minor fast, which was not broken till after nones, that is to say, about three o'clock in the afternoon, differing from the greater fasts, such as that of Lent, which was prolonged till after the hour of Vespers, that is to say, till six o'clock in the evening; it being Friday, I say, Fructueux refused to take this drink, because the hour for the repast was not yet come, as it was only ten o'clock in the morning. "We are fasting," said he, "I cannot drink: it is not yet the ninth hour of the day, that is to say, three o'clock in the afternoon." So he went on his way without accepting anything, and, a little while after, he went to receive in Heaven the reward of his virtues.

- D. GENEVAUX, *Hist. Chois.*, 153.

409. *The Fasts of the Emperor Charlemagne.* -

Although fasting did not agree with Charlemagne, he, nevertheless, observed faithfully all those that were prescribed by the Church. Only, on account of the officers who eat after him, he took his meal a little earlier on those days, that is about two o'clock in the afternoon, although it was still customary to wait till three. A bishop having come to the court during Lent, was scandalized at the Emperor's eating too soon on fast days, and took the liberty of reproaching him for it. The Emperor heard him quietly and said: "Your advice is good, and I will follow it, but I order you to take nothing until my officers have made their repast." Now, there were

(Page 533)

five consecutive tables. The princes and the dukes who were in attendance on the Emperor only eat after him; the counts then waited on the dukes; after the counts' table came that of the military officers and lastly, that of the minor officers of the household. In this way, it was far in the night when the last table was served. The bishop, who was obliged for some days to eat only after the others, soon perceived that the Emperor was right in taking his meal at two o'clock on fasting days, and that he did so through compassion for his officers, so that they might take theirs a little sooner. What a contrast between the age of Charlemagne and ours, dear friends! Then, people of all conditions made it a duty to observe the law of fasting, and now, in almost all states of life, people make it a sort of point of honour to violate it! Whence, then, comes this difference? Ah! it is that people were then truly Christians, whereas there are now many persons who are so only in name.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, VI., 108.

410. *The Effect of Reading a Good Book.* -

A bad Christian, who had much reason to reproach himself before God, had occasion to read a book entitled *The History of Fasting*. He was struck on learning how rigorously fasts were kept in the first ages. He thought within himself: "I call myself a Christian and I have never fasted; if I had lived in the times when the penitential canons were followed to the letter, to how many years fasting should I have been condemned for all the iniquities whereof I am guilty?"

(Page 534)

The first Christians made no collation (or small snack as a concession) on fast days; all abstained from wine, and a great number contented themselves with bread and water; it was only in the evening that they took even that." What he had read did not leave his mind, and he unceasingly made new reflections on it. At length God touched his heart. Penetrated with a lively sorrow for his sins, he determined to do a rigorous penance, and with that intention entered a monastery where the strictest silence was observed, with a continual fast. It was, I think, the Order of Minors or Minims, which, as you probably know, my friends, was founded in the fifteenth century by St. Francis of Paula (or Paola in Italy), who came to France in 1481 to assist Louis XI in his latter years and prepare him for death. This poor converted Christian entered this rigorous order; he lived and died holily in it, and proved once more how much fruit good reading may produce.

- LASSAUSSE, *Explic. du Cat. de l'Empire*, 317.

411. *How King Stanislaus Passed His Lent.* -

We are edified, my dear friends, when we see a priest, a religious, or a lay person religiously observe the most painful precepts of religion; but our admiration is still greater when a prince or a king is in question. Such was Stanislaus, a former king of Poland in the 18th century, afterwards Duke of Lorraine. A faithful observer of the ancient discipline of the Church, he made but one meal, not even allowing himself the collation (or small snack as a concession); moreover, on Fridays he denied himself the use of fish and eggs. From his dinner on Holy Thursday, till the following

(Page 535)

Saturday, at noon, he denied himself every species of nourishment, even bread and water. That interval, specially consecrated to the memory of Our Lord's Passion, the pious monarch employed, as far as his affairs permitted, in prayer, and in visiting churches and houses of charity, where he poured forth abundant alms. He every year prepared for the feast of Christmas by nine whole days of fasting and abstinence. In a word, the austerity of his life recalled, in modern times, what history teaches us of the fervour of the early faithful. All that he had practised in his youth, and in the vigour of his life, he found practicable even in his extreme old age. It was only through submission to the holy authority which he respected in his pastor, that he consented, when over eighty years of age, not, indeed, to infringe on the commandment of the Church, but to moderate a little the severities he added thereto. Notwithstanding these austerities, that would be admired even in an anchorite, King Stanislaus, justly named *the Beneficent*, lived to the age of eighty-four years; he died at Luneville in 1766.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. Hist. Educ.*, II., p. 275.

412. *The Fasts of Louis XVI.* -

When, at the day of judgement, God will reveal the good works of each, we shall all be surprised, children, to see what was done by persons whose high rank seemed to give them more freedom and facility in dispensing themselves therefrom. The laws of abstinence and fasting, of which so little account is made, and which

(Page 536)

people in the world are sometimes ashamed to observe, were sacred for King Louis XVI., of France, and he would not have dared to violate them without the most legitimate reasons. What proves his exactitude in conforming thereto, is, that having learned, one Saturday, that the Archbishop of Paris had abolished the fast on Fridays in Advent, which at that time was still observed, he said to the person who brought the news:

"It would have been well if the Archbishop had sent his decree here two days sooner, it would have saved me from fasting yesterday, which was a Friday of Advent."

The misfortunes he had to endure did not make him forget his duties; they made him, on the contrary, more anxious to acquit himself of them. During his captivity, the commissioners had sometimes the cruelty to annoy him even in his conscience. If, in conformity with the privations imposed by the Church, he did not take any breakfast, they gorged themselves that day, and ridiculed him for his scruples. On one of those days he was served with nothing but meat. Louis contented himself with replying to their indecent raillery

- "I do not interfere with your conscience, why do you interfere with mine?"

So saying, he soaked his bread in a little wine, and that was all he eat.

- GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, 289.